



**A Comparative Analysis of Educational Performance by Students at
The Sycamores Non-Public School:
Those Involved with DCFS and Those Not Involved with the Department**

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This report summarizes recent data on the educational performance of two groups of students enrolled at the Sycamores Non-Public School (NPS) during the spring semester of 2005. For this analysis, students were divided into two groups – those involved with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and other students who were not involved with the department. Under the leadership of the Education Coordinating Council’s (ECC) Data Group, the 2004-2005 Sycamores’ data were examined more closely to compare the educational performance of these two groups of students. The study was modeled after a preliminary analysis done by LAUSD in April 2005, using similar indices, and was designed to highlight differences in student characteristics and performance that might be of special interest to the ECC.

Background. Students eligible for special education services can receive services in a continuum of placement options. Non-public special education schools are considered to be at the more restrictive end of the placement continuum. They tend to be narrowly focused, typically enrolling students with specific disabilities such as emotional disturbance, severe learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, and mental retardation. They include both day and residential institutions and offer intensive programs with highly specialized services such as counseling, tutoring, or behavior management needed for children who cannot be served by their local school districts.

There is a paucity of research on non-public schools, but published reports tend to be critical of such schools due to insufficient standards for certification and lack of accountability for educational outcomes. AB1858, new legislation in California which took effect January 2005, focuses specifically on the standards for quality of education and accountability to students at non-public schools. The legislation seeks to ensure that students who attend non-public schools have access to standards-based core curriculum and instructional materials; that these schools conduct regular state and local assessment or alternate assessment of students’ academic progress; and that the non-public schools complete an annual School Accountability Report Card.

The Sycamores NPS serves a sizable number of youth in foster care. In its most recent academic report based on the total school population comparing school achievement data from three school years, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004, the school identified the following key findings:

- Academic testing revealed statistically significant improvements on NPS students' total achievement scores on the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement
- Academic testing also revealed statistically significant improvements on the Broad Reading ($p \leq 0.001$), Broad Math ($p \leq 0.05$), and Broad Writing ($p \leq 0.001$) subscales.
- Students made one full grade level of improvement per academic year (compared to only one-half grade level of progress per year before entering NPS). This helped normalize the students' learning curve and moved them closer to the national averages.

Findings. Data collected from the 2004-2005 school year were the basis for this preliminary analysis. There were a total of 36 DCFS youth in the Sycamores NPS at the time the analysis was performed. Almost half ($n=17$) were African-American children and almost all ($n=33$) were in either RCL 12 or 14 placements. All were eligible for special education. Ten of the DCFS youth were in public school placements, either full time or dual enrolled.

Chart 1: NPS Students by Grade Level and DCFS Status (Spring 2005)

Grade	Total	DCFS
K	0	0
1 st	0	0
2 nd	1	0
3 rd	3	0
4 th	5	2
5 th	9	1
6 th	8	4
7 th	11	4
8 th	15	6
9 th	15	10
10 th	8	3
11 th	4	4
12 th	3	2
Total	82	36

Chart 2: NPS Students by Ethnicity and DCFS Status (spring 2005)

Ethnicity	Total	DCFS
White	31	13
African-American	30	17
Hispanic	21	6
Total	82	36*

Chart 3: NPS Students by Language Classification and DCFS Status (Spring, 2005)

Total English Learners	DCFS
2	0

Chart 4: NPS Students by Program Eligibility and DCFS Status (Spring 2005)

NPS Special Education Population *	Total	DCFS
	82	36
Residential Programs		
RCL-14 (48 beds)	48	19
RCL-12 (17 beds)	17	14
Total	65	33
Residential Clients in Public School Full-Time		
RCL-14	1	1
RCL-12	5	5
Residential Clients Dual Enrolled (both NPS and Public School)		
RCL-14	0	0
RCL-12	3	3
NPS Day Students (n=17)		
Dual Enrolled	2	1
NPS Total Dual Enrolled		
Dual Enrolled	5	4

* The Sycamores NPS only serves students eligible for special education. The Sycamores NPS serves students from both residential programs as well as day students from surrounding communities. Some other numbers of possible interest are below. Note that type of program in public school setting is not identified nor is eligibility category for special education services.

Chart 5: NPS Students by Suspensions and DCFS Status (Spring 2005)

Suspensions *	Total	DCFS
	0	0

* The Sycamores NPS policy is not to suspend students. Some of the 6 students in the residential program who attend public school full-time have been suspended from their public schools during the 04-05 school year. None of the 4 students with DCFS status who are dual enrolled have been suspended from the public school during the 04-05 school year.

Educational Performance. Chart 6 shows how the DCFS students at each grade level scored on the Woodcock-Johnson III Achievement Battery compared to the non-DCFS students. Both the DCFS and non-DCFS students tended to score in the 70's and 80's range meaning low average and low performance in reading, math, and written language. The DCFS students scored slightly lower than the non-DCFS students in most grade levels and subject areas. The secondary DCFS students scored slightly higher (low-average) than the middle grade (low) DCFS students.

Chart 6: Woodcock Johnson III Achievement Test Scores* and DCFS Status (Spring 2005)

	Non-DCFS			DCFS			
	Broad Reading	Broad Math	Broad Writ Lang	Broad Reading	Broad Math	Broad Writ Lang	
Elementary							
4 th (n=3)	65.3	89.6	70.6	(n=2)	81	94.5	80.5
6 th (n=8)	90.9	94.8	91.5	(n=1)	58	41	39
mean	78.1	92.2	81.1	mean	69.5	67.8	59.8
Middle							
6 th (n=3)	74.7	86	77.3	(n=4)	75.5	81	77.5
7 th (n=6)	82	87.2	82.2	(n=4)	75	78.3	71
8 th (n=8)	74.4	84.4	78	(n=5)	69.8	71	71.4
mean	77.12	85.9	79.2	mean	73.4	76.8	73.3
Secondary							
9 th (n=5)	85.4	75.4	78.4	(n=10)	77.2	77.6	79.7
10 th (n=5)	77.2	79	78.2	(n=3)	88	90	91.3
11 th (n=0)				(n=4)	77.3	79.3	80.5
12 th (n=1)	94	79	104	(n=2)	78	84	83
mean	85.5	77.8	86.9	mean	80.12	82.7	83.6
Total = 39**				Total=35**			

* Standard scores (SS) describe a student's performance relative to the average performance of other students his or her age. SS have a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. SS represent the following performance levels:

- 131 and above – very superior
- 121 – 130 – superior
- 111 – 120 – high average
- 90 – 110 – average
- 80 – 89 – low average
- 70 – 79 – low
- 69 and below – very low

** a small number of students refused to participate in testing; therefore the total numbers of students in Chart 6 are lower than the overall school population

Discussion. The data from the Sycamores NPS represent small numbers of students and therefore we must be cautious in interpreting the findings. However, there are some patterns worth noting. These data do represent some of the most challenging students within the Los Angeles County special education population. Even so, many of the students involved with DCFS are doing as well as or better than the non-DCFS population at the Sycamores NPS. Further, the data from youth from DCFS at the

secondary level are especially significant. Many of these youth have been at the Sycamores NPS for 2 to 3 years and their test scores are some of the best at the school. When challenging students such as these are placed in appropriate placements with intensive services, resources, and accommodations matched to their needs they can demonstrate low average to average academic achievement with the potential for continued improvement.