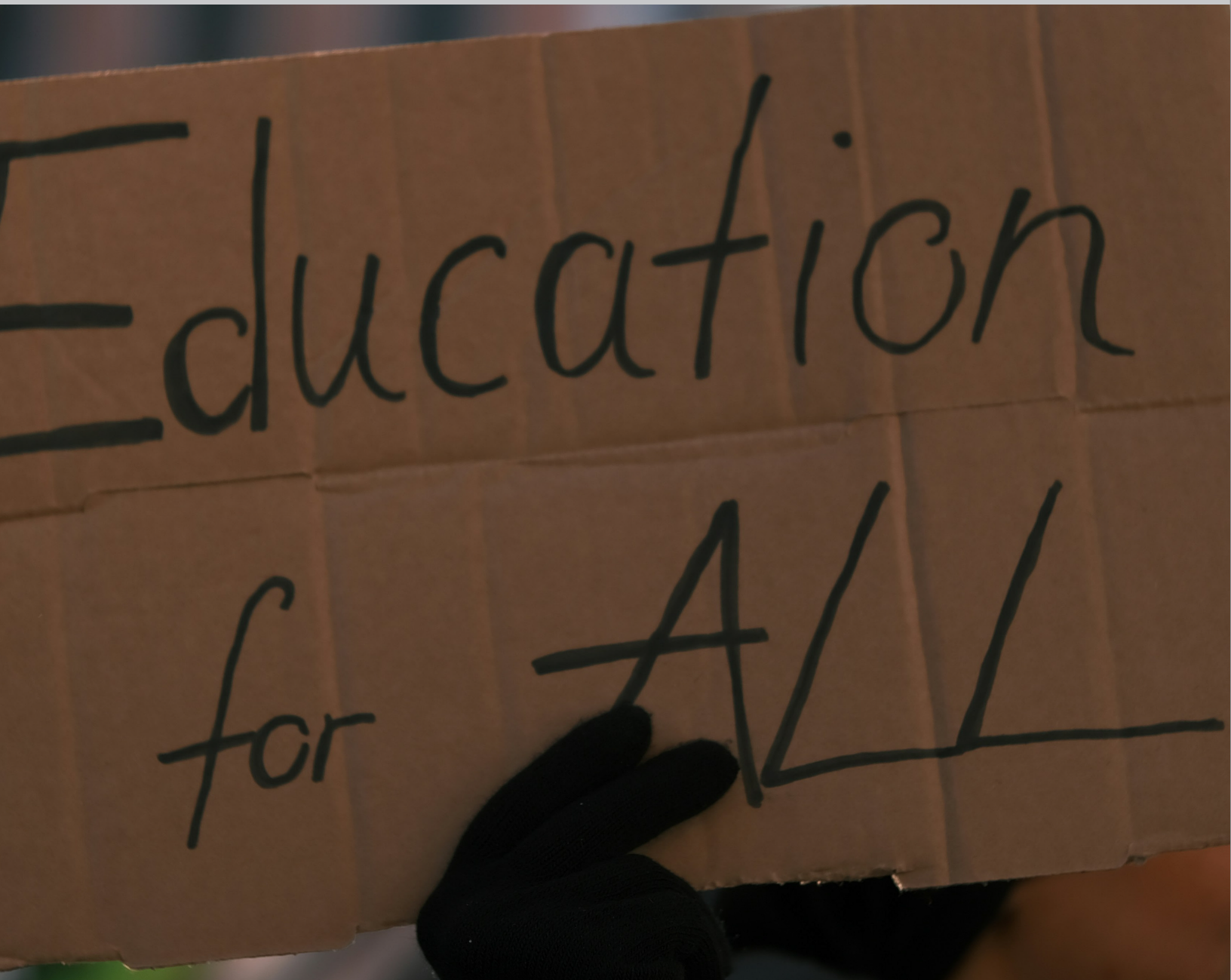




WHO HAS THE POWER?

Chronicling Los Angeles County's Systemic Failures
to Educate Incarcerated Youth

EDUCATION JUSTICE COALITION
Los Angeles



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INTRODUCTION

“Education is the key to success. It opens doors for those who want to become a better person, and to make this happen we have to make sure they’re getting the education they deserve.” — Mainor Xuncax, Youth Policy Advocate, Arts for Healing and Justice Network (AHJN)

Xuncax spent four years on juvenile probation in LA County.

All youth in California, including incarcerated¹ youth, have the fundamental right to an education.² Los Angeles County has had one of the largest juvenile legal systems in the United States for decades.³ The Los Angeles County Probation Department asserts that it “is currently the largest probation service agency in the United States, and presumably the world with over 6,500 employees and an operations budget of more than \$900 million.”⁴ Despite decades of lawsuits and calls for reform, Los Angeles County continues to detain young people in conditions where they lack access to the essential tools they need to reintegrate into their communities and avoid recidivism. As evidenced by low graduation rates, high suspension rates, alarmingly low attendance, observations, and testimony from students, staff, and monitors,⁵ Los Angeles County has failed to ensure access to the essential tool of a quality, culturally affirming, robust, and individualized education to the thousands of students under its care in juvenile detention facilities each year. This failure disproportionately affects low-income communities of color and persists due to the lack of transparent and responsive accountability mechanisms.

In 2020, two members of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (BOS) introduced a motion to enact Youth Justice Reimagined (YJR), a model centered on reformatory justice and healing for youth. Supervisors Kuehl and Ridley-Thomas emphasized that Los Angeles County “...must resist a narrative about these young people that does not leave space for hope and healing, and insist on a structure that promotes positive youth development and rehabilitation at all costs.” Although the BOS unanimously agreed to enact YJR at the time, as of 2025, the Board has not allocated the necessary funding to fully implement this transformative initiative.

¹ This report will use “detained” and “incarcerated” interchangeably.

² California Constitution Article IX, section 1 provides: “A general diffusion of knowledge and intelligence being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, the legislature shall encourage by all suitable means the promotion of intellectual, scientific, moral, and agricultural improvement.” California Constitution Article IX, section 5 provides: “The Legislature shall provide for a system of common schools by which a free school shall be kept up and supported in each district at least six months in every year, after the first year in which a school has been established.” See also 5 Cal.3d 584 (1971) (Serrano I); Serrano v. Priest, 18 Cal.3d 728 (1976) (Serrano II); Butt v. State of California 4 Cal.4th 668 (1992).

³ See Juvenile Reentry in Los Angeles County: An Exploration of Strengths, Barriers and Policy Options available at: <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/58190.pdf>.

⁴ See the Los Angeles County Probation Department Website at: <https://probation.lacounty.gov/invest-program/lacountyprobation1/#:~:text=The%20Los%20Angeles%20County%20Probation,department's%20staff%20are%20sworn%20officers.>

⁵ See the California State Dashboard LACOE report available at: <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/19101990000000/2023/schools>, Decoding Alternative Education report available at: <https://youthlaw.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2023-03/2023%20Decoding%20Alternative%20Education%20FINAL.pdf>, Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission Education report available at: https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/commissionpublications/report/1120919_EducationReportFinal-Accepted03-14-22.pdf.

Since 2020, Los Angeles County has faced lawsuits from the California Attorney General and several classes of formerly detained youth alleging inhumane, unconstitutional, and illegal conditions in its juvenile detention facilities spanning decades. The California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) has closed Central Juvenile Hall and parts of Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall after determining they failed to meet basic standards for living conditions and education. By early 2024, the BSCC voted to close Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall and Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall (excluding its Secure Youth Treatment Facility) due to ongoing violations. These lawsuits and facility closures illustrate longstanding, troubling realities: young people detained in the county's facilities lose significant instructional time due to high suspension rates and other factors,⁶ are often denied access to critical special education services,⁷ perform well below state standards in testing,⁸ and graduate at rates far lower than the state average.⁹

Unfortunately, Los Angeles County officials often dismiss concerns raised by and on behalf of young people, claiming that the education-related issues for detained youth are not systemic.


This report seeks to highlight the lack of accountability within Los Angeles County systems that affect education for incarcerated youth. In doing so, this report asks: who has the power to make the necessary reform to ensure equitable education for detained young people in Los Angeles County? Will those with power heed the call for increasing public accountability and community partnership to achieve this end moving forward?

⁶ California School Dashboard. For 2022, Barry J. Nidorf suspended 28.9 students at least one time and had a chronic absenteeism rate of 28.6 %. For 2022, Central School, the reported suspending 4.5% of students at least once and there was no data reported on chronic absenteeism despite this being a state-required category for reporting. For 2022, Dorothy Kirby Center reported suspending 17.2 % of students for at least one day and there was no data reported on chronic absenteeism despite this being a state-required category for reporting. As a statewide average, 3.1% of students were suspended at least once in 2022. The state average for chronic absenteeism in 2022 was 30%. Note that all students in LACOE juvenile court schools are detained in that facility, which should in theory mean that students are attending school much closer to 100% of the time.

⁷ See LACOE Juvenile Court Schools Reports that document missing instructional time and missing special education minutes in 2022.

⁸ California School Dashboard. For 2022, Barry J. Nidorf School reported student performance on ELA was 263.9 points lower than the standard and reported student performance on math was 249 points lower than the standard. For 2022, Central School reported student performance on ELA was 277 points below the standard and reported student performance on math was not reported. Dorothy Kirby Camp did not report enough test scores to be documented by the state.

⁹ California School Dashboard. For 2022, Barry J. Nidorf School reported a graduation rate of 41.4%, Central School reported a graduation rate of 8.9%, and Dorothy Kirby Camp reported a graduation rate of 38.9%. The state average graduation rate is 87.4%.



Who has the power to make the necessary reform to ensure equitable education for detained young people in Los Angeles County? Will those with power heed the call for increasing public accountability and community partnership to achieve this end moving forward?

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF: DECADES-LONG PROBLEMS IN LOS ANGELES' JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITIES

“At the end of the day, it was an unhealthy environment, and I felt that.”

– Youth Leader Kevin Rodas, Arts for Healing and Justice Network (AHJN)

Rodas recounts his experience in an LA County detention facility and court school.

The Los Angeles County Juvenile Legal System has a long-standing history of misconduct, abuse, and a failure to provide the services and support that youth need. The Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation) and the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) are the primary agencies implicated in the systemic misconduct affecting youth in the juvenile legal system. Despite persistent failures and a reduction in the number of operational juvenile detention facilities from 19 to six, the budget for Probation has continued to grow.¹⁰ Below are key moments that demonstrate the history behind today's crisis.

In **1971**, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (BOS) transferred oversight of the education of incarcerated youth to LACOE, while retaining the authority to hire and fire the superintendent. LACOE operates as both a supervising body for all Los Angeles County school districts (Big LACOE) and as a school district itself (Small LACOE). This structure sets LACOE apart from other California counties, where representatives of county offices of education are elected by the public. In Los Angeles County, however, LACOE representatives are appointed directly by the BOS. This system creates a disconnect and a lack of accountability from LACOE to the general public. While the BOS exerts quasi-control over LACOE and its programs, it is not directly responsible for the administration of education for incarcerated youth in the county, further complicating the accountability structure.

In **2000**, a Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury report highlighted Probation's failure to maintain appropriate facilities and coordinate with LACOE with respect to the educational needs of young people in its care. The Civil Grand Jury called on the BOS to take action to improve collaboration between these two agencies.¹¹ Youth camps, in particular, reported deteriorating facilities, cleanliness issues, and graffiti.¹²

Similar challenges were documented in the juvenile halls. Central Juvenile Hall struggled with deteriorating infrastructure, a lack of coordination between Probation and LACOE, and an ongoing need for bilingual teachers. Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall reported the frequent use of pepper spray, while Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall highlighted poor communication between Probation, teachers, and the Department of Mental Health (DMH). Many youth at Barry J. Nidorf were reported to have severe mental health issues, underscoring the need for specialized educational resources and better coordination. The overall situation painted a bleak picture of the facilities' inability to provide a conducive environment for the rehabilitation of detained youth. The report recommended that the BOS conduct unannounced visits to youth detention facilities to ensure accountability.¹³

¹⁰ Board of State and Community Corrections Juvenile Detention Profile Survey <https://bscc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/JDPS-1Q2002-1Q2020.pdf>

¹¹ Los Angeles Grand Jury. (1999-2000). *Los Angeles County Grand Jury Final Report* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <http://grandjury.co.la.ca.us/x1z2.pdf>

¹² Id.

¹³ Id.

In **2001**, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) sent a letter to the BOS detailing its investigative findings on the conditions at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, and Central Juvenile Hall. The DOJ identified significant issues surrounding teacher shortages, consistent daily instruction, and support for students with special needs. For example, the DOJ noted that some students were turned away when classrooms reached capacity or became overcrowded.¹⁴

In **2004**, the DOJ found that Los Angeles County and LACOE violated the constitutional rights of youth in juvenile detention facilities.¹⁵ The parties entered into a settlement agreement geared towards improving medical and educational services and preventing suicide.

Between **2006** and **2008**, the DOJ investigated Los Angeles County juvenile detention facilities, which eventually led to a settlement agreement.¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, the DOJ found that Probation remained profoundly out of compliance and extended the monitoring period an additional four years.¹⁷

In **2010**, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), ACLU Foundation of Southern California, Public Counsel, and Disability Rights Legal Center filed *Casey A. v. Gundry*, a class action lawsuit against LACOE and Probation officials, highlighting significant deficiencies in educational and rehabilitative services at Challenger Memorial Youth Center, the county's largest juvenile probation camp at the time. Later that year, LACOE Superintendent Darline P. Robles resigned from her position.

In **2011**, Los Angeles County reached a settlement agreement with the *Casey A.* plaintiffs. The settlement required the defendants to overhaul programs under expert oversight, provide compensatory services for students who received inadequate support, and implement systematic reforms in 13 key areas. The court retained jurisdiction for four years to ensure compliance. Later that year, the BOS unanimously appointed Arturo Delgado as LACOE Superintendent. While not unique to this system, this is just one example of how LACOE engages in a fire-and-hire response to addressing institutional failure.

In **2015**, federal oversight ended after Probation allegedly met all the requirements outlined in the settlement agreement. However, a report from the Inspector General's Office revealed a troubling 150% increase in the use of pepper spray by probation staff on youth between 2015 and 2017, following the end of federal oversight.¹⁸

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. (2003). Los Angeles County Juvenile Hall Findings Letter [PDF file]. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2010/12/15/la_county_juvenile_findlet.pdf

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Justice. (2004). *Justice Department reaches agreement with Los Angeles County to improve conditions at juvenile facilities* [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/archive/opa/pr/2004/August/04_crt_580.html; U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. (2007). Los Angeles County Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act: Evaluation report [PDF file]. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2010/12/15/la_juv_8-01-07.pdf; Piller, C. (2004). California's Juvenile Justice System in Crisis. Los Angeles Times. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-aug-26-me-juvenile26-story.html>.

¹⁶ United States Department of Justice. (n.d.). Memorandum of Agreement between the United States Department of Justice and the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2010/12/15/lacamps_moa.pdf.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Justice. (2008, October 31). *Findings Letter - Los Angeles County Jail Mental Health Services*. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2010/12/15/lacamps_findings_10-31-08.pdf.

¹⁸ WitnessLA. (n.d.). *LA County Probation Reaches for New Goals for Juvie Camps as Feds Pack Up*. Retrieved from <https://witnessla.com/la-county-probation-reaches-for-new-goals-for-juvie-camps-as-feds-pack-up/>; Daily News. (2019). *LA County watchdog says probation department plagued with overuse of pepper spray on youth, overburdened internal affairs unit*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailynews.com/2019/02/04/la-county-watchdog-says-probation-department-plagued-with-overuse-of-pepper-spray-on-youth-overburdened-internal-affairs-unit/>

In **2016**, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on a study commissioned by LACOE's special education division, which highlighted significant shortcomings in district programs.¹⁹ The report pointed to issues like a lack of quality teaching materials, poor instructional quality, unclear billing procedures, and barriers to independent learning. The *Los Angeles Times* also noted a decline in funding and a loss of instructional continuity in recent years, with the county's special education programs receiving significantly less state tax revenue. The report recommended developing a comprehensive plan to improve education for students with special needs and suggested restructuring the program to address these issues.

In **2018**, the California Department of Justice (DOJ) launched an investigation to determine whether conditions of confinement for youth at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall and Central Juvenile Hall were in compliance with state and federal laws.²⁰ The investigation into the juvenile halls focused on use-of-force policies and incidents; room and solitary confinement policies and practices; the provision of rehabilitative programming, recreation, religious services, education, and medical and mental healthcare; access to and adequacy of grievance procedures; and staff training. As part of the investigation, the Attorney General's Office conducted multiple site visits, interviewed more than 80 witnesses, and reviewed thousands of pages of documents. Ultimately, as alleged in the complaint, the California DOJ found that the county provided insufficient services and endangered youth safety, by, among other things, relying on excessive and inappropriate physical and chemical use of force.

VOICES INSIDE: DOVONTRAY FARMER, INCARCERATED AT LOS PADRINOS IN 2016

As reported, young people incarcerated in county juvenile facilities participated in so-called “gladiator fights” overseen by Probation, engendering a violent and hostile environment that pitted individual youth against each other for perks and rewards and access to most basic needs. Dovontray Farmer, a youth leader who was incarcerated in 2016 at Los Padrinos, described his experience:

“I got to survive the gladiator fights that they put us through. If you win, they respect you. If you lose, you’re voted off the island. The higher-ups [Probation officers] let others take your food and do whatever to that person. They just allow it. They allow the others [incarcerated youth] serving your food to spit in your food and in your face as a form of disrespect. They’ve been doing this way before me.”

¹⁹ L.A. County report on special education sees ‘crisis’, Joy Resmovits (March 9, 2016) <https://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-edu-la-county-special-ed-crisis-report-20160308-story.html>.

²⁰ Attorney General Becerra, Los Angeles County Enter into Groundbreaking Settlements to Protect the Rights of Youth in the Juvenile Justice System, (January 13, 2021) <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-becerra-los-angeles-county-enter-groundbreaking-settlements>.

VOICES INSIDE, CONTINUED

The tumultuous and unstable environment overshadowed the importance of education and prevented Dovontray and other incarcerated youth from accessing consistent learning time.

“There was a teacher who would tell students we can work one on one with them – but that didn’t always happen. When we change facilities, dang we don’t got that teacher anymore. The work -- the history they give us -- it’s crap. When they talk about Black people, they just talk about slavery and Abraham Lincoln – that’s the only Black lesson we have. That’s about it. There were not a lot of history lessons. As far as math, it was basic or we didn’t have to do it. We could’ve said $1+1 = 3$, and they’d pass us. What kind of education is that?”

Lack of Accountability in Los Angeles County

The juvenile detention system in Los Angeles County suffers from a lack of accountability, leading to repeated violations of youth’s civil rights. This broken system perpetuates a harmful cycle of “finger-pointing,” often between Probation and Los Angeles County Office of Education, which hinders the resolution of issues that significantly affect the education of incarcerated youth. As a result, these young individuals are consistently denied their fundamental right to quality education, while also facing substandard living conditions. Urgent action is needed to address these systemic failures and create a just, equitable, and supportive learning environment for all incarcerated youth.

LACOE is responsible for educating young people detained in Los Angeles County juvenile detention facilities, and yet, only 4% of students met or exceeded the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP) standard in English Language Arts, and just 2% met or exceeded the standard in Mathematics, as reported in LACOE’s 2022-2023 Local Control and Accountability Plan. Remarkably, both metrics were categorized as “successes.”²¹

These low scores on state standardized tests are unsurprising given that students are not receiving adequate instruction and students have reported frequent absences or suspensions from LACOE schools. These absences are often attributed not only to disciplinary actions but also to staffing shortages within Probation facilities. However, attorneys, advocates, and families regularly observe these patterns when reviewing student records. Moreover, publicly available data aligns with these youth accounts in some areas and raises serious concerns about potential non-compliance with legal requirements in others.

²¹ Los Angeles County Office of Education’s 2022-2023 Local Control Accountability Plan can be found here: <https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/educationalprograms/lacoe-schools/plans-reports/Local%20Control%20and%20Accountability%20Plan%202022-23.pdf>.

- During the 2022/23 school year, per LACOE's School Accountability Report Card (SARC), Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Court School reported that 25.7% of students were suspended at least once, and the facility had a chronic absenteeism rate of 38.1%. Dorothy Kirby Center, a suitable placement resembling a juvenile camp where young people are housed for 5-9 months at a time, reported suspending 29.2% of students for at least one day, and the facility had a chronic absenteeism rate of 5.1%.
- During the 2023/24 school year, per LACOE's SARC, one of three young people incarcerated in Los Padrinios graduated from high school while nearly one of four were suspended. In that same year, 14% of students at Los Padrinios, or 79 students, were chronically absent or missing more than roughly four weeks of the school year.
- Comparatively, per California School Dashboard, the statewide averages for student suspensions were 3.1% in 2022, 3.5% in 2023, and 3.2% in 2024. Meanwhile, the state average for chronic absenteeism was 30% in 2022, 24.3% in 2023, 18.6% in 2024. It is notable that all students in LACOE juvenile court schools are detained on-site, which theoretically should result in attendance rates approaching 100%.

While LACOE is responsible for educating detained youth, Probation is responsible for ensuring safe living conditions and access to rehabilitative services including education. Probation has faced ongoing challenges and systemic failures, including failed inspections, reports of sexual assault and misconduct, and rising violence within youth facilities. These failed inspections stem from unsuitable living conditions, food-related health violations, and the denial of the fundamental state right to education for incarcerated youth. Probation attributes many of these issues to a lack of staffing, the department has been under a hiring freeze since 2020, as the reason for exacerbating the already critical gaps in care and oversight.

In recognition of these failures, the Board of Supervisors established the Probation Oversight Commission (POC) in **October 2019**. The POC is a civilian-led body tasked with overseeing and advising on systemic reforms within the Probation Department. The POC is empowered to conduct facility inspections and investigations, issue subpoenas, and review policies, practices, and procedures. The POC is responsible for reporting its findings to the Board of Supervisors and the public.

Meanwhile, county stakeholders and advocates began meeting to develop a plan to reimagine youth justice to build alternative infrastructure to youth incarceration.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell has emphasized the urgent request from Los Angeles County youth, uplifting the Department of Youth Development (DYD) as one of the vital tools available to drive change within the legal system, which disproportionately affects Black and Brown youth. Supervisor Mitchell stated, "Intentionally working with youth and equipping them with the skills and resources to succeed is how we fulfill our goal as a County of shifting from failed systems built solely on punishment to proven solutions for youth development that strengthen the overall vitality and safety of our communities."

However, DYD has yet to effectively implement the model approved by the BOS, known as Youth Justice Reimagined (YJR).²² The YJR model aims to transform the youth legal system by moving away from punitive measures and toward restorative and rehabilitative practices. This model advocates for a shift in focus from incarceration and punishment to addressing the root causes of youth involvement in the legal system, aimed towards promoting positive youth development.

²² New LA County Department of Youth Development Aims to Transform Youth Justice, (July 6, 2022) <https://lacounty.gov/2022/07/06/new-la-county-department-of-youth-development-aims-to-transform-youth-justice/>.

YOUTH JUSTICE REIMAGINED (YJR)

Youth Justice Reimagined

is a comprehensive model to reform Los Angeles County's juvenile justice system.

YJR Origin

Youth Justice Work Group, Probation Reform and Implementation Team, and Alternative to Incarceration Initiative members led the charge for juvenile justice reform.

In 2021, the BOS unanimously approved YJR and committed to invest \$75 Million into YJR.

BOS Fails to Fulfill Commitment

The BOS has yet to allocate full funds to YJR and continues to fund Probation.

Consequently, Los Angeles youth are still facing incarceration without reformation.

The EJC expects the BOS to fulfill their commitment.

Youth Justice

- **Racial and Ethnic Equity**
- **Centering Community**
- **Youth Development**
- **Public Safety Achieved Through Wellbeing**
- **Wellbeing Achieved by Addressing Social Determinants of Health**
- **Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice**
- **Transparency and Accountability**
- **Evidence-Informed Design**
- **Power-Sharing, Coordination and Collaboration**

What is Youth Justice Reimagined?

Youth Justice Reimagined intends to support youth through programming and facilities. Schools would have support to operate as youth centers with **family programming, vocational programs, therapy, and counseling, available for drop-in support.** Community Centers would offer services, **crisis response** and temporary shelter in addition to creative and recreational programming. Additionally, YJR would offer **small residential home** options to allow youth a comfortable, safe place while they complete their sentence, attend classes.

Youth Justice Work Group

Originally convened in 2019 to determine the best reallocation of Probation's **\$80 million budget surplus.**

Diverse group of youth leaders, community advocates, service providers, Los Angeles County representatives, and justice partners.

Envisions the juvenile justice system to be based on **healing, restoration, and well-being.**

Led the initiative to **remove incarcerated youth from Probation's custody** and into the Department of Youth Development's custody.

EDUCATION JUSTICE COALITION'S ADVOCACY EFFORTS REGARDING INJUSTICES LOS ANGELES COUNTY INCARCERATED YOUTH FACE

The Education Justice Coalition (EJC) formed in **March 2020**, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns which resulted in detained young people in Los Angeles County being denied access to school for months and placed in isolated environments without access to family or mental health support.²³ EJC unites youth advocacy organizations with education law and youth development expertise. Our commitment is to end youth incarceration and provide meaningful, individualized, and culturally affirming education to all young people in their communities. EJC's primary goals are to uplift young people's lived experiences, provide education advocacy resources in the community, influence policies to end the school-prison nexus, and hold decision-makers accountable.

Community-led accountability and transparency are important policy priorities for EJC, given the significant barriers in engaging with County leaders. Board of Supervisors and Probation Oversight Committee (POC) meetings are typically held during regular business hours, making it difficult for individuals to participate without missing work. This scheduling issue creates an initial barrier to community engagement, as people must rearrange their employment and daily routines in order to attend. Additionally, these meetings can last from three to five hours, further complicating participation for those who cannot afford to be away for such extended periods. The structure of the meetings themselves adds another layer of difficulty. The boards follow a parliamentary procedure that limits community involvement. Public comments, for example, are confined to two minutes per individual, and these comments are given after the board has already discussed the agenda item in question. As a result, community members are unable to have their input considered during the board's deliberations. This restrictive format prevents meaningful dialogue between the public and the board, undermining the potential for constructive engagement and making it harder for the voices of those affected to influence decision-making. This lack of meaningful interaction further discourages participation and reinforces the feeling of disconnection between the community and those in positions of power.

Despite these challenges, the EJC has worked to engage with Probation, LACOE, and the BOS in attempts to hold these entities accountable and improve realities for detained youth.

On **March 30, 2020**, at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EJC sent a letter to Los Angeles County urging immediate action to ensure equal protection, due process, and safety for youth under its custody and supervision. EJC highlighted the safety concerns for incarcerated youth and recommended the release of as many youth as possible, along with an immediate halt to the admission of new youth into incarceration. Additionally, the EJC called on LACOE to guarantee education for youth remaining in custody, including providing services for students with disabilities in accordance with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The EJC also requested a detailed report on the administration of education within the probation facilities. While many youth were

²³ https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-04-20/as-coronavirus-spreads-in-l-a-county-jails-and-prisons-some-young-of-fenders-with-asthma-are-denied-release?fbclid=IwAR3ulR3cQw9PKqyCeuTcf2ZGtGLwJuQi7Fy0DRJRB0GDJzg2bb7lyXR_JY and <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-04-06/coronavirus-fear-for-parents-los-angeles-juvenile-detention-facilities>

eventually returned to the custody of their families, LACOE failed to provide sufficient assurance regarding the measures or reporting that would be implemented to ensure the continuity and quality of education for those still in Probation's custody.

On **May 19, 2020**, the EJC sent a letter to LACOE seeking clarification on the metrics LACOE would provide in response to the requests made in its earlier letter. Previously, LACOE staff had disputed the experiences of students, which raised concerns about the accuracy and transparency of their reporting. Their failure to specify the exact metrics to be included in the report heightened these concerns. Additionally, LACOE's legal counsel informed the EJC that the requested report would be considered a Public Records Act (PRA) request. PRA requests are governed by a timeline, require detailed specificity, are often delayed, and may result in litigation. The EJC questioned the reasoning behind LACOE's decision to treat the letter as a Public Records Act request, as providing the report would have fostered greater transparency, collaboration, and efficiency in addressing the educational needs of incarcerated youth.

On **June 5, 2020**, the EJC sent another letter to LACOE expressing deep concerns about the administration of education for incarcerated youth. Over the preceding months, the EJC had held five public town halls and conducted meetings with LACOE staff to discuss the provision of educational services. The EJC demanded specific, substantive guarantees regarding the continuation of education during school closures. It also called for meaningful public engagement and the establishment of clear accountability mechanisms for LACOE's education services. The EJC emphasized that these actions were essential to ensure that incarcerated youth received the education and support they were legally entitled to, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Between **June 16, 2020**, and **September 15, 2020**, the EJC made a series of public comments to LACOE and the BOS addressing the inadequate administration of education for youth in Probation's custody. As of September 1, 2020, 427 youth were quarantined in Probation's facilities, further complicating the issue of educational access. In its comments, the EJC called for the release of incarcerated students, urging LACOE and Probation to prioritize the safety and well-being of youth in custody. The EJC also advocated for more than two days of public review for proposed education policies to ensure transparency and community engagement. Additionally, the EJC pushed for an investigation into "student refusals," expressed the need for more counselors in facilities, and demanded greater transparency in LACOE's budget to ensure adequate resources for the education of incarcerated youth.

On **October 9, 2020**, the EJC sent a letter to State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond of the California Department of Education (CDE), urging intervention in LACOE's approval of its own Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan (which replaced the Local Control and Accountability Plan for the 2020-21 school year). The EJC emphasized that 900 youth were enrolled in Los Angeles County juvenile court and community schools, with 517 of them incarcerated. Many of these students lacked access to education and critical services necessary for their development.

The EJC outlined several recommendations to address these deficiencies, including mental health services, providing adequate technology for learning, and fostering family engagement. While CDE's office indicated they would follow up with LACOE, the EJC received no further communication regarding the outcome of that conversation. Additionally, the CDE did not respond to the EJC's substantive or procedural concerns, leaving significant issues unresolved.

In **October 2020**, Los Angeles County in partnership with the Hayward Burns Institute released the Youth Justice Reimagined report outlining recommendations from the Youth Justice Work Group (YJWG).²⁴ Several members of EJC participated in the YJWG.

On **November 24, 2020**, the BOS passed a motion in support of “Youth Justice Reimagined,” a care-first model that invests in youth development over punitive responses.²⁵

In **2021**, Los Angeles County, and the LACOE entered into settlements to improve the conditions and education services in the county’s juvenile halls.²⁶ The settlements come after a California DOJ investigation and work to address serious deficiencies regarding the treatment and conditions of confinement of youth in juvenile detention in the county, as well as concerns regarding the inadequate provision of education services to justice-involved youth. As a result of the investigation, Los Angeles County—including its Probation Department, Department of Mental Health, and Department of Health Services—and LACOE have agreed to take a wide range of corrective actions, to be overseen by an independent monitor and subject matter experts, aimed at securing positive outcomes for justice-involved youth and ensuring systemic improvements to the county’s juvenile halls.

On **April 29, 2021**, the EJC delivered a presentation to the POC providing a historical timeline of the systemic injustices faced by incarcerated youth in Los Angeles County since 2010. The EJC urged commissioners to review the settlement agreement between the California Attorney General and LACOE. They proposed requesting LACOE and Probation to provide regular updates at POC meetings and advocated for an investigation into critical education equity and racial justice concerns. These included issues like school discipline practices, strategies for addressing learning loss, and ensuring access to approved “A-G” courses required for admission to California State University or University of California campuses. Afterwards, the POC voted to establish a standing Education Subcommittee that has since been disbanded.

On **August 30, 2021**, EJC submitted a PRA request to LACOE Superintendent Debra Duardo and LACOE attorney Vibiana Andrade seeking records pertaining to LACOE’s administration of alternative education to incarcerated youth in Los Angeles County. The request detailed 15 specific records, including information on teacher and student demographics, training programs, and any memorandum of understanding between LACOE and law enforcement agencies. Despite the clarity and specificity of the request, LACOE failed to provide any response.

In **2022**, the California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), found the Los Angeles County Central Juvenile Hall unsuitable for the confinement of youth, a vote that requires the county to either remediate violations of the Board’s regulations or, after receiving a 60-day notice from the Board, remove the young people from the facilities.²⁷

²⁴ Youth Justice Reimagined Report can be found here: <https://dyd.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Youth-Justice-Reimagined-Report-2020-1.pdf>.

²⁵ <https://file.lacounty.gov/sdsinter/bos/supdocs/150833.pdf>

²⁶ Attorney General Becerra, Los Angeles County Enter into Groundbreaking Settlements to Protect the Rights of Youth in the Juvenile Justice System, (January 13, 2021) <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-becerra-los-angeles-county-enter-groundbreaking-settlements>

²⁷ BSCC Finds LA Central Unsuitable, (June 9, 2022) <https://www.bscc.ca.gov/news/bscc-finds-la-central-unsuitable/>.

In **March 2022**, the POC released the *Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission: Education Report*, highlighting significant issues with the education administered by LACOE in Probation's facilities.²⁸ The report stated that "most classrooms lack a culture of learning," revealing that many teachers believed minimal work was "the best that could be reasonably expected of the students." The POC observers found that classroom windows were painted over, blocking sunlight to prevent students from being distracted by outside movement. A POC observer noted that "for a total of over forty-five minutes a teacher sat at the desk while the teacher's aide played Youtube videos on the screen of the 'crate challenge'" because students had "already finished" the daily required work by 9:25 a.m. The report further stated that LACOE routinely failed to meet the minimum standards required by California law, as "instructions in most classes involved either watching a video or reading a nonfiction essay then answering questions." The quality of instruction was described as "generally far below expectations." For example, one student avoided a math worksheet for 35 minutes before mentally solving the problems in about two minutes, as the student had already earned the math credit and "should have been working on something else." The report also detailed insufficient staffing in Probation's classrooms, noting that only two of nine classrooms were staffed with full-time teachers due to LACOE's vacation policy. Observers frequently found Probation officers pulling students out of class or "tak[ing] over a corner [of the classroom] for one-on-one meetings with students."

Also, in **March 2022**, the EJC submitted a letter to the POC, BOS, and LACOE reiterating its ongoing demands to limit the incarceration of young people, enhance the quality of education for youth still detained, and strengthen mechanisms for community oversight and engagement to ensure transparency and accountability.

In **July 2022**, the BOS launched the Department of Youth Development.²⁹

In **January 2023**, the POC released the *2022 Facility Inspections Annual Report*, in which it detailed conditions and youth experiences in Probation's juvenile detention facilities. At Camp Paige, youth reported that Probation officers subjected them to militant-style discipline, including target practices and receiving write-ups for "not walking in a straight line." At the Dorothy Kirby Center, a youth filed a report after a Probation officer reportedly stated, "I have friends here that will hurt you if you get out of line." At Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, male youth described aggressive searches by Probation, including having their genitals touched or being searched while naked. Female youth at the same facility reported being denied phone calls, threatened with OC spray (a form of pepper spray), and locked in rooms for extended periods.

The report also highlighted the unsanitary conditions of many facilities. Observers noted that Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall's restroom conditions were "disappointing and unsanitary" and the facility was "dirtier and less hygienic" than during a prior visit. Unit bathrooms were "in a terrible state," with severe rusting, trash, graffiti, and "the reeking smell of mildew." At Camp Afflerbaugh, observers received "alarming information" that youth were relieving themselves in empty water bottles because they were not allowed to leave their rooms to use the bathroom. Youth in multiple facilities also raised concerns about the "nasty" food, reporting that it often contained hair or was undercooked.

²⁸ Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission: Education Report, March 14, 2022, https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/commissionpublications/report/1120919_EducationReportFinal-Accepted03-14-22.pdf.

²⁹ Our History, Department of Youth Development, <https://dyd.lacounty.gov/history/#:~:text=DYD%20moved%20into%20Phase%202,community%2C%20and%20County%20partners%20continues.&text=On%20July%201%2C%202022%2C%20the,Youth%20Development%20was%20officially%20established>.

On **May 23, 2023**, in an unprecedented vote after years of noncompliance, the BSCC declared Central Juvenile Hall and Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall unsuitable for housing youth, mandating their immediate closure and the relocation of all youth within 60 days.³⁰ Shortly after, the BOS decided to repurpose Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall in Downey to serve as the County's primary juvenile hall.³¹ The BOS allocated \$1 billion to the department, including funds for renovating Los Padrinos.

Notably, this move followed a failed attempt to secure \$1 billion in funding from the state of California by Assemblymember Blanca Pacheco of Downey via Assembly Bill (AB) 695.³² However, Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed the bill, and cited concern with Probation's failure to intervene during a physical altercation between youth.³³ A video of the incident shows eight officers standing by while a group of youth attacked another youth. This lack of intervention raises serious questions about the accountability and training of Probation staff, as well as their commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of all youth under its care.

Less than a year later, on **February 15, 2024**, the BSCC continued to find the County out of compliance with respect to Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall and now the Secure Youth Treatment Facility located at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall.³⁴ The BSCC granted the County 60 days to present a compliance plan. In response, the County submitted a corrective action plan, which the BSCC narrowly approved on April 11, 2024.³⁵ The Probation Department temporarily increased staffing levels in the facilities by utilizing field deputies, even though a majority of their staff were not coming into work.

Despite some improvements, the approval of the plan relied heavily on assurances that staffing levels would remain consistent and that staff would undergo extensive additional training. There is currently no long-term guarantee that these temporary fixes will address the deep-rooted structural issues that have plagued Los Angeles County's juvenile halls for decades. Notably, all members of the BOS have voiced strong concerns about these events and the problematic conditions within the facilities throughout the BSCC investigation process. However, the BOS has yet to establish a comprehensive solution to address these ongoing issues within the departments they oversee, including the Probation Department and LACOE.

Following the BSCC vote, the Los Angeles Times published an article revealing that four additional officers had been placed on leave for allegedly allowing or encouraging youth-on-youth violence inside Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall. The Probation Department indicated that these officers were found to have permitted what many are referring to as "gladiator fights," in which youth are reportedly encouraged to fight each other over items like snacks or their lunch. This disturbing revelation underscores ongoing concerns about the safety and management of youth in the facility, highlighting serious issues with accountability and oversight within the Probation Department.³⁶

³⁰ See BSCC website at: <https://www.bscc.ca.gov/news/bscc-finds-la-juvenile-halls-unsuitable/>.

³¹ Los Padrinos History, <https://probation.lacounty.gov/lospadrinos/>.

³² See generally <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2023-09-07/editorial-juvenile-probation-los-angeles-departments-culture-problems>.

³³ Video shows L.A. probation officers letting group beat teen in Los Padrinos juvenile hall, (April 12, 2024) <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-04-12/video-shows-l-a-probation-officers-letting-group-beat-teen-in-los-padrinos-juvenile-hall>.

³⁴ L.A. County has two months to fix problems in juvenile hall, (February 14, 2024) <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-02-15/l-a-county-juvenile-hall>.

³⁵ State regulators allow L.A. County's juvenile hall to stay open, (April 12, 2024) <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-04-12/state-regulators-allow-halls-stay-open>.

³⁶ Four more L.A. County probation officers put on leave in connection with 'youth-on-youth violence', (April 26, 2024) <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-04-12/video-shows-l-a-probation-officers-letting-group-beat-teen-in-los-padrinos-juvenile-hall>.

In **October 2024**, the BSCC found Los Padrinos unsuitable.

In **March 2025**, a statewide grand jury indicted 30 Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall probation officers on felony charges—including child abuse, endangerment, conspiracy, and battery—after investigations revealed that between July and December 2023 they had orchestrated and permitted 69 violent “gladiator fights” among 143 youth detainees, encouraged assaults, denied medical care, and failed to intervene despite clear surveillance footage of the attacks.³⁷

On **July 23, 2025**, California Attorney General Rob Bonta petitioned the court to place Los Angeles County’s juvenile halls under a court appointed receivership, citing “glacial” progress in fixing dangerous conditions including rampant youth-on-youth violence, overdose deaths, and noncompliance with a 2021 stipulated judgment covering unsafe and unlawful conditions. Bonta argued that this “last resort” is necessary because Los Angeles County remains out of compliance with roughly 75% of the agreed upon reforms, posing continued harm to youth in custody.³⁸

As of **2025**, the EJC remains actively engaged with the POC, BOS, and LACOE. Our efforts continue to focus on advocating for marginalized communities, striving to ensure that all youth, particularly those who are incarcerated or system-impacted, have access to opportunities that improve their quality of life and upholding their fundamental rights.

VOICES INSIDE: A YOUTH LEADER, INCARCERATED AT LOS PADRINOS IN 2024

Decades of attempted reforms and little follow through have created irreparable conditions, confirming what young people have been telling us for years: education is an afterthought in these facilities. A youth leader who was incarcerated in Los Padrinos in 2024 shared his experience:

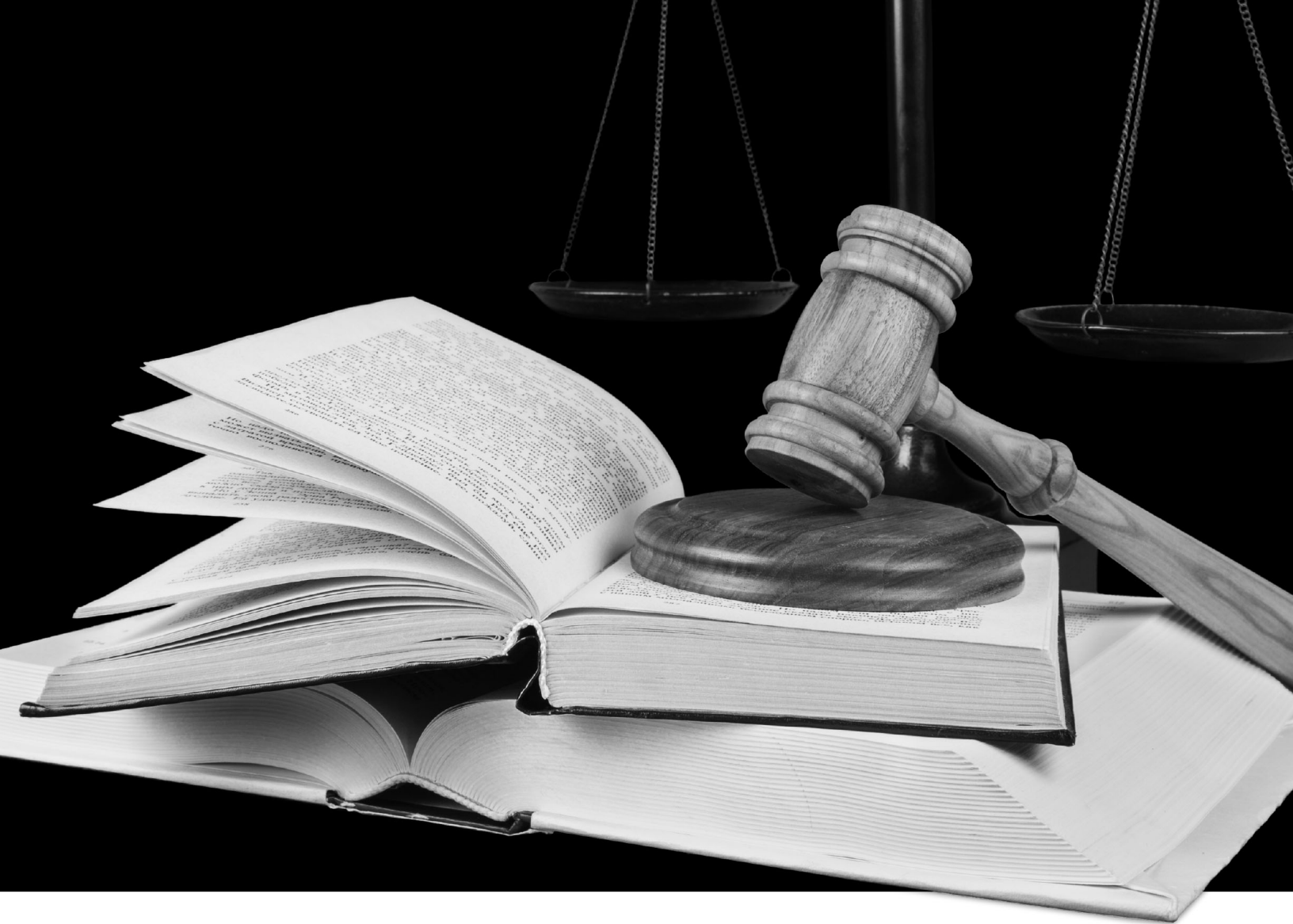
“We didn’t learn. The teachers wouldn’t do anything. They would go to work, sit down, and tell us what to do without teaching us. The teachers would hand us a packet that we do over and over and over. They wouldn’t do nothing. They’d give us the same, basic packets like on vowels and nouns. I get that we have a variety of age groups in one unit, but I was already in high school. It’s not fair to be learning about vowels and nouns like we’re dumb.”

Among the mechanisms to hold the County accountable, few are effective – leaving young people and their families to suffer in silence and further disillusioned by the education system.

“I would express myself to the ombudsman, and they told you it would get better, but it just got worse. I’d talk to the director of education at Probation, and he wouldn’t do nothing. We wouldn’t even talk about college when we were in high school. The work was super repetitive so it got to the point where I just wouldn’t do it – I’d scribble on it. I already knew it.”

³⁷ 30 LA County probation officers are accused of allowing 'gladiator fights' in juvenile hall, (March 3, 2025) <https://laist.com/news/criminal-justice/la-county-probation-officers-gladiator-fights-los-padrinos-juvenile-hall-indictment-child-abuse>.

³⁸ Attorney General Bonta Asks Court to Place Los Angeles County Juvenile Halls in Receivership, (July 23, 2025) <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-bonta-asks-court-place-los-angeles-county-juvenile-halls>.



SO, WHO HAS THE POWER?

There are various state and county agencies who play a role in the oversight and provision of education for young people in the juvenile legal system (see Glossary and Appendix 1). Responsibilities are dispersed among many departments and committees, creating confusion as to who has the ultimate power to both improve conditions and transform our youth justice system. However, there are several institutions that have—and have had—a direct responsibility for the care and education of the youth under their supervision. While these institutions continue to leverage this manufactured confusion to escape accountability for what has been a complete, and egregiously consequential, abdication of ownership and responsibility (and a direct violation of the rights of the youth under their "care/supervision"), we believe this distinction is important.

The Education Justice Coalition (EJC) continues to engage with various leaders, as outlined in the preceding section, and below is more information about some of the key stakeholders and decision-makers who have the power to make a meaningful impact.

CALL TO ACTION

This report aims to situate the current crisis in Los Angeles County's juvenile detention facilities within historical context and demonstrate the systemic nature of ongoing issues. We seek to inform Los Angeles County residents that their Board of Supervisors (BOS) holds the authority to address this crisis.

We strongly encourage all Los Angeles County residents to join us in efforts to urge the Los Angeles County BOS, along with all relevant County agencies, to prioritize the education of young people who come into contact with the juvenile legal system. To do so, decision-makers should consider the following:

1. **Implement Youth Justice Reimagined:** It is imperative to minimize the incarceration of young people, as detention severely impacts their education and overall well-being;
2. **Ensure Access to Quality Education and Programming:** Young people who are detained must have access to high-quality education and meaningful programming within juvenile detention facilities; and
3. **Enhance Transparency and Community-Led Accountability:** It is crucial to create mechanisms for transparency and community-led accountability to ensure that equitable education is consistently provided within juvenile detention facilities.

Implement Youth Justice Reimagined

First and foremost, Los Angeles County must fully implement **Youth Justice Reimagined** (YJR). Carceral settings are inherently punitive and counterproductive to youth development. The Education Justice Coalition (EJC) envisions a future where young people no longer face incarceration. By affirming YJR, the County has committed to a future in which fewer young people are removed from their homes. However, the current reality remains starkly different, with judges, prosecutors, probation officers, and other court actors frequently resorting to detention. It is essential that we come together to confront the numerous disruptions and challenges young people face when incarcerated—most notably, the severe disconnection from and disruption to their education trajectory. This issue is even more pressing following the BSCC's decisions to close Los Angeles County's juvenile detention facilities in 2023 and 2024. Now more than ever, Los Angeles County must act swiftly to release as many young people as possible from these facilities to mitigate the harmful, long-term effects of incarceration. The time for action is now.

Any period of detention by Probation requires a young person being disenrolled from their community school, causing significant disruptions to their education when they enroll in LACOE juvenile court schools and when they reenter their community. Despite the legal right to "immediate enrollment," incarcerated youth often experience delays before they are enrolled in LACOE juvenile court schools. When they are released, many students require legal assistance to enroll in their "school of origin" (defined as the last school they attended prior to entering the system, or any school they attended within the last 15 months with which they feel a connection), or their local comprehensive school.³⁹ Unfortunately, school districts frequently turn these students away due to the stigma of system involvement, often pushing them toward alternative schools such as continuation or community day schools. These alternative settings segregate students from their peers, often leading to disengagement, or worse, an inability to earn a high school diploma or GED.

³⁹ Cal. Educ. Code section 58853.5.

The lack of consistent educational opportunities compounds the challenges these young people face, making successful reintegration into the community even harder.

In addition to the gaps in education, young people who are incarcerated face the added challenge of being separated from their schools in the community, where staff have had the most time to build rapport and trust with them. Many of these youth have experienced significant trauma and face challenges like learning disabilities. When incarcerated, they must then form bonds and establish trust with new teachers in a short period of time. Given these circumstances, even the most experienced and creative educators struggle to create classroom environments where students can move beyond their survival instincts and develop trust and focus on learning. In California's court schools, teachers often struggle to engage students because they may not be credentialed or trained to meet the specific educational needs of high-school-aged youth, especially those with trauma histories or learning disabilities.

Furthermore, students who have experienced incarceration report that additional factors, such as the presence and authority of probation officers and the constant turnover of classmates, exacerbate the challenges of engaging in a court school learning environment. These conditions make it even harder for students to succeed, further hindering their educational progress and reintegration into society.

To improve educational outcomes and work toward ending the school-to-prison pipeline (also known as the school-prison nexus), it is essential that youth remain in their community schools for as long as possible. Keeping young people connected to their local schools helps maintain continuity in their education, fosters stronger relationships with trusted educators, and reduces the disruptive impact of incarceration on their academic and personal development. This approach, which prioritizes minimizing incarceration and keeping youth integrated into their communities, is key to breaking the cycle of involvement with the juvenile legal system and improving long-term outcomes.

Ensure Access to Quality Education and Programming

For the small number of young people who may still be ordered to detention facilities, LACOE and Probation must ensure that students have access to high-quality education and robust programming that supports their growth and development. The education provided must be tailored to address the unique and significant needs of the court school population. As detailed in this report, LACOE and Probation have consistently failed to provide incarcerated youth with the education and programming they require for effective youth development. These failures not only hinder students' academic progress but also perpetuate cycles of disadvantage and involvement with the juvenile legal system. It is crucial that the County and its agencies prioritize meaningful, supportive educational opportunities for these young people to help them reach their full potential.

What follows is a sampling of data that is publicly available to illustrate these significant concerns. While reviewing this data, it is helpful to keep in mind that various Los Angeles County juvenile halls have been closed and reopened due to failing state inspections in the last few years, which means there might not be data to compare year-to-year in each facility highlighted.

In addition, there are multiple sources of data to provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation and to illustrate to readers the potential drawbacks of considering only one data source. LACOE's own local testing data reveals that students in the juvenile halls and camps experience declines in their basic math and English skills while incarcerated. In addition, there are systemic issues with suspensions and chronic absenteeism across the juvenile court schools.

At Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, for the 2023-24 school year, per the California Department of Education's School Accountability Report Card, **22.7% of students with disabilities** missed more than 10% of the school year, which is categorized as **chronically absent**. In that same year, **44.55%** of students with disabilities were **suspended**. Additionally, **23.5% of African American/Black students** and **17.6% of Hispanic/Latino students** were **chronically absent**. That year, **44.19% of African American/Black students** and **25.11% of Hispanic/Latino students** were **suspended**.

Per the California School Dashboard, at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, for the 2024 school year, there is no data on chronic absenteeism. In the same year, per the Dashboard, **34% of students with disabilities were suspended at least one day**. Additionally, **27.9% of African American/Black students** were **suspended at least one day** and **27.7% of Hispanic/Latino students** were **suspended at least one day**, a **6.9% increase from the previous year**.

At Central Juvenile Hall, for the 2021-22 school year, per their School Accountability Report Card, **59.5% of students with disabilities** were chronically absent. The chronic absenteeism rates for **African American/Black students** were **58.0%**, and for **Hispanic/Latino students**, it was **42.7%**. In the same year, **8.93% of students with disabilities** were suspended, **7.45% of African American/Black students** were suspended, and **5.63% of Hispanic/Latino students** were suspended.

Although Central Juvenile Hall closed in **July 2023**, the California School Dashboard reported for the **2024 school year**, **1.8% of students with disabilities** were suspended at least one day, **2.7% of African American/Black students** were suspended at least one day, and **1.1% of Hispanic/Latino students** were suspended at least one day.

At Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, for the 2023-24 school year, per the School Accountability Report Card, **19.2% of students with disabilities** were chronically absent while 10.4% of Hispanic/Latino students and 19.7% of African American/Black students were chronically absent. In the same year, suspension rates were also concerning, with **33.12% of students with disabilities**, **28.05% of African American/Black students**, and **19.58% of Hispanic/Latino students** being suspended.

For the 2024 school year at Los Padrinos, the Dashboard reported that **fewer than 11 African American/Black students qualified as chronically absent so there is no available data**. The same year, the Dashboard reported 13% of Hispanic/Latino students were chronically absent. Additionally, **22.3% of students with disabilities** were suspended at least one day, **18.6% of African American/Black students**, and **12.8% of Hispanic/Latino students** were suspended at least one day.

At Afflerbaugh-Page Camp, for the 2023-24 school year, per the School Accountability Report Card, **10.6% of students with disabilities** were chronically absent. The chronic absenteeism rate for African American/Black students was 8.3% and for Hispanic/Latino students it was 2.9%.

More concerning was the suspension rate, with **65.12% of African American/Black students suspended, 64.29% of students with disabilities suspended, and 47.06% of Hispanic/Latino students suspended.**

The Dashboard did not have any statistics on chronic absenteeism at Afflerbaugh-Page Camp for the 2024 school year or any year prior. But, statistics on suspensions for the 2024 school year were equally as concerning as the School Accountability Report Card conveyed, with **46.5% of African American/Black students suspended at least one day, 46.4% of students with disabilities suspended at least one day, and 32.9% of Hispanic/Latino students suspended at least one day.**

These statistics illustrate not only a concerning pattern of chronic absenteeism and high suspension rates, but they also raise alarms about the disparities in these outcomes, particularly for students with disabilities and students of color. These outcomes underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms in the education provided within juvenile detention facilities, including addressing suspensions, absenteeism, and ensuring that students receive the support and resources they need to succeed academically while incarcerated.

Further compounding the challenges within LACOE juvenile court schools is the lack of access to critical special education services.⁴⁰ Many students with disabilities do not receive the services they are entitled to under the law. For example, non-public school placements, which are sometimes necessary for students with more significant needs, are often not available within juvenile court facilities. This lack of appropriate services further hinders the educational development of youth in these settings. Reports from EJC members who represent detained youth during the 2022-23 school year reveal that students were not provided access to special day class placements at a majority of LACOE juvenile court schools, leaving many with unmet educational needs. Additionally, teachers within the LACOE juvenile court system reported that specialized academic instruction minutes were frequently delivered by paraprofessionals, rather than by credentialed special education teachers. This lack of properly trained and credentialed staff for specialized instruction further undermines the quality of education for students who require additional support, reinforcing the systemic issues plaguing the education provided in juvenile detention facilities. These gaps in educational services not only violate the rights of students with disabilities, but they also contribute to the cycle of educational and systemic failure that many youth in the juvenile legal system face.

While LACOE and Probation are bound by the 2021 Attorney General's settlement, it is crucial that both agencies clearly document and address the missed education that detained students experience in the juvenile halls. A publicly available record must be kept to track how much instructional time is lost and how missed services will be made up. Throughout 2023, reports highlighted significant gaps in education and services, but often without any clear plan for how to provide the necessary compensatory services.

⁴⁰ In our experience, LACOE routinely makes changes to Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for young people who are incarcerated to remove services that are not available in court schools. This practice has consequences outside of these facilities. IEPs altered to match the available services within the facility are the same IEPs that the youth carry with them when they transition to schools outside of those facilities — meaning that the students either require legal or other advocacy support to reinstate their services or will struggle with fewer services and supports than they had when they first entered the facility.

For instance, in January 2023, Central Juvenile Hall had about 158 students enrolled, while Barry J. Nidorf had about 133 students. During that month, Central Juvenile Hall experienced a total of 51,250 minutes of lost instructional time, with an attendance rate of 94.3%. Barry J. Nidorf reported 42,500 minutes of lost instructional time, and an attendance rate of 94.4%. According to the SAER report, a total of 49 students at Barry J. Nidorf were owed 100 hours of compensatory education, while 34 students at Central Juvenile Hall were owed 74 hours by Probation for missed instructional time. Despite these figures, there has been a lack of transparency and concrete planning to ensure that the missed services are adequately made up for, leaving students at risk of falling further behind educationally. This continued failure to address the educational needs of incarcerated youth contributes to the broader systemic issues in juvenile legal and education.⁴¹

In April, Central Juvenile Hall had approximately 151 students enrolled, while Barry J. Nidorf had about 116 students. During that time, Central Juvenile Hall experienced a total of 64,550 minutes of lost instructional time, with an attendance rate of about 92.5%. In contrast, Barry J. Nidorf reported a significantly higher total of 184,450 minutes of lost instructional time, accompanied by a much lower attendance rate of about 72.1%. According to the SAER report, 102 students at Barry J. Nidorf were owed a total of 526 hours of compensatory education, while 57 students at Central Juvenile Hall were owed 102 hours for missed instructional time.⁴²

In May, Central Juvenile Hall had approximately 156 students enrolled, while Barry J. Nidorf had about 109 students enrolled. For the month, Central Juvenile Hall reported a total of 64,700 minutes of lost instructional time, with an attendance rate of about 93.7%. Barry J. Nidorf, however, experienced a significantly higher loss of instructional time, totaling 291,600 minutes, and had a much lower attendance rate of 59%. The SAER report indicated that in May, 117 students at Barry J. Nidorf were owed a total of 910 hours of compensatory education, while 68 students at Central Juvenile Hall were owed 107 hours.⁴³

Los Padrinos had approximately 225 students enrolled, while Barry J. Nidorf had only about 26 students enrolled. Despite the difference in enrollment, Los Padrinos experienced a total of 155,900 minutes of lost instructional time, with an attendance rate of about 89%. In comparison, Barry J. Nidorf had 43,250 minutes of lost instructional time and a much lower attendance rate of 73.6%. The SAER report noted that in August, 137 students at Los Padrinos were owed a total of 341 hours of compensatory education, while 26 students at Barry J. Nidorf were owed 119 hours of compensatory education by the probation department.⁴⁴

⁴¹ LACOE Board Meeting Agenda, March 21, 2023, pg. 28. [https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/board/board-agendas/No.%2020%20\(3-21-23\)%20Online%20Agenda.pdf](https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/board/board-agendas/No.%2020%20(3-21-23)%20Online%20Agenda.pdf).

⁴² LACOE Board Meeting Agenda, May 16, 2023, pg. 38. [https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/board/board-agendas/No.%2023%20\(5-16-23\)%20Online%20Agenda.pdf](https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/board/board-agendas/No.%2023%20(5-16-23)%20Online%20Agenda.pdf).

⁴³ LACOE Board Meeting Agenda, June 20, 2023, pg. 255. [https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/board/board-agendas/No.%2025%20\(6-20-23\)%20Online%20Agenda.pdf](https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/board/board-agendas/No.%2025%20(6-20-23)%20Online%20Agenda.pdf).

⁴⁴ LACOE Board Meeting Agenda, September 19, 2023, pg. 37. [https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/board/board-agendas/No.%209%20\(9-19-23\)%20Online%20Agenda.pdf](https://www.lacoe.edu/content/dam/lacoeedu/documents/board/board-agendas/No.%209%20(9-19-23)%20Online%20Agenda.pdf).

The County must urgently prioritize the following actions to ensure that Probation and LACOE work together to implement overdue reforms and improve educational opportunities to include the following:

1. **A-G and College Preparatory Courses:** Ensure incarcerated students have access to A-G and college preparatory courses, providing them with equal opportunities for higher education as their non-justice-involved peers;
2. **Special Education Services:** Offer meaningful and consistent access to appropriate special education services, regardless of the detention setting, ensuring students with disabilities receive the support they need in the least restrictive environment (LRE);
3. **Mental Health Services:** Provide consistent access to high-quality mental health services, including school-based services such as Educationally Related Intensive Counseling Services (ERICS);
4. **Trauma-informed Staff:** Ensure that staff members are trauma-informed, understanding the unique needs of incarcerated youth and providing the necessary support for their emotional and educational well-being;
5. **Academic Intervention Programs:** Offer academic intervention and remedial programs for students who are behind or not working at grade level, ensuring they receive the support to succeed;
6. **Qualified, Culturally Competent Teachers:** Employ qualified teachers who not only care for and respect students but also exhibit cultural humility, reflect the racial/ethnic composition of the students, and are appropriately credentialed for secondary education and single subjects;
7. **Inclusive Hiring Processes:** Include students, families, and community members in LACOE staff hiring decisions to ensure that candidates are capable of building genuine relationships with youth;
8. **Culturally Relevant Curriculum:** Implement a curriculum that is culturally relevant, inclusive, and provides training to support youth in secure facilities;
9. **Consistent Access to Education:** Ensure that students have uninterrupted access to their education, without being removed from class for reasons related to Probation staffing or other similar issues;
10. **Classrooms Led by Educators:** Create classrooms that feel like school and not detention. Classrooms should be run by educators, not probation officers, to ensure a conducive learning environment;
11. **Access to Education via Technology:** Provide consistent access to education and programming through technology, including virtual and hybrid learning opportunities, even during quarantine or other disruptive circumstances;
12. **Youth Participation in Program Design:** Offer frequent opportunities for youth to participate in designing educational programs that meet their needs, such as forming a youth council or electing youth commissioners who regularly meet with LACOE and Probation for feedback;

13. **Family Involvement:** Ensure that parents and families have meaningful opportunities to participate in their child's education and programming, fostering a collaborative support system for the student;
14. **Community-Based Organization Programming:** Provide frequent opportunities for youth to engage with community-based organizations (CBOs) across various areas, ensuring diverse and meaningful programming options;
15. **Transparency in CBO Selection:** Ensure transparency regarding the CBOs selected to provide programming, allowing public oversight and accountability;
16. **Financial Literacy and Transition Services:** Provide financial literacy education and other transition services to prepare youth for life after detention, including budgeting, managing finances, and navigating life skills;
17. **College and Vocational Opportunities:** Offer access to college programs, including community college (associate's degree) and four-year college (bachelor's degree) options, with reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Additionally, provide vocational or certificate programs in areas such as construction, barbering, food service, logistics, and electrical work; and;
18. **Robust Transition Planning:** Establish a comprehensive and meaningful transition planning process, including the provision of specialized counselors who follow youth from detention settings into their communities, offering continuous support during reentry into schools outside of detention facilities..

Enhance Transparency and Community-Led Accountability

Our final recommendation for Los Angeles County is to establish a robust, transparent system of accountability for youth who are incarcerated. Education planning must be open to families and community-based organizations (CBOs), who should have meaningful opportunities to provide input. Historically, LACOE has failed to engage stakeholders, denied public comment, and overlooked critical feedback. The County must avoid these missteps moving forward by ensuring transparency and incorporating community input into education decisions. This will help create a more responsive system that meets the needs of incarcerated youth and supports their educational success.

While LACOE has taken a step by installing youth board members, this is not enough. To ensure accountability and effective implementation of its realignment and court school education plans, the County must establish community-led workgroups, such as youth councils or oversight boards with community membership. These mechanisms are essential for ensuring that those who have directly experienced the juvenile legal system are involved in monitoring and shaping educational services. It is critical that the voices of young people and their families are heard, respected, and included in decisions. Only by truly listening to their experiences can the County break the cycle of harm and create an equitable system for all.

We appreciate the time and effort required by Los Angeles County residents and decision-makers to review and consider the information and recommendations contained in this report. We look forward to continuing to collaborate and build a world in which all students receive the quality education they deserve and are entitled to under law.

GLOSSARY

Overview of the key organizations that contribute to justice-impacted youth receiving quality education in Los Angeles County.

Education Justice Coalition (EJC): An empowering alliance of youth advocacy organizations, deeply knowledgeable in education law and youth development, dedicated to eradicating youth incarceration and championing a culturally sustaining education for every young individual. Moreover, the coalition ends to build on the County's work in ending the Los Angeles County Probation Department's custody of youth and eliminate the need for juvenile court schools; promote the leadership of impacted families and young people in decisions related to education in juvenile facilities and county community schools; and create community-led accountability mechanisms to ensure juvenile court school and county community school students receive a high-quality education.

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (BOS): The Los Angeles County BOS is the governing body responsible for overseeing and making policy decisions for the 9.8 million people in Los Angeles County. The board is composed of five elected supervisors, each representing a specific geographic district within the county. The supervisors serve as both the executive and legislative branches of the county government.

Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE): The BOS appoints the Superintendent and seven-member LACOE Board of Education. LACOE works closely with county agencies, probation departments, and juvenile legal facilities to provide education and support services for youth involved in the legal system. It offers educational programs tailored to the unique needs of justice-involved youth, including those in detention centers and court schools. In addition to the administration of education in juvenile legal facilities, LACOE provides oversight and accountability to the 80+ school districts in Los Angeles County.

Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation): Probation is responsible for the upkeep and staffing of all juvenile detention facilities, juvenile halls, and secure youth treatment facilities ("SYTF") in Los Angeles County. Probation is further responsible for the access of incarcerated youth to education.

Los Angeles County Department of Youth Development (DYD): Established in 2021 under the authority of the Board of Supervisors (BOS), the Department of Youth Development (DYD) was created with the primary objective of reforming Los Angeles County's youth legal system and promoting the development of young individuals. Commencing operations in July 2022, DYD is dedicated to coordinating and enhancing a diverse array of youth development services, opportunities, supports, and compassionate initiatives. By prioritizing equitable measures, DYD aims to diminish youth involvement in the legal system while fostering the holistic growth and well-being of young people throughout Los Angeles County.

Examples of Key Players

Appendix 1: Overview of Key Advocacy Organizations in Los Angeles County



Learn More Here:

- <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2023-04-14/editorial-l-a-countys-juvenile-hall-catastrophe-is-a-quarter-century-in-the-making>
- <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-02-15/california-youth-prisons-closing-criminal-justice-reform>
- <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2024-02-15/los-angeles-juvenile-probation-bail-out>

