



**Educational Status of Probation Youth Enrolled in  
Los Angeles County Office of Education Programs**  
Discussion paper – April 2006

A special analysis completed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) at the request of the Education Coordinating Council in November 2005 sheds considerable light on the educational conditions of Probation youth. This discussion paper begins by describing the educational services provided to Probation youth by various LACOE programs and the methods used to analyze statistics on student enrollment and performance. The paper includes data on attendance and achievement for Probation youth enrolled in juvenile halls, camps, community day schools and the Cal Safe program. It also includes results of the California High School Exit Exam. The paper concludes with areas for further consideration by the ECC suggested by members of the Data Workgroup.

Description of LACOE Programs: LACOE provides programs and services to students, parents, educators, and the school districts within LA County. The Juvenile Court and Community Schools (JCCS) unit within LACOE provides individualized teaching and support to delinquent and abandoned youth in juvenile halls, camps, and residential programs. With its partners in the Probation Department and other county agencies, JCCS focuses on moving youth toward literacy and academic achievement. All schools are fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Credits earned in JCCS are accepted at all high schools, colleges, and universities. Academic goals are achieved by:

- Immediate and follow-up assessment of student academic and special education needs;
- Designing and implementing Individual Education Plans for students with special needs and Individual Learning Plans for regular education students;
- Small classes with a maximum 17-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio;
- Intensive reading instruction supported by after-school tutoring;
- Integrating the latest computer technology and software into the curriculum.

LACOE's Division of Alternative Education (DAE) was created to reach students who fall through the cracks in the public education system, those who are "at-risk" academically, and those who have specialized interests and talents. DAE's overall goal is to provide programs with alternative education settings so that students will succeed and achieve. DAE is also concerned about students who are "at-risk" of academic failure. To help reach those students, DAE has program goals to ensure that students will:

- Set and attain individualized behavior, academic, and career goals,
- Attend school consistently,
- Reinvest in school and learning, and
- Successfully transition to the home school district or to institutions of higher learning.

DAE operates the following alternative education programs:

- The Community Day Schools serve students referred by the districts due to expulsion, those referred by the Probation Department, and/or those assigned because of poor attendance or other at-risk behaviors.
- The California School Age Families Education Program serves male and female students who are pregnant or parenting teenagers.
- The Community School programs include both school facilities and independent study strategies.

Methods used for Statistical Analysis: This analysis of data on probation students enrolled in either the JCCS or DAE programs was based on data from November 2005 and a "snapshot" of enrollment on different days during December 2005 (this comparison helped to show the amount of movement occurring at different times). Information on diplomas issued was as of August 31, 2005.

Students whose records were included in the analysis came mostly from school districts throughout the County, with the highest proportion from the Los Angeles Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Compton Unified School District. In addition, a small number of students (n=16) had previously been enrolled in out-of-County school districts.

Probation Students in Juvenile Hall Schools: LACOE data show that 2,047 students were enrolled in juvenile hall schools as of November 2005. Of these, 79% (n=1,617) were classified as regular education students and 21% (n=430) were classified as special education students. As of August 2005, LACOE had issued 787 high school diplomas in regular education and 138 high school diplomas in special education. In regard to ethnicity, the highest percentages of students were Latino, African-American, and White. The primary language spoken was English, followed by Spanish.

LACOE also offered an Independent Study Strategy for Probation and other pupils in both regular education and special education. Probationers accounted for 28% (n=246) of the total of 852 regular education students in the Independent Study program, and they accounted for 18% (n=33) of the total of 33 special education students in the Independent Study program.

Star Advantage Tests, which are administered as youth enter juvenile halls, showed that regular education students in juvenile halls in November 2005 had an average grade level reading ability of 4.9 -- just below fifth grade level. The average Star Advantage Test math score for regular education students was 5.7. For special education students, the average reading score was 3.8 and the average math score was 6.0.

According to LACOE data, the attendance rate for regular and special education students in juvenile halls during the second semester of 2004-05 was 86%. Since attendance is taken once a day rather than on a period by period basis, this figure undoubtedly underestimates the amount of instruction time missed by youth who had excused absences for illness or for appointments scheduled during the school day. Nor does it account for time missed by youth who were sent back to their units due to medical problems or behavior problems such as a "lockdown."

The Probation Department's reading improvement program, Operation Read, makes volunteers available to tutor some of these youth outside of school hours, but the service is available only to youth whose reading scores put them at or below the fourth grade reading level.

Probation Students in Camp Schools: LACOE data show that 2,064 students were enrolled in Probation camps in November 2005. Eighty percent of these students were classified as regular education (n=1,650), while 20% (n=414) were classified as special education. Star Advantage Test scores showed that regular education students in camps had an average grade level reading ability of 5.3 and an average math score of 5.5. Special education students had an average reading score of 4.0 and an average math score of 4.4. The attendance rate for both regular and special education students in camps during the second semester of 2004-05 was 93%. In some camps, Operation Read volunteers were available to help youth who were behind two grade levels in reading.

Probation Students Enrolled in Community Day Schools: LACOE data show that 676 probation youth were enrolled in Community Day Schools in November 2005. Eighty-seven percent (n=585) of these students were classified as regular education students and 13% (n=91) were classified as special education students. Star Advantage Test scores showed that regular

education students had an average grade level reading ability of 7.0, and an average math grade level ability of 9.0. In special education, the average reading score was 4.1, and the average math score was 4.6. The attendance rate during the second semester of 2004-05 for both regular and special education students was 80%. In some Community Day Schools, additional help with reading for students who lagged at least two grade levels in reading was available from Operation Read.

Data on Probation Students Enrolled in Cal Safe Programs: Another program offered by LACOE was the Cal Safe program for pregnant teens, teen moms, dads, and their children. Probationers accounted for less than 1% of all students enrolled in this program as of November 2005, with 12 regular education students and two special education students.

High School Exit Examination Results for Probation Youth: Another way to assess the educational status of probation youth is by looking at California High School Exit Examination results for graduates from LACOE juvenile hall and Community Day School programs. The charts show 2003-04 exam results in English Language Arts and Math for graduates statewide, for LA County, and for selected LA school districts, schools, and programs. Results for 492 LACOE students in juvenile halls and the community day school program show that 26% passed the English Language Arts exam. The average English score for these students was 330, with a score of 350 required to pass the exam. In comparison, 70% of all students in the County who took the test passed the exam. Results for 516 juvenile hall and Community Day School students who took the Math exam show that 35% passed the exam, with an average score of 325. In comparison, 70% of all students in the County who took the test passed.

California High School Exit Examination  
2003-04 School Year

Category	English Language Arts Portion			Math Portion		
	Number of Students Completing the Test	Percent of Students who Passed	Average Scaled Score*	Number of Students Completing the Test	Percent of Students who Passed	Average Scaled Score*
California	444,869	75%	376	447,110	74%	377
Los Angeles County	118,120	70%	372	118,339	68%	371
Los Angeles Unified School District	43,449	62%	363	43,845	58%	361
Compton Unified School District	1,465	51%	350	1,467	41%	347
Inglewood Unified School District	960	59%	357	972	46%	351
Los Angeles County Office of Education	1,236	45%	347	1,266	35%	342
Juvenile Hall/Community Day School	492	26%	330	516	16%	325
Special Education	81	27%	328	80	17%	326

\* The State passing scaled score is 350 or higher.

Source: California Department of Education, DataQuest, 2003-04 School Year

### Questions for Consideration by the Education Coordinating Council

The educational challenges faced by Probation youth, as well as the interagency problems faced by the Probation Department, LACOE, and the many other local school districts to which these youth return clearly raise concerns that cannot be solved by any one entity alone. Progress will require the coordinated efforts of each one of these agencies, in coordination with a very large number of community partners.

Recognizing the importance of education for the future of these youth, the Probation Department developed its successful Operation Read program which brings volunteer reading tutors into juvenile halls to help many youth with limited reading skills. Probation has also worked hard to put Deputy Probation Officers on school campuses and to develop school safety collaboratives through its School-Based Supervision Program. LACOE and the Probation Department have made a shared commitment to reintegrating high-need youth into comprehensive high schools on their release from detention facilities. Can the ECC help LACOE and the Probation Department to strengthen these initiatives?

The second area that requires further exploration by the ECC relates to special education. On a national basis, about 10% of the general school population is eligible for special education services. These LACOE data show that the percentage of special education probation students in halls and camps was more than double – 21% of students in juvenile halls and 22% of students in probation camps. While larger percentages of special education students may help to explain why overall school achievement rates for students in juvenile hall and camps are so low, they raise many other complex and challenging questions about how to improve educational outcomes for this diverse population. Since no data were available on learning disabilities, this is another area that requires further discussion.

The third area for discussion by the ECC has to do with timely exchange of information between the multiple school districts that serve these youth. LACOE staff reports difficulties getting transcripts and other educational information on students entering the juvenile halls and camps in a timely manner from their local schools. Once youth are released from detention, there is a special need for communication and information sharing between the Probation Department, LACOE, and the other school districts so that youth can return to school with as little disruption as possible. Partnerships are needed to ensure timely return to comprehensive community-based schools, to address the reluctance of some school districts to accept youth returning from detention, and to provide the supports necessary so that these youth can transition successfully at home and in school.

The fourth area for continued discussion is whether appropriate tutoring and support services are available for probation youth in communities across the county. Relevant information for youth and their families on job opportunities, planning for college, and other vocational options is also needed.

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Data for this discussion paper were based on two sources:

1. Gary Levin and Frank Plaistowe. "Statistical presentation on youth on probation in LACOE, 2005-2006."
2. Data on California High School Exit exams for 2003-04, California State Department of Education Dataquest.