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SPECTRUM NEWS

Juvenile detention centers offer students a competitive education, and for those that earn it, diplomas. (Spectrum News 1)

EDUCATION

## Students receive diplomas in detention centers

BY COREY JAMES | COLONIE  
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Education provided in juvenile detention centers may be less intensive than regular schools, however, there's a school district that proves juvenile detention centers have qualified teachers and a comprehensive curriculum.

Joan Arthurton, South Colonie Central School District special education teacher, said, "We teach them, I think, so much more than just about life and how to talk to people and accept people."

Arthurton also teaches at the area's juvenile detention facility.

"Our students are getting more because we're teachers, moms, guidance counselors, social workers. We're the ice cream man for our kids," he said.

Because of the age of the kids enrolled in the Capital District Juvenile Detention Facility, students are not allowed to be interviewed.

But when asked about the teaching styles and curriculum there compared to public schools, one senior student replied, "It's the same work but here, I get more one-to-one help from my teacher. It makes it easier for me because I get the help I need and there aren't 30-plus other kids in the class needing help, too. I'm a senior right now, and my teachers are helping me stay on track to graduate in 2023. My teachers are supportive, and have more time for me than before coming here."

Rebecca Openeer, special education teacher, said they don't have phones in the center.

"We don't have all those typical distractions teenagers have. And without those, it really slows down, slows things down, and allows kids to really focus on things like reading," Openeer said.

Despite the challenges of educating students ages 13 to 20, the staff have worked hard to provide students with the most effective educational experience possible and an academic environment in which students can learn and grow.

"This is the same curriculum a typical school would offer. As a result, they can get all the Regents courses they would normally take, such as math, science and algebra," said Lucas Jacobs, vice president of detention and prevention services for Berkshire Farm Center Services.

Since the Raise the Age legislation took effect in 2018, more than 10 students have received their high school diplomas. According to faculty, that's the most in recent years.

The teens housed at the detention facility are generally convicted of a felony committed at age 16 or 17. They can be held at the facility depending on their sentence until 21.

Jacobs assisting with operations. He strives to change the teen's education.

"The typical perception of security tension is that it is an educational facility with some programming thrown in. I wish to turn that around and state that we are a school and programming facility with security as well," Jacobs said.

Although the students made decisions that led to their juvenile detention placement, their past does not define them. That's because they learn to be better people and make better choices.

"I try to tell them that what they have done shouldn't define them. We can all be better again. All of us," Arthurton said.

There are eight secure detention facilities operating throughout the state of New York, two of them in New York City and six of them outside of it.



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