

## **Juvenile Facility Superintendents Define Their Job Duties and Tasks**

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There are hundreds of short- and long-term residential placements within the United States, ranging in size from those holding a dozen or so youth in a community-based program to institutions that hold hundreds in settings that closely resemble adult correctional facilities. Each type of facility has its own set of challenges, but this article focuses upon the leaders overseeing the operations of secure placements. Superintendents in these facilities require a broad set of knowledge, skills, and traits in order to successfully lead dozens or even hundreds of employees and manage multi-million dollar budgets while ensuring a safe and secure environment. Making their jobs even more challenging are increasing expectations for rehabilitation; greater numbers of difficult-to-manage residents; the challenge of recruiting, training, motivating, and retaining staff; and accomplishing these tasks in an era of diminishing budgets.

Similar to other leadership positions, the role of superintendent is strongly influenced by what occurs in the internal and external environments. In some cases, the goals of the employer may conflict with those of community activists, residents' families, attorneys, the local providers of health and educational services (e.g., mental health services or community schools), and other stakeholders – forcing the superintendent to juggle these different priorities. Furthermore, given the prospects of litigation, the activities of unions or associations of staff members, and the media, some superintendents work in conditions closely akin to being under the microscope at all times. The complexity of leading a juvenile facility is enhanced by the fact that most

jurisdictions today are operating with budget restrictions and all managers are being asked to “do more with less.”

One way to better understand the main tasks and duties of a facility superintendent is to develop a job competency profile. The outcomes of these exercises can be used for a variety of purposes, including developing training and education, as well as position descriptions and performance evaluations. On March 27, 2009 a group of six facility superintendents met in Lexington, Kentucky to develop a job competency profile for facility superintendents.<sup>1</sup> A process called Developing a Curriculum, or DACUM, was used to identify the key job duties and tasks for superintendents, as well as training needs for new and veteran superintendents.

### **Developing A Curriculum: The DACUM Process**

In order to create a competency profile for juvenile facility superintendents, facilitators used a process called Developing a Curriculum, or DACUM. DACUM was first introduced in the 1960s, and is based on the ability of a neutral facilitator to guide a panel of highly performing incumbent workers to describe the key duties and tasks of their jobs. The participants then prioritize these duties and tasks, and also describe the key knowledge, skills, and traits needed to do their jobs. Furthermore, members of the panel identify the training needs for persons new to the job, as well as for veteran employees. Panels of six to twelve participants are used in these groups and they bring with them a wealth of knowledge and skills; in the case of the six superintendents

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<sup>1</sup> Participants included: Linda Commons (IN), Michael Dempsey (IN), David Kazee (KY), Barbara Lonardi (TN), Daniel Scarborough (NE), and Kristie Stutler (KY). These superintendents graciously volunteered their time to participate in this process and we are greatly indebted to them.

participating in the March 27, 2009 DACUM they brought over 150 years of juvenile justice and correctional experiences to the table.

DACUM is widely used in adult and juvenile corrections, and has been used for positions as diverse as juvenile correctional counselor to state administrators. The position of juvenile superintendent, however, was last done in 1994, and it was speculated that much had changed in the practice of juvenile justice. Not only have transformations in architecture and technology influenced what occurs in these settings, but changes have also been driven by federal and state legislation, as well as a growing emphasis on accreditation and the introduction of Performance based Standards. While the pace at which some of these changes have occurred has been rapid, indicators of success include fewer suicides and violent incidents in juvenile facilities.

The superintendent's DACUM was facilitated by Karen Russell and Penny Meade from the Facilitation Center at Eastern Kentucky University. These facilitators have a neutral role – meaning that they don't have a stake in the final outcome, and are there to guide the panel through the process – which is easier said than done considering the scope and complexity of these positions. During the day-long group event, six juvenile facility superintendents were asked to identify the main day-to-day duties, as well as the tasks linked with each duty. This process was conducted using a storyboard approach, where cards describing each duty and task were listed on a card, which was then attached to an adhesive surface on a wall. This storyboard approach enables the facilitators to move the cards around to account for changing priorities as the focus group completes their work.

The original job competency profile, first completed in 1994, acted as a starting point, but after eight hours of focused activity, we learned that much had changed in the priorities of juvenile superintendents. Table 1 shows the main duties, and while they look very similar, we found that the duties that comprised the main tasks had changed significantly (to review all of the job duties and tasks for juvenile facility superintendents, please go to <http://dacum.eku.edu/>). The top five duties in the 2008 profile reinforce the complexity of a superintendent’s role: ensuring that the facility is safe, staffed, keeping youth engaged in programs, operating the institution on a fiscally sound basis, and ensuring that the entire range of support services—from the support staff to the rehabilitative program—is meeting the needs of the residents. These duties are inter-related: It is impossible to operate a safe facility without skilled and motivated staff, and safety also depends on keeping youth constructively occupied in a well-managed environment conducive to rehabilitation. As a result, all of these duties reinforce and support each other.

**Table 1. Main Duties, Juvenile Facility Superintendents, 1994 and 2008**

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Competency Profile – 1994</b>	<b>Competency Profile – 2008</b>
	<b>Main Duties</b>	<b>Main Duties</b>
1	Provide a safe and secure environment	Ensure a safe and secure environment
2	Manage personnel	Manage human resources
3	Manage budget	Manage facility programs
4	Coordinate programs	Manage fiscal operations
5	Develop and implement policies and procedures	Manage support services
6	Direct internal/external communications	Administer emergency management
7	Coordinate planning	Manage/oversee physical plant operations
8	Manage administrative support functions	Ensure quality assurance
9	Ensure maintenance of the physical plant	Manage strategic planning process
10	Develop systems and processes to manage MIS	Manage public relations

11	Ensure quality control	Promote juvenile justice professional development
12	Manage public relations	
13	Manage crises	
14	Participate in professional development	

Having identified the main duties and tasks for these positions, one quickly gains an appreciation for the position of juvenile superintendent. In order to successfully achieve the duties listed above, superintendents must have a comprehensive knowledge of issues ranging from adolescent development to local, state, and federal legislation, as well as national-level standards. Furthermore, these superintendents must have a solid set of skills that can put that knowledge into practice, as well as a long list of individual traits: ranging from adaptability to trustworthiness. Underlying all of these traits, however, is a commitment to working with youth and a sense of humor—traits that brought these professionals to the DACUM, and kept them engaged in the exercise.

### **Using Job Competency Profiles**

The job competency profile that was developed by the Juvenile Facility Superintendents will be used by a wide variety of agencies, and for a number of purposes. First, it will be used to develop education and training for juvenile justice leaders in local and state organizations. As part of the exercise, for instance, the panel members identified training needs for both newly appointed superintendents as well as veteran leaders. Furthermore, the profile will be used by the National Partnership for Juvenile Services in the development of leadership panels at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium on Juvenile Services in Indianapolis from October 11-14, 2009, as well as in their ongoing leadership training programs. Last, the Department of Correctional and Juvenile Justice

Studies at Eastern Kentucky University will use this knowledge to shape the curriculum for graduate and undergraduate educational programs.

Altogether, it is important to develop education and training for juvenile services personnel that are based on what the research tells us about a particular issue, as the end result is more relevant and will better meet the needs of the participants. Education and training are costly activities in an era of tight budgets, but the cost of neglecting either is much greater. Thus, we hope that agency administrators and trainers will be able to use the results of the job competency profile for juvenile facility leaders: not only for current workers, but to help develop the knowledge, skills, and traits of future superintendents that will help shape the future of juvenile justice.

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