



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

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2ND Chance for Expelled Youth: Continued Education Opportunities Augusta is Home for DJJ's New 'Education Transitional Center'

(AUGUSTA - GA) Students expelled from traditional schools around the Augusta area now have another opportunity to learn at an innovative new "Transitional" center. Department of Juvenile Justice Commissioner Avery D. Niles is pleased to announce DJJ has opened its third Regional Education Transitional Center to help keep Georgia kids in classrooms.

The Georgia Preparatory Academy developed this new Education Transitional Center concept, called 'ETC' for short, while working on academic advancements for Juvenile Justice Reforms. Richmond County youth who have been suspended or expelled or can no longer pursue their educations in traditional public school settings began attending ETC classes in Augusta this week.

"At DJJ we realize it is counter-productive to Juvenile Justice Reform when our youth have no way available to earn their high school diploma or GED," said Commissioner Niles. ***"Under DJJ supervision, the new ETC can provide local youth with opportunities to continue their educations and earn course credits outside of their former public school classrooms."***

The Commissioner said the Augusta ETC program now joins the Macon - Bibb County and Savannah - Chatham County ETC locations established by DJJ last year to align with Governor Deals' vision to develop a consistent plan of action to reduce juvenile recidivism.

Dr. Audrey Armistad is Associate School Superintendent of the Georgia Preparatory Academy which is dually accredited as the state's 181st school system. The Academy evaluates which young offenders at DJJ have compiled enough credits to obtain a diploma. Dr. Armistad said classroom innovations like DJJ's Education Transitional Centers help meet the modern quality academic needs of expelled Georgia students and will assist them to achieve their educational goals.

Each site will begin by serving up to 20 youth. ***"Sometimes we will encounter 16 or 17-year-olds who are still reading on a second or third grade level,"*** Dr. Armistad said. ***"Our challenge is to bring these students back up to where they need to be,"*** Armistad said.

Dr. Armistad emphasized the importance of reaching troubled teens while there is still time. ***"This will be an awesome opportunity for families in the Augusta area,"*** Armistad said. ***"Kids in the community who aren't in school will have another opportunity to earn their diplomas or GEDs."***

(MORE MORE MORE)

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

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Dr. Armistad said parents, families, schools and communities working together can create meaningful partnerships which ultimately lead to significant across-the-board gains in student achievement. The official opening of the DJJ Education Transitional Center in Augusta drew positive reactions from Richmond County Juvenile Court Judge Jennifer McKenzie; Toombs Judicial Circuit Court Public Defender Caryn Lobdell; Guardian Ad Litem Jane Dansie, and many other local stakeholders from the 2015 DJJ Augusta Citizens Academy.

“I commend DJJ for the role they play in the lives of the students,” said City of Waynesboro Mayor Pauline Jenkins after touring the Center. ***“The resources that have been put in place for our young people to become productive and responsible citizens will be a great asset for the entire community.”***

Chief Assistant Public Defender Sara Meyers at the Toombs Judicial Circuit was excited to see the new ETC program ready to meet the needs of Augusta’s troubled youth. ***“Having an education is a key to success and it is comforting to know that the ETC is providing that education to troubled students that have the desire to get an education,”*** said Meyers. ***“The leaders there are striving to make this a community effort to lead the students to a bright future.”***

Several stakeholders shared the view that programs like ETC could be useful to communities with a need to help keep youth with similar education problems from becoming entangled in the juvenile justice system. ***“I think it can really help these children that we’ve processed out because when they are not in school they have a tendency to reoffend and this program could reduce that,”*** said Superior Court Chief Judge William Woodrum, Jr.

Chief Judge William Woodrum, Jr. of the Ogeechee Judicial Circuit was impressed with the way Augusta’s new Education Transitional Center makes troubled youth place a value on their education. ***“The program looks like it is set up to be able to impress upon them that they will need to take some responsibility for their education,”*** Chief Judge Woodrum said. ***“It can be frustrating to the court to not be able to place the children in an educational setting when they are released and this program provides a good solution to that.”***

Regional Education Transition Centers will be staffed with current DJJ teachers and housed in local **Community Court Services** offices throughout Georgia based on areas identified with the most critical needs. Each Regional Education Transition Center will provide:

- An education setting for instruction from highly-qualified DJJ teachers.
- A place and transition period for youth before they reenter public school districts.
- Educational instruction to strengthen cognitive levels in reading and math.
- An alternative educational setting for youth to recover credits needed for diplomas.
- Opportunities for vocational training, career exploratory programs and planning for post-secondary options and employment.

“Don’t let this opportunity die,” said Commissioner Avery Niles. ***“Make sure hope happens. We hope to grow it and expand it.”*** Niles said. ***“There was a void in their lives and now that void can be filled with opportunity.”***

The Georgia Preparatory Academy is moving ahead with plans for suspended or expelled students to one day be able to enroll in one of DJJ’s new Education Transitional Center locations in Fulton and Muscogee Counties. DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles says, ***“The goal of this agency is to ensure that each student is in a better place with their education when they leave here, than they were when they arrived.”***

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