

# Clayton County's JDAI Journey



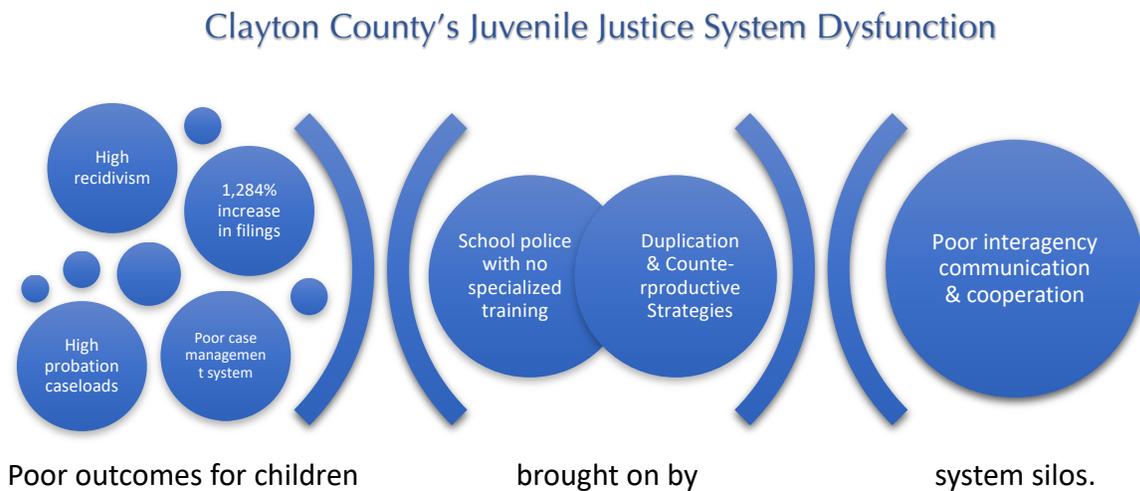
Colin Slay, Director of Juvenile Court Operations

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## Clayton County, Circa 2002

Prior to our participation in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s (AECF) Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), there was not much “system” in Clayton County’s juvenile justice system. While not uncommon at the time in our nation, our system was characterized by poor interagency communication that often resulted in duplication of services for children involved with multiple agencies. Even worse, some youth and families were referred to competing programs or were involved with counterproductive strategies.



The introduction of police officers into our schools in the mid-1990s only confounded the problems; we experienced a more than a 1,200% increase in the number of juvenile complaints in the year following the officers’ introduction on campus. That led to unmanageable caseloads that often exceeded 100 cases per probation officer. We had no probation management system—no way to classify the risk of juvenile offenders and no objective, organized way to identify criminogenic risk factors and treatment needs. During this same period, we began to see high school graduation rates dip to their lowest points.

## Finding JDAI

In 2001, AECF introduced JDAI to Georgia in the Foundation’s first attempt at state-wide replication. Prior to this JDAI was producing promising results in several county-level replication efforts. Unfortunately, the initial foray into large-scale replication of JDAI was not successful.<sup>1</sup> Clayton County, however, realized the value of the JDAI Core Strategies and sought the assistance of AECF in local replication. In late 2002, Clayton County began using the JDAI Core Strategies of collaboration and

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<sup>1</sup> JDAI has since been successfully replicated at state scale in several states, most notably in New Jersey and Missouri. In 2015, largely inspired by Clayton County’s successful replication of JDAI, Georgia embarked again upon state scale replication of JDAI. Clayton County Juvenile Court’s Chief Judge, the Honorable Steven Teske, and Director of Juvenile Court Operations, Colin Slay, were appointed by Georgia Governor Nathan Deal, to the Georgia JDAI Steering Committee, a committee working under the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.

data-driven decision making to reform our system. Realizing that strong judicial leadership would be necessary to impart change in such a misinformed and dysfunctional system mired in apathy and complacency, Judge Steven Teske, with the blessing of then Chief Judge K. Van Banke, issued a court order under the auspices of a rarely used juvenile code section<sup>2</sup> to convene juvenile justice stakeholders for the purposes of developing a community risk reduction program. Judge Teske’s initial focus was the overwhelming number of complaints coming from schools for minor behavioral problems.



Judge Teske also realized that for the effort to truly be a collaborative approach it would be important for the court to assume a position equal to the other stakeholders. This was accomplished by soliciting a neutral party to facilitate the collaborative meetings—Dr. Pete Colbenson, Executive Director of the Children and Youth Coordinating Council, facilitated the ensuing nine months of meetings. Culminating from that series of negotiations were the first interagency agreements and protocols for the juvenile justice system in Clayton County.

Among the protocols, the most prominent was the School Referral Reduction Program (SRRP). Signed by the chief judge, school superintendent, and chiefs of local law enforcement, the SRRP identified four

delinquent offenses that would no longer be subject to the formal filing of a juvenile complaints. Instead, the parties agreed to handle those minor behavioral infractions with a continuum of responses, ranging from a warning to educational workshops for the child and parent as an alternative to filing a formal complaint with the juvenile court. The results were dramatic; in the years since, school-related misdemeanor filings have fallen by more 90%, and the school-justice partnership has received much national attention.<sup>3</sup>

## Expanding the Reforms

While we were able to achieve Judge Teske’s initial objective of reducing the numbers of offenses being referred from the schools, we quickly came to realize that the need to adequately address the underlying behaviors remained. In response, the court, utilizing its newfound partnerships, created the Clayton

<sup>2</sup> In 2003, Judge Teske used OCGA § 15-11-36 to convene stakeholders for the purpose of creating a community-based risk reduction program.

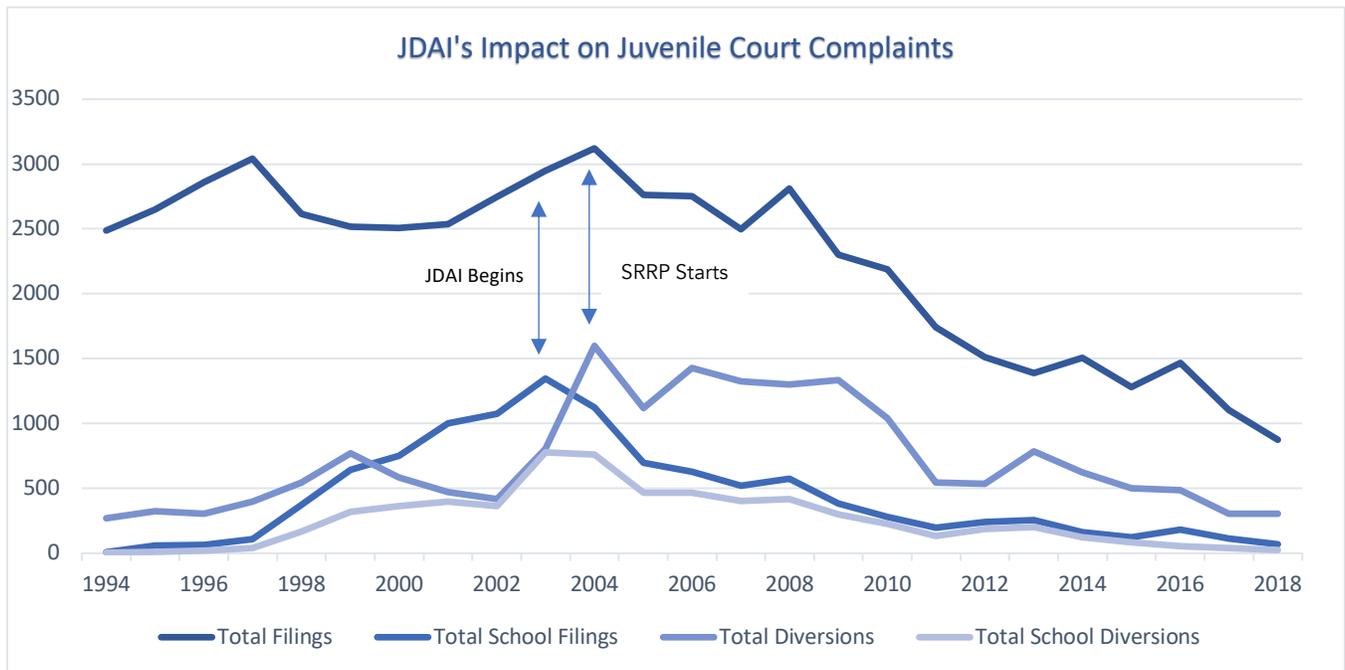
<sup>3</sup> In 2008, AECF began funding a replication effort based on our School-Justice Partnerships Model. As of the writing of this paper, the technical assistance team from Clayton County has assisted over 40 jurisdictions from across the nation in the development of a strategic plan to address the use of police officers in schools. In 2013, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges piloted their School Pathways project, an initiative to disrupt the “School-to-Prison Pipeline” based on the Clayton County model. In 2014, our model was identified as a best practice by researchers Howell, Lipsey, and Wilson in their book, *Handbook for Evidence-Based Juvenile Justice Systems*.

County Collaborative Child Study Team (Quad-CST). The multidisciplinary Quad-CST was instituted to address the chronic behavioral and mental health problems of children in schools in an effort to prevent those youth from becoming formally involved in the juvenile justice system. The Quad-CST was the genesis of what would later become the Clayton County System of Care.

In addition to the SRRP and Quad-CST, in partnership with other juvenile justice stakeholders, the court created the award-winning Finding Alternatives for Safety and Treatment (FAST) Panel.<sup>4</sup> This multidisciplinary review committee meets with the parent(s) of every child detained in Clayton County, and its purpose is to identify alternatives to detention that will allow the child to be safely released from detention pending the next phase in the juvenile justice process. The FAST Panel was the first detention review committee in the state of Georgia.

## The Impact of JDAI in Clayton County

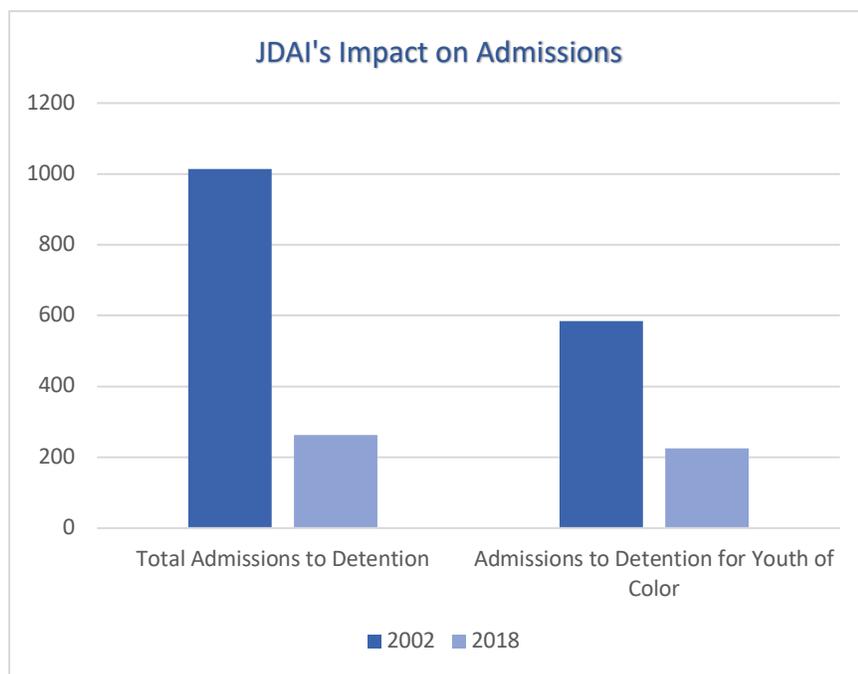
The impact of JDAI in Clayton County has been profound. Since its implementation in 2003, the number of filings from both the schools and community have decreased tremendously. There has been a corresponding increase in the use of alternatives to detention, diversion, and other informal measures as well.



The overall use of detention in Clayton County has decreased 64% since 2002. Annual admissions for youth of color have fallen by 40%. Not only are fewer youth being detained, the average length of stay has been reduced by seven days, 31% less than in 2002.

<sup>4</sup> The FAST Panel was awarded the American Probation and Parole Association's *President's Award* in 2006, for innovation in juvenile justice.

The reforms inspired by JDAI have not been confined to the front door of the juvenile justice system. In 2006, the court repurposed a failing juvenile drug court program to focus on the deepest end of our local system, designated felony offenders. Using an accountability court framework, we began offering juveniles facing up to 60 months of incarceration an option to undergo intensive treatment while under close supervision in an effort to avoid their restrictive custody sentences. In order to qualify for the Second Chance Court, the youth and his parent(s) have to agree to participate in cognitive behavioral therapy, home confinement with electronic monitoring, surveillance, random drug screening, and other intensive services over an 18-month period. With grant funding from the Governor’s Office of Children and Families and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, we were able to expand the treatment options to include evidence-based services such as Multisystemic Therapy. As a result, we have been able to reduce commitments to the Department of Juvenile Justice by more than 70% from 2002.



We are now more than a decade-and-a-half into our JDAI journey, and while we are proud of what we have accomplished, we are nowhere near finished. There are still too many children entering our juvenile justice system whose underlying issues are driven by undiagnosed or untreated mental health problems. Poverty, abuse, and other traumas still drive far too many kids into the delinquency system. Too many of the youth entering our system are youth of color. We recognize that these issues are complex and will be difficult to impact, but our

willingness to embrace reforms like JDAI demonstrates that the agencies, organizations, and citizens of Clayton County are willing and committed to giving our children their best chance at becoming healthy, productive adults. We will continue our journey!

While we are thankful of the support provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the opinions expressed in this document are the author’s alone and do not necessarily represent those of the Foundation.