

# ***TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY***

## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***Overview***

The Juvenile Justice Shared Initiative grew out of two conferences that took place within a month of each other at the end of 2004. At the first one, the 67<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), one plenary session addressed the issue of meeting the needs of students with disabilities in juvenile justice settings. The plenary featured two states – Florida and Arkansas – that had developed specific programs to meet the educational needs of this population. The audience was challenged to go back to their states and take a look at their own programs and how these students might be better served. Shortly after the conclusion of the NASDSE conference, the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)<sup>1</sup> held its own conference for disability rights advocates that included a session focused on this same issue. NASDSE's executive director, Bill East, attended that session. As an audience participate, he urged the two organizations to work together on our shared concerns about both the number of students with disabilities in the juvenile justice system and the paucity of programs to meet their needs.

NDRN and NASDSE staff began planning an initial meeting to see if there was interest on the part of other groups and individuals working in this area in the development of what came to be called the "Juvenile Justice Shared Agenda." A group of 20+ interested individuals met for the first time in March, 2005. Those participating in the meeting all agreed to the need for developing a "shared agenda." After several more meetings and conference calls, the "shared agenda" began to take shape as having two distinct components. The first would be a white paper providing an in-depth overview of the issues, and it would be accompanied by a series of "tools for success" – best and promising practices that were being implemented with success throughout the country and could be used by educators to prevent students – including those with disabilities – from being referred to the juvenile justice system due to their behavior in school.

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<sup>1</sup> NDRN was formerly known as the National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems (NAPAS).

The *Tools* section evolved into a set of nine sections or “**Steps**” that relate somewhat chronologically to the stages of a student’s involvement in pre-school, school, and post-school settings, including juvenile justice settings for those referred to that system. Further, the group as a whole made the decision that the target audience for the white paper and *Tools* would be educators. Through numerous discussions, it was noted that many papers had already been written targeted to professionals working in the juvenile justice system. For the *Shared Agenda*, the focus would be on keeping children and youth out of that system, or getting them out and keeping them out, and educators are well-positioned to help with this critical need.

The nine *Steps* are:

- Pre-school Early Intervention: Birth Through Age 5
- Universal Interventions
- Targeted Interventions
- Intensive Interventions
- Transition from School to Post-School Activities
- Children in the Child Welfare System
- Court-Involved Youth
- Youth in Juvenile Justice Facilities, and
- School Re-enrollment and Transition from Juvenile Justice Facilities

Steps 2, 3 and 4, which contain tools related to intervention strategies, parallel the thinking behind the concept of *Response to Intervention* (RtI). RtI is neither a tool nor a “step,” but an approach to education defined by instruction or intervention, matched to student need, that has been demonstrated through scientific research and practice to produce high learning rates for most students. RtI represents a tiered approach to intervention using these same concepts of universal, targeted and intense instruction. The same tiered construct has been demonstrated to be effective in approaches to classroom management.<sup>2</sup>

Once the nine *Tools* sections were identified, NDRN and NASDSE, as the co-leaders of the *Shared Agenda*, began looking for individuals to lead the research and writing for each one. . Some of the original participants facilitated the development of a section, and others worked as part of a team and wrote descriptions of some of the tools. Additional organizations and individuals with specific subject-matter expertise were identified and invited to assist. More than 60 professionals representing various national organizations and other entities participated in the preparation of the *Tools*.

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<sup>2</sup> For a complete description of these constructs, see *School Leadership for Improving the Lives of Youth: Innovative Steps for Preventing Placements of Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*, the white paper accompanying this *Tools* document.)

It is important to note that:

(1) This was not intended to be a research project. Most of the individuals who worked on the *Tools* are not researchers, but are practitioners with extensive knowledge of a variety of programs and practices. Each team was tasked to identify approximately 5-7 tools for its section, write an introduction and a brief summary of each tool, and, identify additional resources for readers seeking more information..

(2) All of the work was done by volunteers – many of whom worked outside of their regular jobs to complete their team’s work.

(3) Each tool was selected as illustrative of a best, promising or emerging practice in use around the country. These write-ups are not intended to be endorsements of any particular program. Over time, we hope to be able to identify other best, promising or emerging practices that will be added to these *Tools*. Future updates will also identify any tools now identified as promising or emerging that have been proven through additional research to be evidence-based practices.

Appendix A lists all of the contributors to the *Shared Agenda* Their affiliations are listed for identification purposes only and this does not imply an endorsement of the *Tools* by their organizations.

### ***The Three Categories of Tools***

Due to a concern that our volunteers would not be able to find a large number of research-based best practices, the decision was made that groups should identify tools that fell into one of three categories – best, promising or emerging. Briefly summarized, these are:

- **Best practices** (also known as evidence-based practices) are documented through a synthesis of research studies involving experimental or quasi-experimental research designs.
- **Promising practices** are interventions, administrative practices or approaches for which there is considerable evidence or expert consensus, but are not yet proven by the strongest scientific evidence.
- **Emerging practices** are new innovations that do not yet have scientific evidence or broad expert consensus support.

Appendix B includes a more complete description of each category.

## ***Components of Each Tool***

Each of the nine *Tool* sections is constructed in the same manner. They each contain 4 - 9 tools. For each tool, there is a brief overview or description of the program; implementation essentials (so educators will know what materials they will need to implement the program in their classroom or school); information describing the program's evaluation; a brief summary of available evidence supporting the designation of the program as a best, promising or emerging practice; resources (who or where to go for more information); and background reading (articles, reports and websites that are easily accessible). In addition, Appendix E contains an extensive Reference List for each tool.

## ***The Companion White Paper***

At the same time that work on the *Tools* got underway, NASDSE and NDRN jointly asked Kevin Dwyer, past president of the National Association of School Psychologists, to draft the white paper, the first part of the *Shared Agenda*, which would lay out the issues that prompted the *Shared Agenda* work. This component of the project is in its final stages of completion and will be ready in the near future. It will be posted on-line alongside of this *Tools* document.

## ***What's Next***

As noted above, a white paper that discusses the issues related to the soaring population of students with disabilities in the juvenile justice system will soon be posted online to accompany these *Tools*. For now, the documents will only be available online, but NDRN and NASDSE are seeking funding to publish the documents and to undertake a training initiative related to the use of the *Tools*. Please watch this website for future updates.

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