

# Guarding the Front Door

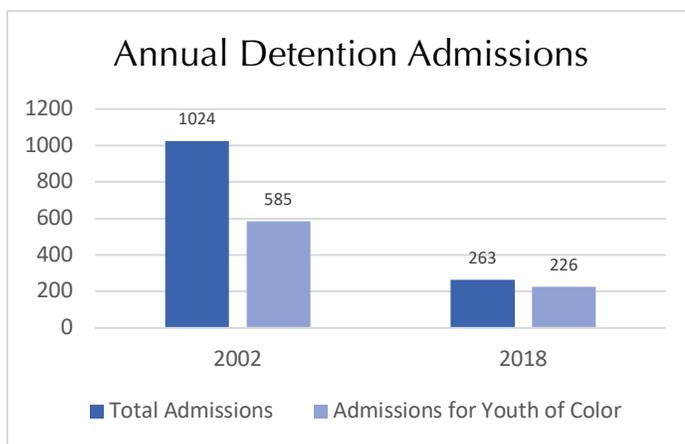
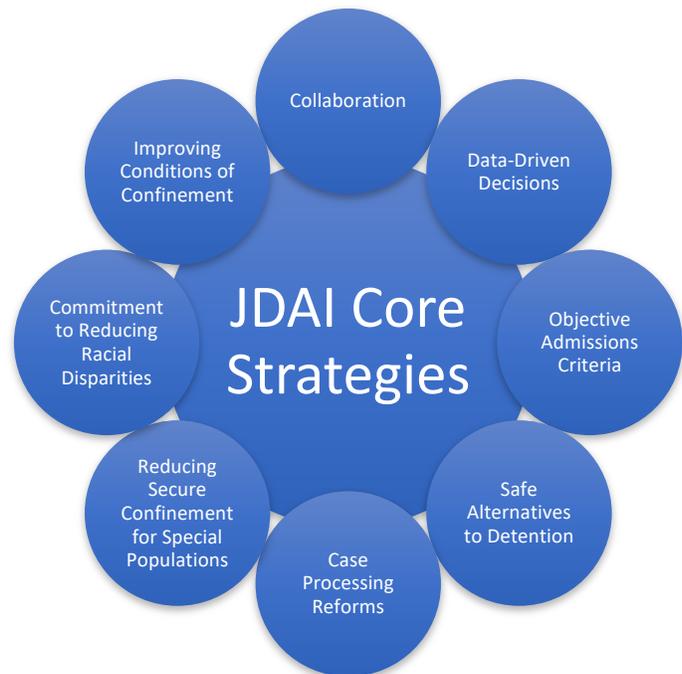
A Look at Clayton County Juvenile Court's Intake Reforms

## Introduction

In 2003, Clayton County Juvenile Court (CCJC) became a replication site of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). JDAI is one of the nation's most prolific juvenile justice reform efforts and has been successfully replicated in nearly 300 jurisdictions across 40 states. It is built upon eight interconnected Core Strategies. Among them is objective detention admissions criteria.

## Detention Assessment Instrument

Effective and fair juvenile justice systems are careful to distinguish between the youth who are most likely to commit new crimes or flee from the court's jurisdiction and those who are not. One of the first steps jurisdictions replicating JDAI often take is the creation of validated risk assessment instruments to aid intake officers in identifying those youth who are more likely to reoffend or flee. In 2003, CCJC adopted the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) Detention Assessment Instrument (DAI).



The validated risk classification instrument scores the youth's likelihood to commit a delinquent act and/or flee based on several static risk factors. There are three possible results: release to a parent without restrictions; release to a parent with conditions and detention alternative program; and detain pending a court hearing. The DAI may only be overridden with the chief intake officer's permission and only if there are significant mitigating or aggravating factors that are not

taken into account by the instrument. We routinely monitor our overrides and use that data to make policy and practice changes when required.

The impact of the use of the DAI to inform and help ensure objective detention decisions in Clayton County has been profound. Compared to our pre-JDAI baseline, annual admissions to detention to have fallen by 74% overall and 61% for youth of color. The DAI was updated and revalidated by DJJ in response to legislation that requires the use of the DAI in all Georgia jurisdictions.

## Detention Review

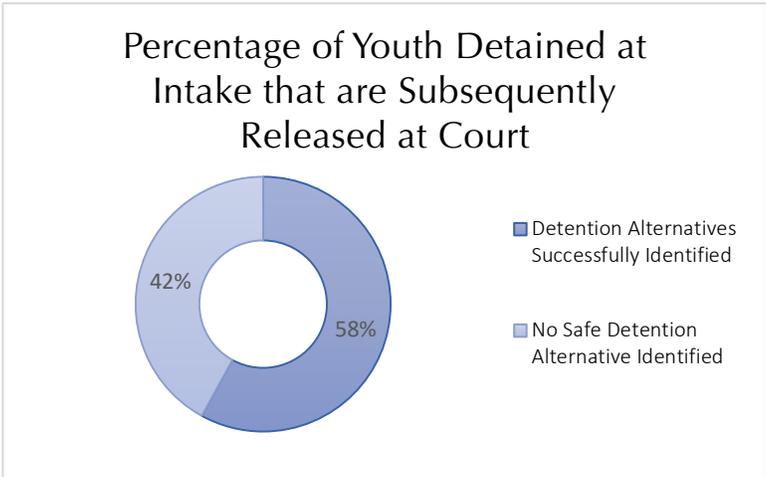
### Finding Alternatives for Safety and Treatment (FAST) Panel

For those children who are detained by Intake, their parents/custodians are invited to appear before a multidisciplinary panel prior to their initial detention hearing before a judge. The award-winning FAST Panel meets every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to take a more in-depth look at the circumstances of all children detained at intake.<sup>1</sup>



The Panel includes representatives from our school system, prosecutor’s office, public defender’s office, probation, the DJJ case expeditor, the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), and other juvenile justice stakeholders, including community-based service providers and trained community volunteers. The objective of the FAST Panel is to

identify detention alternatives that will allow for the child to be safely released to the community pending the next court hearing. It is important to note that in order to preserve proper due process, the actual presenting offense is not discussed during the FAST Panel meeting. The panel members review information provided by the child’s parents, school, and others involved with the family solely for the purposes of identifying risk mitigating and protective factors that can be deployed with the child and family to ensure the child can be safely released and will return to court when summoned.

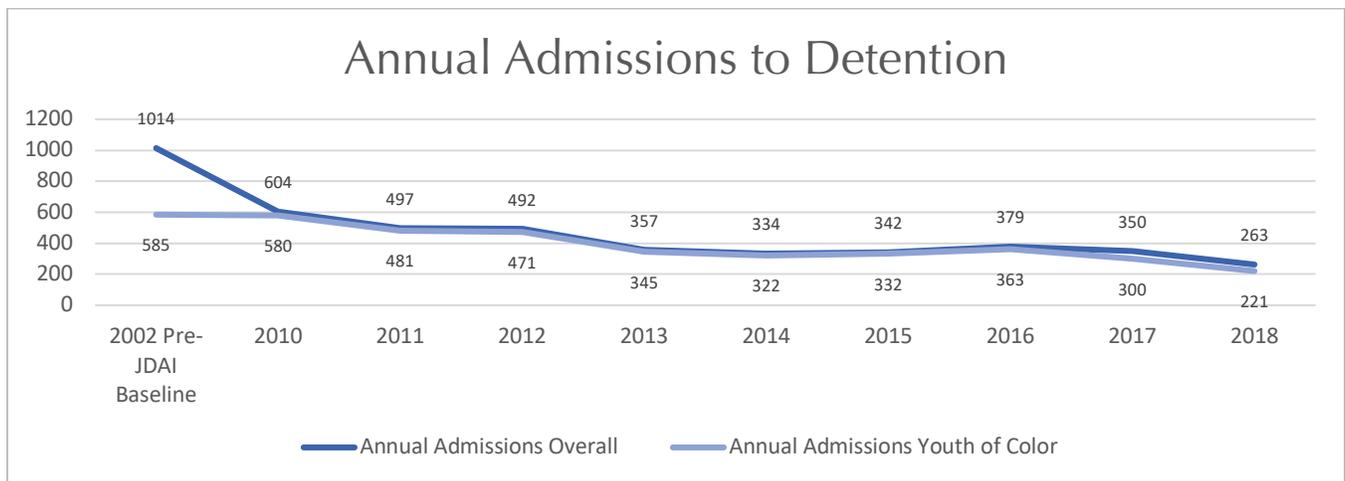


<sup>1</sup> The FAST Panel was awarded the American Probation and Parole Association’s *President Award* in 2006, for innovation in juvenile justice.

Program data indicates that the FAST Panel has been successful in finding detention alternatives for 58% of the youth whose cases have been considered. Absent the FAST Panel review, it is likely that most of the children detained at intake would remain in detention through the disposition of their cases.

## DJJ Case Expeditor

An integral part of the FAST Panel is the case expeditor. Since 2002, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice has provided CCJC with the services of a case expeditor. DJJ provides the case expeditor with a detention alternatives budget, and the case expeditor works closely with the FAST Panel and probation department to move juveniles from detention into a detention alternative as quickly as possible. CCJC has enjoyed great success with our detention alternatives programs—for the past several years, failures-to-appear for court and youth arrested for a new felony offense while released on a detention alternative have remained below five percent of the youth released on detention alternatives. Furthermore, during this same period we have experienced a 69% reduction in the overall filings of juvenile complaints.



## Conclusion

Clayton County Juvenile Court’s attention to ensuring that only the youth who are a high risk to reoffend or flee and not those who merely anger us has resulted in a safer, more equitable juvenile justice system. The court has not only successfully reduced the number of youth entering detention, it has done so while preserving the safety of the community. Furthermore, the intake reforms have significantly reduced the number of youth of color who are entering detention—an important consideration as racial and ethnic disparities have been a core focus for Clayton County Juvenile Court’s JDAI strategy.

This report was authored by CCJC’s Director of Juvenile Court Operations, [Colin Slay](#).

We are thankful for the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in our JDAI journey, we acknowledge that the opinions presented in this document are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the Foundation.