

# EVIDENCE-BASED NEBRASKA

## SCHOOL INTERVENTIONISTS

FY 2015-2020

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**May 2021**

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**Layout by Tara Grell, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research**

This project is supported by Contact CC-21-727 awarded by the Nebraska Crime Commission. Points of view or opinions contained in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Nebraska Crime Commission or the Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program.

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# Executive Summary

School Interventionists identify and coordinate behavioral or academic intervention for a student. Youth can be referred to the School Interventionist for attendance issues, poor grades, lack of engagement, and/or behavior issues. The intervention process includes clearly identifying the problem, selecting a strategy to address the problem, and measuring the effectiveness of the strategy. The intervention can include other supports for the youth within the school or community.

In interviewing School Interventionists, they are often responsible for addressing a range of school and home issues, and often use a range of activities to do so. These activities fall within three identified evidence-based practices including: building social and emotional competencies, focusing on protective factors to improve school engagement, and being a supportive adult and building relationships with youth they serve.

Of the eight programs that have been funded over the course of the project, two of the School Interventionists programs receive referrals from diversion programs and serve youth on diversion who are also having school issues. The other programs often receive referrals from school counselors or other mental health/social workers. Generally, Interventionists focus on school-related issues, such as improving grades, attendance, or school engagement; however, they also focus on addressing issues at home. One program primarily addressed absenteeism. The programs varied in terms of the level of risk of the youth served. While some indicated higher rates of prior law violations, others reported a higher level of aggressive behavior and many reported youth came from high risk environments.

Four of the programs had sufficient cases to examine outcomes (at least 80% of their cases were discharged). Of these, there were high rates of youth successfully completing the program (or a neutral discharge, such as transferring schools). In examining school-related outcomes for two of these programs that had sufficient data to do so (at least 80% of the data was complete), School Interventionists appear to be most successful at improving grades and improving school engagement, with less success at improving attendance (in both programs attendance did not improve).

We were able to examine future system involvement for the four programs. Specifically, each program had between 1.3% and 2.4% of youth with a status offense court filing. Law violation rates were more variable across programs—with a range of 1.6% to 13.1%. Programs with higher future system involvement rates were also those programs with higher risk youth, based on information programs provided about high-risk environment, aggressive behavior, and previous law violations.

# Nebraska's Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program

Recognizing that unnecessary formal involvement in the juvenile justice system may be contrary to the best interests and well-being of juveniles, the state of Nebraska established a fund entitled the Nebraska Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program (CBA) Fund to support local programs and services for juveniles (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-2404.02). The purpose of the Community-based Aid Program is to assist counties with developing intervention programs and services “designed to serve juveniles and deter involvement in the formal juvenile justice system” (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-2404.02(2)(b)). This fund encourages the provision of appropriate preventive and/or diversionary programs for juveniles, as well as better coordination of the juvenile services system. The statute specifically outlines funding particular activities, including “programs for local planning and service coordination; screening, assessment, and evaluation; diversion; alternatives to detention; family support services; treatment services; truancy prevention and intervention programs; pilot projects approved by the commission; payment of transportation costs to and from placements, evaluations, or services; personnel when the personnel are aligned with evidence-based treatment principles, programs, or practices; contracting with other state agencies or private organizations that provide evidence based treatment or programs’ preexisting programs that are aligned with evidence-based practices or best practices; and other services that will positively impact juveniles and families in the juvenile justice system.” (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-2404.02(3)(b)).

Programs funded through CBA, including School Interventionists, are statutorily required to report data to the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (Nebraska Crime Commission) (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-2404.02(4)(a)). This requirement is fulfilled when programs enter youth information into the Juvenile Case Management System (JCMS). The JCMS is a secure, web-based tool that allows programs to meet their reporting requirements while measuring whether the program is meeting the goals they set out to achieve. More importantly, as a statewide system, programs are held to a uniform standard of reporting by utilizing common definitions. An overarching objective of the JCMS is for programs to utilize consistent definitions for key data elements.

# School-based Programs

Schools can be a place that students seek positive relationships and may be best suited to identify problems both at school and in the home. Young people spend much of their time in the school setting, as such, school-based programming can be an ideal method for providing youth with needed services. Alternatively, schools can also serve as an entry point to the juvenile justice system. These pathways to the juvenile justice system, also known as the school-to-prison pipeline, are systematic policies and practices that may funnel youth from the school, into the juvenile justice system and “systematically dissolve student connections with schools” (Hughes, Raines, & Malone, 2020, p. 72; Skiba et al., 2014). Instead of relying on juvenile justice system involvement for issues related to absenteeism, behavioral problems, and academic failure, schools are well-positioned to provide services that consider ecological factors (i.e., developmental level, culture, home life, and community) in addressing school issues, while also promoting students’ social-emotional functioning, mental health, and behavior (Baer & Manning, 2014; Hughes et al., 2020).

According to the Evidence-based Nebraska project (EB-Nebraska) program type definitions, school-based programs help provide educational support, training and/or supervision for youth where academic and/or behavioral problems originated in the school setting. EB-Nebraska includes four types of school-based programs: After School programs, Alternative School programs, School Interventionists, and School Resource Officers<sup>1</sup> (see Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2019 EB-NE Brief #4).

## School Interventionists

The EB-Nebraska definition for School Interventionists indicates they: identify and coordinate behavioral or academic intervention for a student. Youth can be referred to the School Interventionist for attendance issues, poor grades, lack of engagement, and/or behavior issues. The intervention process includes clearly identifying the problem, selecting a strategy to address the problem, and measuring the effectiveness of the strategy. The intervention can include other supports for the youth within the school or community.

The term and definition of School Interventionist was created specifically for the EB-Nebraska project, as there was not a clear “program type” already established in the research literature. Although School Interventionists often receive referrals for absenteeism issues, through the process of classifying programs into types and speaking with programs, the Juvenile Justice Institute discovered that School Interventionists were doing much more than addressing absenteeism/truancy and classifying these programs as an absenteeism program seemed limiting. In addition to absenteeism, School Interventionists were addressing academic issues, behavioral and mental health, family circumstances, school engagement, and even assisting in providing/getting youth and family access to basic needs and personal hygiene products.

To better understand the scope of the School Interventionists currently funded by the CBA fund in Nebraska, we interviewed each School Interventionist and asked about their background/training, their relationship with the school, the infrastructure in place for them in the school, what their typical days and caseload consisted of, reasons youth are referred, and the types of interventions they employed.

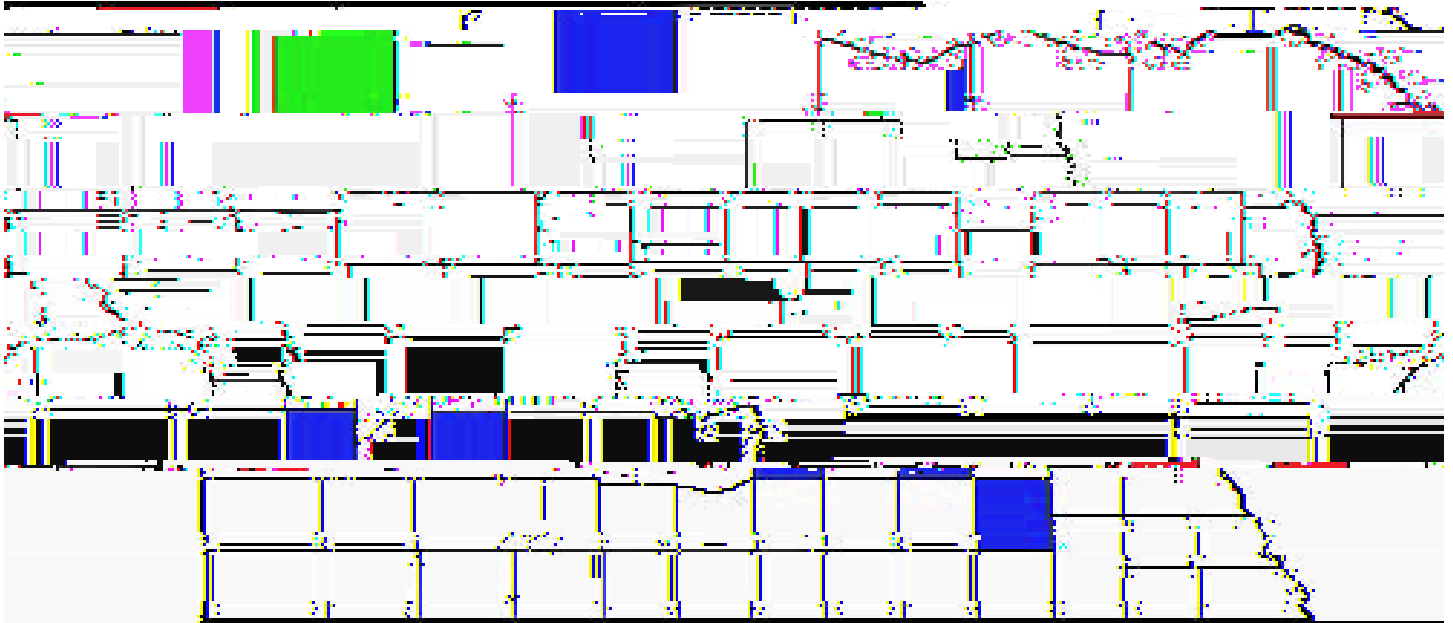
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<sup>1</sup> As of FY 2021-2022, the Community-based Aid Program and Juvenile Services Commission Grant Program will no longer be funding School Resource Officers

## Interviews with School Interventionists

We conducted interviews with six Interventionists from four county programs (two counties each fund two Interventionists – with one at a middle school and one at the high school). We interviewed all programs that are currently funded (FY 2020-2021) and that have been funded for at least one year. The following programs were interviewed for the report:

Figure 1. Map of Counties with School Interventionists funded FY 2020-2021



Dawes County Social Work Program – Dawes County	1 Interventionist
Middle/High School Interventionists – Hall County	2 Interventionists
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Saline County	2 Interventionists
Interventionist – York County	1 Interventionist

Of the six Interventionists, two had a master’s degree in education and counseling (one was licensed as a mental health practitioner, though the licensure was not required for the position), two had bachelor’s degrees in human development and social work (one with a social work certification), and two were currently completing their bachelor’s degrees in sociology. Five indicated that they worked for the school and one indicated they worked for the county attorney’s office. Most stated that they had a great relationship with the school in terms of serving youth and getting data required to enter into the JCMS. One Interventionist who serves two schools indicated that their relationship with one school was not as great, and that the school was not very supportive of the program (i.e., the school is not referring many youth) – possibly because of mental health stigma. Two of the Interventionists serve two schools, one serves six schools, and three indicated serving one school. All reported having a dedicated space in the schools – some a private office and others a desk within a larger office (for which some indicated privacy concerns). The length of time each had been an Interventionist varied, with two indicating approximately one year, one indicating two years, two indicating three years, and one six years.





interventions including DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy), WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan), and Boystown curriculum that focuses on talking to adults, hygiene, expressing anger, and social skills.

found that after accounting for risk and attendance, student and interventionists perceptions of the closeness of their relationship was related to improved engagement and school attendance (Anderson et al., 2004).

It appears that in some instances, the Interventionists are able to step in and assist the young person when a parent cannot. One Interventionist described a successful case in which the young person needed an ID to join AmeriCorps after graduation but could not get their parent to assist them.

**Table 1. Race/ethnicity of Youth Served by School Interventionists**

	Frequency	Percent
American Indian, Alaska Native	62	5.8
Asian	4	0.4
Black, African American	64	5.9
Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander	3	0.3
White	434	40.3
Hispanic	477	44.2
Other Race	4	0.4
Multiple Races	25	2.3
Unspecified	5	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,078</b>	<b>100</b>

**Programs and Referral Source**

Table 2 displays the number of youth served in each program and years that the program has been funded, and thus, entered cases into the JCMS. Three of the programs have been funded for the length of the CBA evaluation period (FY 2015 to FY 2020), while the others have been funded for fewer years. Two of the programs who were previously funded and entered data, are no longer currently funded as of FY 2019.

Table 3 displays the referral source for each case. Overall, the most referrals came from diversion programs ( = 1 (o)35 from diversion

**Table 2. Number of Youth Served in Each Program and Years Programs Have Been Funded**

	Frequency	Percent	Funded (FY)
Schuyler Public Schools – Colfax County	94	8.6	2015 - 2020
Dawes County Social Work Program – Dawes County	55	5	2015 – 2020
Middle/High School Interventionists – Hall County	611	56	2015 –2020
Back on Track (The Hub) – Lancaster County	30	2.7	2020 –2021
Your Life -- Madison County	42	3.8	2016 – 2019
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Richardson County	136	12.5	2016 – 2019
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Saline County	81	7.4	2017 – 2020
Interventionist – York County	42	3.8	2018 – 2020
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,091</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Table 3. Referral Source for Youth Served by School Interventionists**

	Frequency	Percent
Diversion Program	300	27.5
Guidance Counselor	220	20.2
Mental Health/Social Worker	206	18.9
School Administrator	170	15.6
Teacher	59	5.4
Self	22	2
Family Member	22	2
Other	21	1.9
School Resource Officer	14	1.3
Court Referral	2	0.2
Probation	1	0.1
None or Missing	54	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,091</b>	<b>100</b>

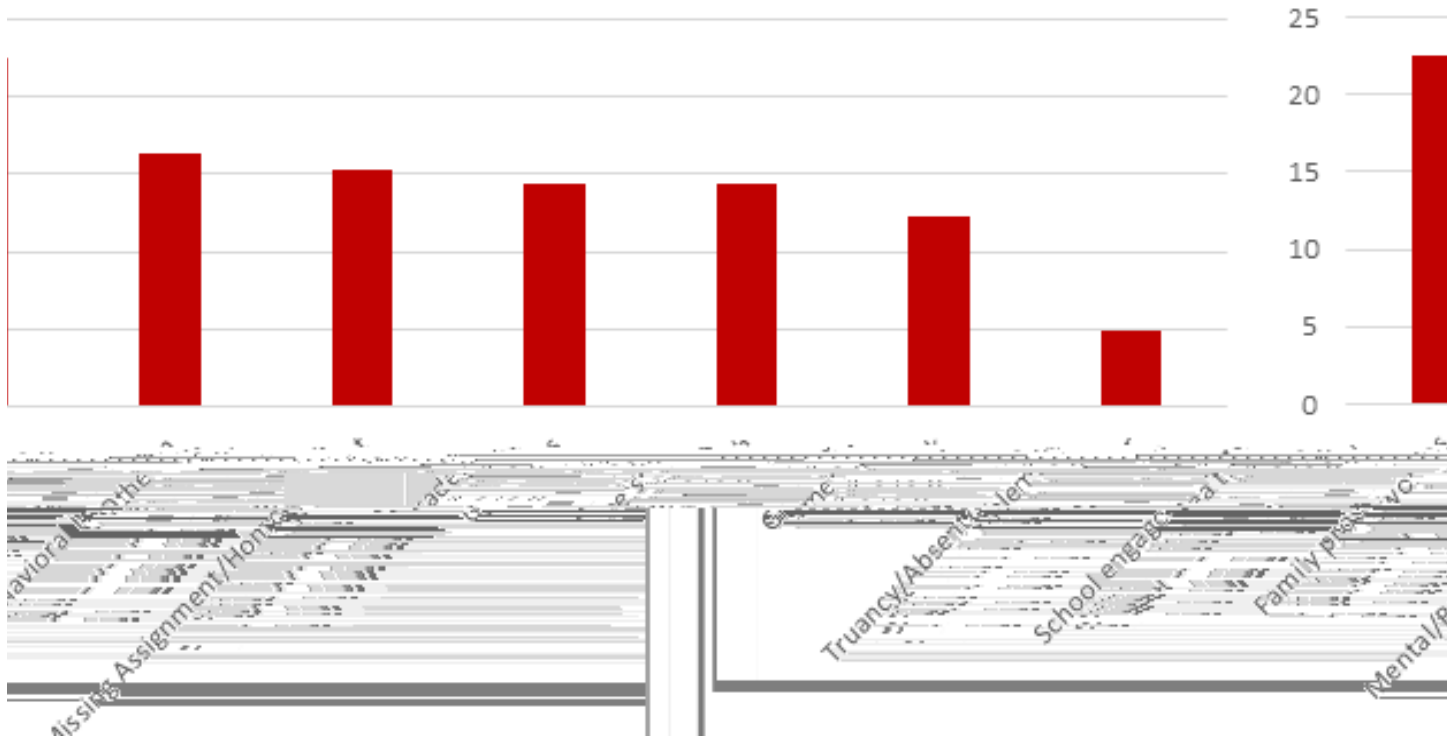
### **Enrollment Reason**

The most common reasons a youth enrolls with the School Interventionist are school-related issues, such as grades ( = 327), truancy/absenteeism ( = 237), school engagement ( = 222), and then missing assignments or homework ( = 178). While interviewing the Interventionists, all of them indicated working with students who have absenteeism issues; however, in most of the programs, they were not the only service provider at the school who handled these cases and there was often a truancy officer or other program to handle absenteeism solely.

Students were also referred for non-school-related reasons, such as family problems ( = 210) and mental/behavioral health ( = 209). During the interviews with Interventionists, many of them

indicated working with youth who have mental or behavioral health issues; however, if the issues warranted referral to a high level of service, the Interventionists often further referred youth to the school counselor or other mental health services.

**Figure 2. Primary and Secondary Reason for Enrollment\***



\*Programs could enter both a primary and secondary reason for enrollment

### **Risk Level of Youth Served**

According to the seminal meta-analysis by Lipsey and colleagues (2009) that examined the primary factors that characterize effective interventions with juvenile offenders, the most effective interventions are therapeutic and of high quality, and serve youth of the highest risk level, including whether they have prior law violations, have a history of aggressive behaviors, and/or come from a high-risk environment. In the JCMS, programs are asked to enter these three variables for the youth they serve. To assess these variables, however, we require at least 20% of the variables to be completed. As Tables 4a through 4c indicate, most programs have a high level of missing data or marked “unknown” for these measures—making evaluation difficult. Of the data that is available, it appears that the highest risk factor for youth served by School Interventionists is coming from a high-risk environment.

Table 4a. Risk Level of Youth Served: Prior Law Violations

	Yes	No	Unknown	Missing
Schuyler Public Schools – Colfax County	17%			

| | | |

is entered into the contacts section of the JCMS, programs are asked to complete fields related to who was present at the meeting, what the intervention was, and the outcomes. In interviewing the Interventionists, we asked how often they meet with youth. Most indicated weekly or bi-weekly. As such, the mean number of meetings below seems low (with the exception of Hall County's Middle/High School Interventionists. at utrow seems l6-15 (.at)uIntve t

**Table 6. Discharge Data Entered and Cases Available for Outcome Analysis**

	Never discharged or possibly active	No discharge reason entered	Discharge reason known	Total	Percent cases closed
Schuyler Public Schools – Colfax County	53	0	41	94	44%
Dawes County Social Work Program – Dawes County	19	1	35	55	64%
Middle/High School Interventionists – Hall County	55	15	541	611	89%
Back on Track (The Hub) – Lancaster County	24	0	6	30	20%
Your Life -- Madison County	2	0	40	42	95%
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Richardson County	0	0	136	136	100%
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Saline County	12	0	69	81	85%
Interventionist – York County	14	0	28	42	67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>1,091</b>	<b>82%</b>

Collectively, Tables 7a and 7b display the discharge reasons for each case. Table 7a displays the successful and neutral discharged cases and 7b displays the unsuccessful reasons. In general, of the programs that can be evaluated (highlighted in gray), these programs are demonstrating several successful outcomes. Similarly, these programs have demonstrated fewer unsuccessful outcomes. Hall County has a higher rate of students transferring schools—likely students transferring from the middle school to high school. Both Madison County and Saline County have high rates of “other”, which is something that should be further examined to ensure that the JCMS is capturing the outcomes adequately.



Table 7a. Discharge Reasons: Successful and Neutral

	Completed program requirements	Graduated	Transferred Schools	Other	Youth/parent refused	Percent Successful/Neutral
Schuyler Public Schools – Colfax County	27%	0%	12.2%	10%	0%	
Dawes County Social Work Program – Dawes County	9%	11%	8.6%	40%	14%	
Middle/High School Interventionists – Hall County	43%	5%	27%	4%	4%	83%
Back on Track (The Hub) – Lancaster County	17%	0%	33%	33%	0%	
Your Life -- Madison County	60%	0%	0%	25%	3%	3% 88%
						43% 0% 25%
						Back on Track (0%)



- There was a significant improvement on misses school from intake to discharge for Saline County YAP Interventionists (Wilcoxon  $\nu = 2.12$ ,  $p = .034$ ,  $n = 55$ ); specifically, 7 students improved, 1 student declined, and 47 students remained the same. This is important considering this program primarily focuses on students with attendance problems.

**Table 8a. School-related Outcomes: Misses School at Intake**

	Frequently or Sometimes	Never or Rarely	Unknown	Missing
Schuyler Public Schools – Colfax County	46%	7%	0%	46%
Dawes County Social Work Program – Dawes County	75%	22%	0%	3%
Middle/High School Interventionists – Hall County	67%	25%	3%	5%
Back on Track (The Hub) – Lancaster County	83%	0%	0%	17%
Your Life -- Madison County	58%	23%	0%	20%
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Richardson County	13%	15%	0%	72%
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Saline County	65%	19%	1%	15%
Interventionist – York County	59%	4%	37%	24%

**Table 8b. School-related Outcomes: Misses School at Discharge**

	Frequently or Sometimes	Never or Rarely	Unknown	Missing

Tables 9a and 9b, which display grades from intake to discharge, again demonstrate that students in both Hall County and Saline County are improving their grades, such that more students have As, Bs, or Cs at intake compared to discharge, and fewer students have Ds or Fs from intake to discharge (see green in Table 9b). As before though, the level of missing data is higher at discharge, which affects the reliability of these results. Wilcoxon nonparametric statistical tests for ordinal data indicated that (please see Table 9.9 (see green in Table 9.1 (ab) (t) 5 (udent) 1 (di) 1 (ic)-3 (al) t) 6

**Table 9b. School-related Outcomes: Grades at Discharge**

	As, Bs, or Cs	Ds or Fs	Unknown	Missing
Schuyler Public Schools – Colfax County	42%	12%		46%
Dawes County Social Work Program – Dawes County	44%	39%	11%	6%
Middle/High School Interventionists – Hall County	45%	44%	2%	10%
Back on Track (The Hub) – Lancaster County	17%	33%	50%	0%
Your Life -- Madison County	5%	0%	3%	93%
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Richardson County	13%	0%	0%	88%
Youth Assistance Program (YAP) – Saline County	62%	25%	3%	10%
Interventionist – York County	54%	18%	0%	29%

A similar pattern emerged for school engagement as displayed in Tables 10a and 10b—more students in Hall County’s School Interventionist program demonstrated high to medium school engagement, and fewer with low school engagement, from intake to discharge (see green in Table 10b). Wilcoxon nonparametric statistical tests for ordinal data indicated that (please note negative Wilcoxon  $\nu$  indicates improvement for this variable because of the way the variable is coded):

- There was a significant improvement on school engagement from intake to discharge for Hall County Interventionists (Wilcoxon  $\nu = -4.92, p < .001, n = 475$ ); specifically, 111 students improved, 46 students declined, and 318 students remained the same.
- There was not a significant improvement on school engagement from intake to discharge for Saline County YAP Interventionists (Wilcoxon  $\nu = -1.34, p = .180, n = 45$ ); specifically, 4 students improved, 1 student declined, and 40 students remained the same.

Table 10a. School-related Outcomes: School Attachment at Intake

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Table 11 displays the FSI for the programs that had at least 80% of their cases closed at the time of evaluation. Each of the programs had between 1.3% and 2.4% of youth with a status offense court filing. Law violation rates were more variable across programs—with a range of 1.6% to 13.1%. The Hall County Middle/High School Interventionist program had the highest FSI, which is reflective of the programming serving a higher risk population: 48.6% of their cases were diversion referrals (one of two programs with diversion referrals), 21% had aggressive behavior (Table 4b), and 36% lived in a high-risk environment (Table 4c).

The program with the next highest FSI was Madison County Your Life, with 4.9% having FSI law violations. This is the other program that receives diversion referrals (7.3% of cases were referred from diversion), 14% had previous law violations (Table 4a), and 31% lived in a high-risk environment (Table 4c).

With respect to Saline County's YAP, the FSI for law violations was 2.5%. In examining their referral source, 71.3% came from the school administrator and 21.3% from a mental health/social worker. Overall, 5% had a previous law violation (Table 4a), 1% with aggressive behavior (Table 4b) – both demonstrating lower risk; however, 39% came from a high-risk environment, indicating that youth in this program have some higher risk issues (Table 4c). During our interviews with this program, it appears they mostly serve youth with absenteeism issues. As such, this could influence whether they have FSI for law violations.

Youth served in the Richardson County YAP had a FSI law violation rate of only 1.6%. In examining their referral source, 80.2% came from the guidance counselor and 9.5% from a teacher. Their level of risk also appears lower than the previous programs discussed, with 2% having a previous law violation (Table 4a), 8% with aggressive behavior (Table 4b), and 11% coming from a high-risk environment (Table 4c). As this program was no longer funded, we did not interview any staff about the program; therefore, we do not have descriptive information about the youth served in this program other than what is in the JCMS. This program did have the highest successful completion rate (84%), suggesting the population is somewhat lower risk.



# References

# Appendix

## Definition of Future System Involvement

For the purpose of accurately assessing post-program law violations across Community-based Aid

## Appendix (continued)

(d) been filed on, which has not been dismissed or dropped, for an act that would constitute a serious traffic offense to include driving under the influence under Neb. Rev. Statute 60-6, 196 or similar city/village ordinance, leaving the scene of an accident under Neb. Rev. Statute 60-696(A), reckless driving under Neb. Rev. Statute 60-6, 214(A), engaging in speed contest/racing under Neb. Rev. Statute 60-6, 195 (a) or (b) or related city/village ordinance.

(i) Future system involvement shall not include less serious traffic violations that do not impact community safety, including careless driving, failure to yield, failing to stop, speeding, violating learner's permit, driving on suspended license, no valid insurance, no helmet, following too close, failure to display plates.

2. Future law violation shall not include the following:

(a) been filed on and that has not been dismissed or dropped, for an act that would constitute a Games and Parks violation as found in Neb. Rev. Statute Chapter 37

(b) been filed on for being mentally ill and dangerous, under Neb. Rev. Statute 43-247(3)(c) or harmful to self or others under 43-247(3)(b)(2)



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