

# Abstract

## **Educational advocacy for court involved youth with disabilities: An empirical analysis of program efficacy towards Child Find requirements and decreased recidivism**

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The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a court based Educational Advocacy Initiative (EAI) on juvenile recidivism and the federal mandate under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, for local education agencies through Child Find to locate, identify, and serve youth with disabilities. The participants in this study were 367 primarily African American youth who had been involved with the Fulton County Juvenile Court and who had received advocacy services through the EAI. The EAI is a court based intervention whereby an advocate intervenes with a youth and their guardian at the court and school levels. The 367 participants were purposefully assigned to the EAI treatment group and were juxtaposed with youth who had received an array of court and detention services throughout the state of Georgia during the years prior to the advent of the EAI. Data for the study were analyzed by examining extant court data associated with the program, spanning a period of two years. Participants in the experimental group were compared to the control group participants through archival state Department of Juvenile Justice records and through that analysis of archival data pertaining to rates of Child Find (i.e., youth who met the eligibility criteria for being a student with a disability) for the local education agencies that populated the Fulton County Juvenile Court in the years prior to the onset of the EAI. The outcomes related to recidivism and Child Find were measured using a Chi-square analysis. The Educational Advocacy treatment reduced recidivism by a rate of nearly 5% when compared with similar youth in the state of Georgia. The difference was not statistically significant. Chi-square analysis indicated a statistically significant difference in the rate of Child Find for youth who had participated in the EAI when compared with the two local education agencies that feed the Fulton County Juvenile Court. Implications and future directions are discussed.