Educational Predictors of Juvenile Delinquency
(He Len Chung, Kayla Taylor, and Hannah Taggart)

The question asked by the TPPB working group was, "What are the top educational predictors of juvenile crime for elementary, middle and high school students?" In general, while much of the research on risk factors has focused on predicting serious and violent offenses, risk factors are relevant to all levels of delinquency. Before considering these risk factors, it is important to keep in mind the following regarding the science of prevention (Coie et al., 1993):

- Problem behavior has a complicated relationship with risk factors; rarely is one risk factor associated with a particular problem.
- The impact of risk factors may vary with the developmental state of the individual (i.e., the age/grade level of the child).
- Exposure to multiple risk factors has a cumulative, negative effect.
- Many different problem behaviors share fundamental risk factors (i.e., the same risk factor often predicts different problem behaviors).

Although researchers use risk factors to detect the likelihood of later offending, many youth with multiple risk factors never commit delinquent or violent acts. A risk factor may increase the probability of offending but does not make offending a certain outcome.

We first present general findings from research about educational predictors of juvenile crime; these studies did not examine specific age differences so it is unclear if certain risk factors are more important than others during different developmental periods of a child's life. We then present findings from studies that considered age differences and identify risk factors that seem to be particularly important during certain educational periods (elementary/middle/high school). We end with a brief consideration of correctional education programming, as this is a critical and understudied predictor of juvenile crime.

General Findings
The causal link between education and juvenile delinquency is fundamentally complex. Early problems (e.g., aggressive behavior) may lead to difficulties in the classroom. Such difficulties, in turn, may result in a child's receiving unfavorable evaluations from teachers or peers. These, in turn, might result in delinquency. Equally, delinquency could be another manifestation of whatever characteristics got the child into trouble with school authorities in the first place. Some studies have shown reductions in delinquent behavior when a teenager drops out of school. Others have shown increasing rates of delinquency following school dropout. In addition, many studies have shown that family and child characteristics predict both problems in school and an increased likelihood of delinquent behavior. Despite the ongoing discussion of the direction of causality, the evidence is clear that the following factors are connected to juvenile delinquency (McCord et al., 2000). Because these studies did not report age differences in study effects, however, it is possible that the impact of these risk factors is different for kids of different ages.

- Truancy/low school engagement
  - When youth disengage from school (stop attending/are truant, do not participate in classroom activities) they are at increased risk to get involved with delinquent activity, as well as substance use (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).

- o Poor student-teacher relationships increases risk for juvenile crime (Loeber et al., 2003); students who get labeled negatively by their teachers are more likely to disengage (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).
  - o Frequent school transitions increases risk for juvenile crime (Hawkins et al., 2000).
  - o School policies concerning grade retention, suspension and expulsion, and school tracking of juvenile delinquency can disproportionately affect minorities and can have negative consequences for at-risk youth (McCord et al., 2000). As such, it is possible that these school policies increases the likelihood of delinquent activity because of the consequences (e.g., negative labeling) that result from them.
- Leaving school early/academic failure
  - o Students who have poor grades (particularly Math and English) are more likely to struggle while in school and leave school early before graduating, both of which are related to increased delinquent activity (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).
  - o Significant declines in grades from one year to the next increases risk for disconnecting from school and leaving school early (Heppen & Therriault, 2008).
- Association with delinquent peers
  - o Associating with delinquent peers increases risk for juvenile crime, including being arrested at an earlier age (Loeber et al., 2003).
- Bullying or being bullied
  - o Bullying can take three forms: *physical* (hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, taking personal belongings); *verbal* (taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, making threats); and *psychological* (spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, or engaging in social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation) (Ericson, 2001).
  - o Bullying behavior is linked to future delinquent behavior such as vandalism, shoplifting, use of drugs and alcohol, and dropping out of/skipping school (Ericson, 2001); youth who bully other children may continue into adulthood through spousal abuse, workplace abuse, and verbal abuse (Seale, 2004).
  - o Students who are bullied and do not feel safe in their schools are at increased risk for delinquent activity (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).

Elementary School
Research suggests that the following factors during elementary school are particularly salient predictors of future juvenile crime.
- Early signs of antisocial behavior, aggression, hyperactivity and disruptive behavior/conduct problems are the most stable predictors of adolescent offending (Loeber et al. 2003; Ou & Reynolds, 2010).
- Frequent school transitions (Hawkins et al., 2000).
- Repeating a grade in school (Loeber et al., 2003).
- Academic failure in specific courses, especially Math and English (Hawkins et al., 2000).

Middle School
Research suggests that the following factors during middle school are particularly salient predictors of future juvenile crime.
- Bullying peaks in middle school (Ericson, 2001).

- o 60% of boys (grades 6 through 9) who bullied others were convicted of at least one crime as adults (compared to 23% of boys who did not bully).
  - o 35-40% of these boys who bullied others were convicted of 3 or more crimes before age 24 (compared to 10% of the boys who did not bully) (Ericson, 2001).
- The transition from having one set teacher all day (in elementary school) to switching teachers for different classes (in middle school) increases the likelihood that youth will be disruptive and engage in delinquent behavior (Seale, 2004).
- Students (ages 12-14) with high truancy are more likely to engage in violent behavior as adolescents and adults (Hawkins et al., 2000).
- Boys (age 11) who attend schools with high concentrations of delinquent youth are more likely to participate in delinquent and violent behavior themselves (Hawkins et al., 2000).

High School
Research suggests that the following factors during high school are particularly salient predictors of future juvenile crime.
- Disengaging from school (ages 14-16) – truancy, suspensions, disinterest in school work and activities, leaving school early – is a strong predictor of general crime (but not violent, serious offenses) (Hawkins et al. 2000).
- Failing the 9th grade or failing specific courses in the 9th grade (especially Math or English) increases the likelihood that youth will disengage from school and leave school early before graduating (Heppen & Therriault, 2008).
- Changing school frequently (ages 14-16) predicts violent behavior at age 18.
- Low school and career aspirations (ages 14-16) are strong predictors of future violent criminal activity (Hawkins et al., 2000).

Other considerations (correctional education)
After delinquent youth have contact with the juvenile justice system, an important predictor of positive school and developmental outcomes (overall psychological development, reduced antisocial behavior) is whether youth make a successful transition from the juvenile justice system back into the community. Yet, this reintegration process is frequently the most neglected component of correctional education programming (Clark & Mathur, 2010). This is due, in part, to a lack of research, knowledge, and resources on what services are successful and how best to provide those services.

Former juvenile offenders who transition to urban public schools have not experienced positive academic and social outcomes (Eber, Nelson, & Miles, 1997). Some of the challenges to school success include excessive dropout rates, academic failure, low graduation rates, institutional placements, and poor post-release adjustments. In addition, more than two-thirds of youths released from secured juvenile settings do not return to school, and the prevalence of learning disorders among former offenders with emotional and behavioral disabilities is three to five times higher than the general population of youth in court-ordered placement. Research in the area of reintegration, or transition, clearly indicates that youth from the justice system need assistance in returning to school. For more information about recommendations in this area, see *The Intensive Aftercare Program* (IAP) initiative, funded by OJJDP in 1988 (Stephens & Arnette, 2000).

Works Cited

Clark, H. G., & Mathur, S. R. (2010). Practices in transition for youth in the juvenile justice system. In D. Cheney, D. Cheney (Eds.) *Transition of secondary students with emotional or behavioral disorders: Current approaches for positive outcomes (2nd ed.)* (pp. 375-395). Champaign, IL, US: Research Press.

Coie, J. D., Watt, N. F., West, S. G., Hawkins, D., Asarnow, J. R., Markman, H. J., Ramey, S. L., Shure, M. B., and Long, B. 1993. The science of prevention: A conceptual framework and some directions for a national research program. *American Psychologist, 48*(10), 1013–1022.

Eber, L., & Nelson, C. M. (1997). School-based wraparound planning: Integrating services for students with emotional and behavioral needs. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *67*(3), 385-395. doi:10.1037/h0080241

Ericson, N. (2001). *Addressing the problem of juvenile bullying* (OJJDP Fact Sheet #27). Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T., I., Farrington, D., P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R., F., Harachi, T., W., et al. (2000). *Predictors of youth violence* (Juvenile Justice Bulletin NCJ 179065). Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Heppen, J., B., & Therriault, S. B. (2008). *Developing early warning systems to identify potential high school dropouts* (Issue Brief July 2009). American Institutes for Research.

Kellermann, A., L., Fuqua-Whitley, D., S., Rivara, F., P., & Mercy, J. (1998). Preventing youth violence: What works? *Annual Review of Public Health, 19*, 271-292.

Loeber, R., Farrington, D., P., & Petechuk, D. (May 2003). *Child delinquency: Early intervention and prevention* (Child Delinquency Bulletin Series). Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice.

McCord, J., Widom, C. S., Bamba, M., I., & Crowell, N., A. (2000). Linking school performance and delinquency. *Education and delinquency: Summary of a workshop* (pp. 13-20).

Ou, S., & Reynolds, A., J. (2010). Childhood predictors of young adult male crime. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*(8), 1097-1107.

Seale, A. (2004). *The 4-1-1 on bullying*. Hamilton Fish Institute: The George Washington University.

Sipe, C. L. (2002). Mentoring programs for adolescents: A research summary. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 31*, 251-260.

Snyder, H., & Sickmund, M. (2006). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 2006 national report.* U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Partnerships for Safer Communities, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Stephens, R. D., & Arnette, J. L. (2000, February). *From the courthouse to the schoolhouse: Making successful transitions* (Juvenile Justice Bulletin). U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.