

# HOMEROOM

THE OFFICIAL BLOG OF THE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Connect with us



## Menu

## Painting a Different Picture of Education in the Juvenile Detention Center



Secretary Duncan and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder today announced a [Correctional Education Guidance Package](#) aimed at helping states and local agencies strengthen the quality of education services provided to America's estimated 60,000 young people in confinement every day.

This guidance package builds on recommendations in the [My Brother's Keeper Task Force report](#) released in May to "reform the juvenile and criminal justice systems to reduce unnecessary

*interactions for youth and to enforce the rights of incarcerated youth to a quality education.” Today’s guidance package is a roadmap that states and local agencies can use to improve the quality of educational services for confined youth.*

*Secretary Duncan and Attorney General Holder visited The Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center School to announce this new guidance. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, the art teacher, writes about the impact of the art program is having on the students in the detention facility.*

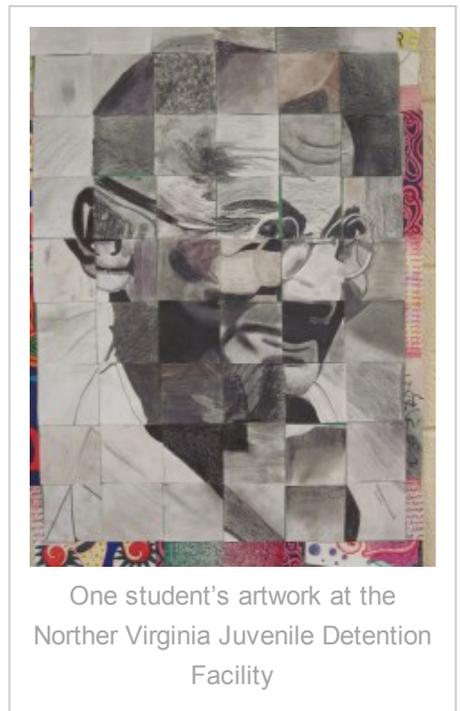
When envisioning a juvenile detention center, people often think of an institution with barbed wire set away from a populated area; a forgotten place where children go to be punished and removed from the public eye. It certainly isn’t regarded as an educational institution where learning and creativity happen. My goal is to paint a different picture. It’s a picture of a place that offers hope in place of doubt, care in place of harm, and knowledge in place of ignorance.

[The Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center School](#) is housed within a single wing of the detention center. As you walk down our school’s hallway, you see artwork displaying where our students have been, where they are now, and where they hope to be in the future. Further down the hall, you might hear students presenting evidence discovered in a science experiment or discussing the personality traits of characters they read about in English class.

The classes at the Center are small, co-taught, and focus on project-based learning. Students receive differentiated instruction and individual attention from every teacher, which helps improve their academic skills. They frequently express that they benefit from this kind of education and insist they would have attended their former schools more regularly if it had been more like this.

The “d-center” school, as it is referred to by staff and students, has grown into a program that has helped students receive their high school diploma, obtain scholarships to community and state colleges, and, ultimately, have a positive impact in their own communities. Here, I have seen students slowly but surely remove the personal barriers they have so carefully built over the years. They trust the education program is here to offer them a chance for change and provide new opportunities. As educators, we realize this may be the first opportunity they’ve ever been given to explore different sides of themselves, tell their story, and truly practice being self aware.

At the end of the day, we measure our success by the small steps we see our students take on a daily basis. For some, it may be the first time they master math concepts, or speak in front of a history class. We don’t view our students as criminals or prisoners; to us they are students who



deserve the best education a child can have. We foster an environment that sets high standards and encourages each one to discover their personal best. And in the process, we often end up finding our own personal best.

To learn more about the art education program at the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center School please visit the [Art room website](#)

*Kathleen Fitzpatrick works for Alexandria City Public Schools and is an art teacher at the Northern Virginia Detention Center School. In 2013, she received the 2013 Agnes Meyer Outstanding Teacher Award.*

## Posts you may also like

- [Family Engagement Town Hall in Indianapolis](#)
- [Fatherhood Is a Community Value](#)
- [My Brother's Keeper Initiative Helping to Ensure Access to Advanced High School Classes](#)



Posted by  
**Joe Portnoy**

December 8, 2014

2 Comments

Headlines, News

Arne Duncan, Attorney General Holder, Correctional Education Guidance, MBK, My Brother's Keeper, Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center