



Office *of the* Governor  
JOHN BEL EDWARDS

# CHALLENGES MET. PROGRESS DELIVERED.

Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2016–2023

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## Introduction

01

### Message from the Secretary and Executive Summary

It has been said, one way to measure a society is to measure how the children are doing. During his term in office, Governor John Bel Edwards has made it a priority to ensure that all Louisiana Children are treated as children even when they make a mistake by violating state law. Under his leadership, the governor has consistently studied and put in place measures to address the needs of system-involved youth. This work began with first identifying the barriers that this population of youth experience, and then using evidence-based techniques to enhance their overall welfare. Our juvenile offenders should be treated as children with the focus of providing an array of individual rehabilitative services.

Recognizing that the youth offender is a child, the governor has focused on supporting legislative measures that have continued to reform the Louisiana Juvenile Justice System, building juvenile justice administrative practices that meet the unique needs of the state's adjudicated youth population. While Louisiana has faced its share of challenges, Louisiana has continued to develop strategies to better assist those youth who commit delinquent or status offenses with a focus on rehabilitation, not punishment. The overall mission is to ensure that every Louisiana child can grow up to be a productive law-abiding citizen.

# Progress Delivered

## 2016

**Act 499** - Established juvenile justice accountability and cost effectiveness reporting. OJJ implemented a data gathering system and reporting via public statistical reports on OJJ's website as part of a continuing inquiry into the efficacy, cost effectiveness and impact on public safety of the treatment and supervision methods that OJJ employed.

**Act 500** - Incorporated OJJ schools into the state school and district accountability program. OJJ implemented a mutual accountability program that had a specialized school report card for use in assessment of student achievement in OJJ schools, established a benchmark for OJJ student credit accumulation and tracked that accumulation, tracked graduation rates and recognized high school equivalent passage rates and tracked success in post-release high school, postsecondary education or job—training programs.

**Act 501** - Raised the age for consideration as a juvenile in the criminal justice system. The act raised the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to include 17-year-old offenders for various offenses, at the discretion of the local DA. Previously, all 17-year-old juveniles were sent to the adult system.

**Act 617** - Clarified confidentiality of records, established that updated reports on the whereabouts and condition of the child be provided to the court and child's counsel not less than seventy-two hours before any in-court review hearing, provided that reports for children who are indigent be furnished at no cost to the child, child's family, or counsel, and provided that any child committed to the custody of OJJ must be physically transported to the committing court for an in-person review hearing not more than six months after the child's commitment, and at least every six months thereafter, unless waived.

## 2017

**Act 376** - Required agencies to screen for sexually exploited children/victims of human trafficking and notify the Crime Victims Services Bureau of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections. OJJ established YS Policy..

# 02

## 2018

**Act 385** - Prohibits persons or business entities publishing confidential juvenile record information or confidential criminal record information of a child. Prohibits charging a fee to remove, correct, or modify any criminal history record or criminal history record information that the person or business entity has published.

**Act 467** - Establishes after adjudication for a violation of R.S. 14:42 or R.S. 14:44, juveniles in secure care shall be eligible for modification after serving thirty-six months of their disposition. Juveniles in the custody of OJJ adjudicated of felony-grade delinquent acts in violation of R.S. 14:42 or R.S. 14:44 who are fourteen years or older at the time of the commission of the offense shall be confined to secure placement until the child attains the age of twenty-one years.

## 2019

**Act 395** - Authorizes the establishment of arts-based programming at juvenile detention facilities. Enables OJJ to establish arts-based programming which may include but is not limited to the performing arts, visual arts, and other arts activities that enhance youth development.

## 2020

**HCR 47** - Requested OJJ to study the impact of COVID-19 on its operations, specifically as it pertained to the safety and security of juveniles and staff at its facilities, as well as the feasibility of releasing low-risk, nonviolent juvenile detainees and its impact on mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

## 2022

**Act 496** - Provided for documentation, training of OJJ personnel and guidelines for youth in solitary confinement. The act established time limits, placement restrictions, documentation requirements, provision of services requirements and required reporting from OJJ on the use of solitary confinement.

**Act. 693** - New Tiered Approach for Juvenile Justice. The Act directed OJJ to develop and implement a tiered system of juvenile facilities for the placement of youth. The system contains facilities and programming for low risk, medium risk and maximum risk youth.

# Challenges Met

# 03

## Education on the Move

Director of Education Shenell Deville and the Supervisor of Special Education Jessica White, have made positive educational developments. Collectively backed by more than 41 years of education experience, Ms. Deville and Ms. White spearheaded the transformation of OJJ's school system, as OJJ school performance scores improved two letter grades, garnering recognizable improvement. As a result, Riverside Alternative (Bridge City) raised its School Performance Score (SPS) by 9.9 points, from 59.6 F to 69.5 C; and Southside Alternative (Monroe/Columbia) raised School Performance Scores (SPS) by 4.5 points, from a 54.3 F to a 58.8 D.

Upon joining OJJ, Ms. Jessica White updated the agency's Child Find policies, record sharing, and discipline reporting procedures. Child Find regulations are now inclusive of collaborative efforts of various Juvenile Justice Staff who are in continuous contact with our youth. OJJ's new Child Find policies now require all schools to identify and evaluate students in need of special education or related services (e.g., speech, counseling, etc.). In addition, Child Find protocols are inclusive of a more comprehensive and professional development and training plan for school staff in areas such as 504, special education, student interventions and progress monitoring, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), and Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Under the expertise of Ms. White, OJJ special education staff and leadership monitor and ensure provisions of special education services for all students with disabilities.

## COVID-19 Global Pandemic

The Coronavirus (COVID) proved to present various challenges to all, including the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ). Under OJJ's Director of Nursing, Dr. Denise Dandridge, the agency devised a plan of care, inclusive of CUE COVID Test Kits, which were made available at all youth facilities throughout the state. Dr. Dandridge's leadership created a process to quickly detect a positive COVID test and ensure that the youth received treatment in a timely manner. OJJ was able to take necessary precautions needed to continue all facility operations during the pandemic.

Additional OJJ educational initiatives are inclusive of the Lyft Education pilot, Louisiana Department of Education Jumpstart Pathway and Career Technical programs, and sustainable vocational programs with multiple industry credentials. **Jumpstart Pathway and Career Technical** programs entail a partnership with Bossier Parish Community College (BPCC), to offer diverse industry courses/credentials towards a TOPS Tech diploma (Jumpstart Pathways and Career Technical Programs). OJJ Secure Care Youth can enroll through dual enrollment courses and earn college credits through Central Southwest (ACY). Fletcher Community College offers post-secondary courses in various areas of concentration through college enrollment for youth who have graduated with their high school diplomas. The Career Technical programs offer Information Architecture, Construction, Business Management, Hospitality and Tourism Manufacturing, Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics.

**The Life Skills Reimagined** program at Riverside Alternative (Bridge City) and Ware Youth Center offer a unique blended-learning model easily implemented by anyone at any cognitive and emotional level.

Life Skills Reimagined is the only holistic life skills curriculum designed specifically for learners with emotional trauma, both in design and content, to cover social-emotional (Setting Personal Boundaries, Managing Negative Emotions) and tangible skills (Getting & Keeping a Job, Personal Finance).

# Leaving Louisiana Better Than We Found It

# 04

Since 2016, Louisiana has greatly reduced the number of youth removed from their homes and placed in state custody for rehabilitation. The days of housing 2000 to 3000 children in state custody is a practice of the past, with Louisiana's current secured care custody numbers being as low as 300 youth offenders on an annual basis. With this reduced population of youth offenders in state custody, Louisiana can provide more intensive rehabilitative services to those youth classified as moderate and high-risk youth offenders.

But to further reduce the need to remove children from their homes to address delinquent behavior, Louisiana recognizes the need to address anti-social adolescent behavior before the child starts violating laws. As he leaves office, Governor Edwards has put in place measures to provide community-based resources to work with youth in the community while the child is engaging in non-criminal behavior. By offering community-

based services to children and families for low-risk behavior, Louisiana will see significant taxpayer savings by working with the child in their home. Secure care custody is one of the most expensive forms of rehabilitative treatment for youth offenders.

The future for reducing the amount of delinquent behavior is to offer more community-based programs that involve families as a critical component to enhance youth outcomes, increase public safety, and strengthen neighborhoods. To ensure this upstream-focused approach can continue, the governor through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative has ensured that OJJ receives funding for juvenile justice initiatives and programs to divert youth offenders from the deep end of the juvenile justice system. This funding initiative will allow OJJ to continue the work of identifying anti-social behavior in the youth population and putting in services to prevent the youth from engaging in criminal behavior.

## Swanson Center for Youth at Monroe to Open Fall 2023

On the cusp of modernization and the passing of legislative bills, OJJ is completing the construction of a new 72-single-room facility to serve as OJJ's Tier-1 Secure Care Facility in accordance with Act 693 or the 2022 Regular Session. The New Swanson Monroe facility will accommodate high-risk youth offenders of Louisiana, and provide the state the ability to offer intensive rehabilitative services in a safe and secure setting for both youth and staff. This facility will also house a transitional treatment unit for youth needing increased specialized and targeted (one on one) services, designed to develop appropriate social skills for integration with lower-tiered facilities' general populations.

## Jetson Juvenile Reception Diagnostic Center to open in Spring 2025

Additionally, Governor Edwards facilitated the state's ability to begin the design and future construction of a new Jetson facility in Baker, Louisiana. The new Jetson will be a 72 single room facility, of which 24 beds are designated for a juvenile reception diagnostic center. The diagnostic center will provide a full array of assessments to assist with the classification of youth under the newly implemented Tier Classification System in Louisiana in accordance with Act 693 of the 2022 Regular Session. The remaining 48 beds will be used to house general population juveniles classified as moderate and low. The operation of both new facilities, Swanson and Jetson, will allow the state to greatly reduce the amount of time youth are currently spending in a local juvenile detention center once an order for placement has been made by a juvenile court.

## OJJ joins Social Media for the first time in Agency's History

On May 19, 2022, the Office of Juvenile justice launched Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn for the first time in agency's history. This social media presence will contribute to the agency's ability to disseminate information on the operation and accomplishments of OJJ.

## OJJ Launches New Website and Branding Design

Under the leadership of Public Information Director Nicolette Gordon, OJJ launched a new website on July 21, 2023. The new website has a clean uncluttered design with enhanced rich content containing a Parent Portal, Regionalized Staff Directory, News & Events Calendar, and a space for Virtual Hiring Events. OJJ's primary goal during the redesign phase was to reposition the agency by creating a more user-friendly website that is responsive across all platforms and devices. Specifically, focusing on making it easier for parents to locate valuable information as it pertains to finding secure care facilities, planning and scheduling visits, and the educational services provided while their child is in OJJ's custody.

OJJ also refreshed the agency's official logo and created a new Branding Style Guide. This essential guide will be used for years to come in helping to communicate a consistent message both internally and externally in regard to the agency.

## Probation & Parole Launches RePath Modernization Program

On March 6, 2023, OJJ's Regional Probation & Parole Offices in Lake Charles & Shreveport launched the RePath Modernization Monitoring Program. This mobile application is used to improve accountability, communication, access to wraparound services, and court attendance for those youth participants in Community Based Supervision. Utilization of the RePath monitoring system will allow OJJ to move away from the use of ankle monitoring systems that often stigmatizes system involved youth. The new monitoring technology will reduce overall costs and provide more administrative efficiency with the monitoring of youth receiving community-based services.



# 05

## Stories of Our Success

Ryan Parks' story did not begin like many adjudicated youth that are in the juvenile justice system. Born into a blended family, Parks had the full support of both his mother and father, however, he found himself in the deep end of the State of Louisiana's Juvenile Justice System. In December 2019, he was placed into state custody where he would undergo intensive rehabilitative treatment. While on this rehabilitative journey, he began to strengthen his faith and quickly became a leader in his own right. Through the LAMOD Program, which is a catalyst that drives therapeutics in growth and development—he achieved the highest level of transformation and received an opportunity to work in detail. This is where he acquired those soft skills that are used in his current position as Manager at a local supermarket.

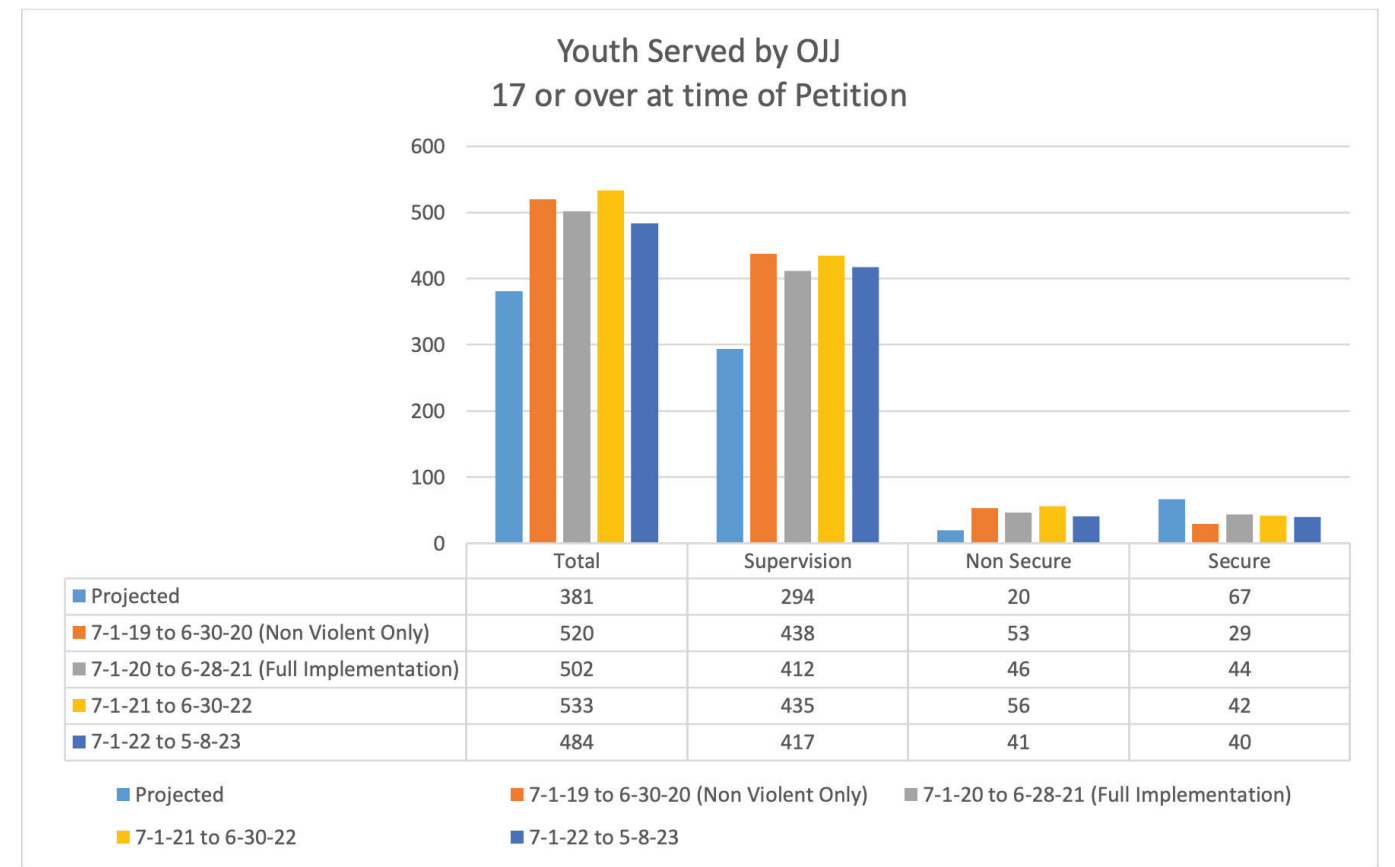
In November 2022, the courts granted Parks an early release from the Office of Juvenile Justice. Parks contributes his family's support as being the primary factor in helping him to succeed. "Many kids act out because they feel like they don't have anyone," said Parks. He affirmed that visitation from his family was instrumental in keeping him grounded when all of the odds were stacked against him. As for the future, he intends to further his education in Business Management and work alongside his parents to advocate for "Second Chances," for youth impacted by the juvenile justice system.



# 06

## BY THE NUMBERS

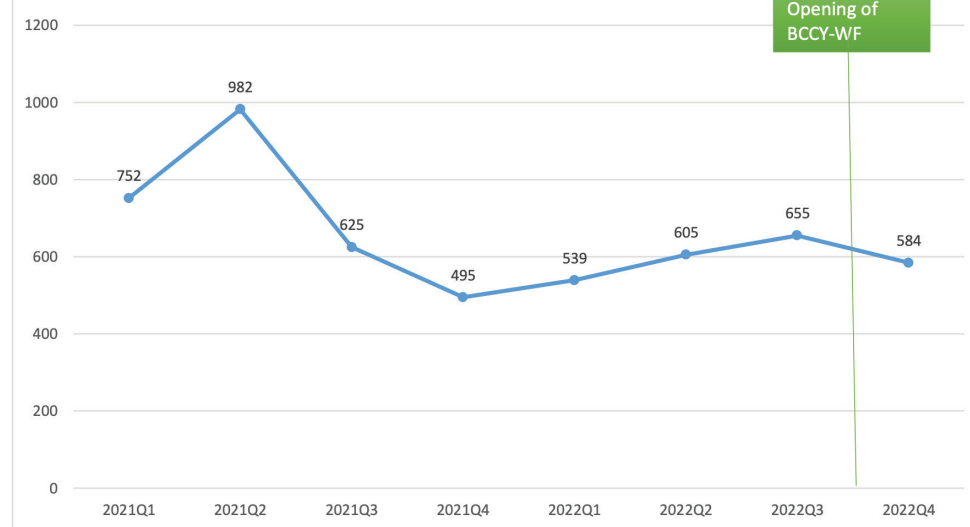
Between the years of 2016 and 2023, Juvenile Justice has been the focus of Governor John Bel Edwards' administration efforts, as well as those vested within the Juvenile Justice Community. Heightened efforts have yielded more Juvenile Justice Reform initiatives than any other eight-year period. First, Act 501 of the 2016 Regular Session, modified the Children's Code and expanded the juvenile court's jurisdiction to refer seventeen-year-olds to the Juvenile Justice System, instead of referral to the adult correctional system.



The above graph depicts the number of youths seventeen at the time of their arrest who were diverted to the Juvenile Justice System. In addition, as forecasted by the Governor and the "Raise the Age" Advocates, the majority of seventeen-year-old youth offenders are able to receive community-based services that help the youth not recidivate.

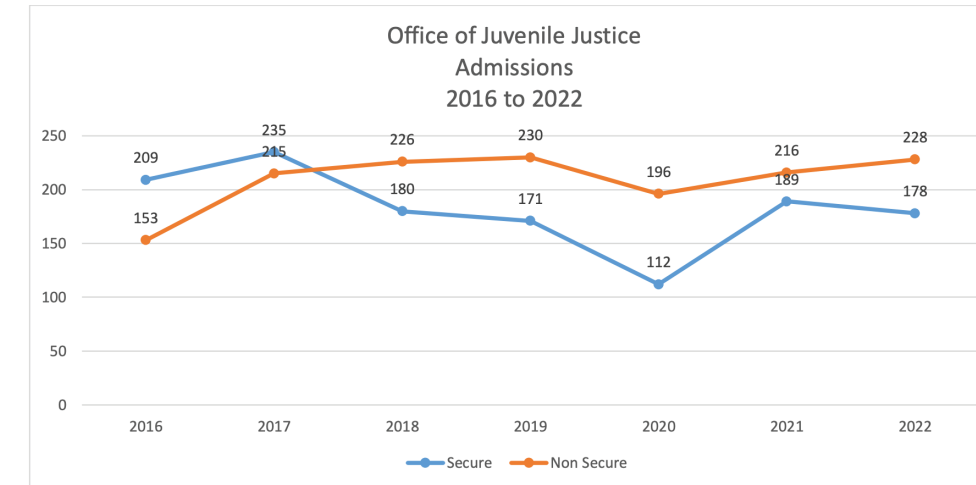
In 2022, Act 496 established the "Tier Classification System". As a result, the Office of Juvenile Justice is now authorized to use a more in-depth classification process for the placement of youth at the various OJJ facilities that meet the needs of the youth without the restriction of regional placement. Since the passage of the law, the agency has begun implementation with positive outcomes for youth behaviors. The new system has decreased the number of disruptive incidents across all facilities and increased the overall safety and security of all facilities.

### Office of Juvenile Justice Youth Incidents



This graph shows the positive benefits across the entire secure care system of having a Tier-1 high security facility where youth with high-risk behavior receive targeted therapeutic services that assist the youth in developing the self-regulatory, coping, and social skills needed to safely and successfully engage peers and staff members. OJJ will further expand the Tier Classification System with the opening of the new Tier-1 seventy-two bed single room facility at Swanson Monroe in late fall of 2023. The rate of disruptive and violent behavior will be further reduced when all youth are classified based on their behavior levels and targeted rehabilitative programming.

Since August 2008, The Office of Juvenile Justice has utilized an evidenced-based assessment tool called the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) to determine the appropriate placement of youth. The Utilization of the SAVRY has resulted in a decrease in the number of youth placed in secure care custody over the last seven years. Instead of secure care placement, more youth have been placed in group home placements (non-secure care). Research shows that allowing children to be maintained in more home-like facilities, participate in community schools, and receive services in a community setting can produce better rehabilitative outcomes for the youth.



This graph shows the reduction in the number of youth being placed in secure care, while the number of youths placed in group homes has increased. Louisiana Children's Code article 102 provides that when a youth is removed from the control of his parents, the court shall secure his care as nearly as possible equivalent to that which the parents should have given him. See, LA. Child. Code Article 102 (West 2023). The utilization of the SAVRY allows OJJ to place youth in the least restrictive home-like environment.

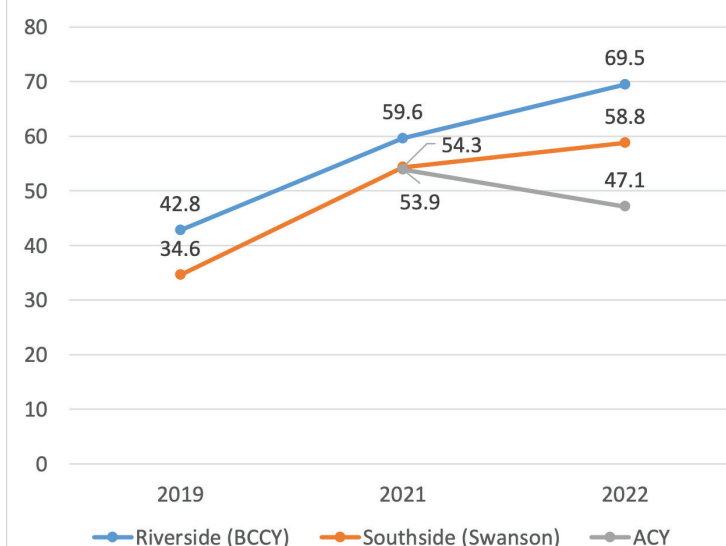
Type of Service	Percent (Increase/Decrease)
Secure	-14.8%
Non-Secure - Delinquency	49.02%

Beyond Legislative changes, OJJ has placed focus on the delivery of educational services to youth in secure care facilities, specifically education services. Historically the schools have underperformed and have received very poor grades. However, the latest evaluation by the Department of Education indicated significant growth.

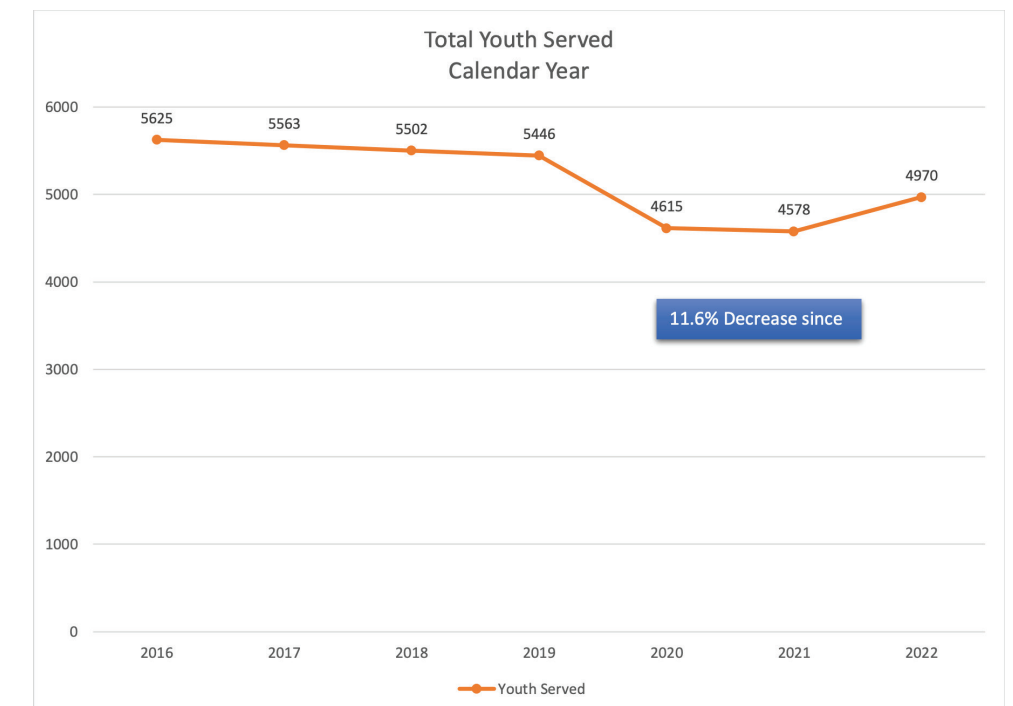
SCHOOL	2019	2022
Riverside	F Rating	C Rating
Southside	F Rating	D Rating

Two schools specifically were able to improve their schools from an F-Rating. OJJ remains committed to ensuring that all youth in secure care can exist in the system with improved individual educational outcomes. Having schools that deliver quality education is critical for the secure care of youth.

### School Performance Scores



This graph shows the steady decline in the total number of youth being served by OJJ. The numbers are inclusive of youth in secure care custody, non-secure care custody, and on probation/parole. The overall reform strategies under Governor John Bel Edwards have resulted in fewer youth being involved in the juvenile justice system. This is due to more preventative community-based programs like Alternative to Detention, Multi-Agency Resources Centers, and various youth offender diversionary programs to keep youth out of the deep end of the juvenile justice system.





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