



PRESS RELEASE

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REPORT FINDS SCHOOLS FAILING IN EDUCATING YOUTH IN CA'S JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Youth Law Center, a national public interest law firm based in San Francisco, today released a study of the education system for youth confined to detention facilities within California's juvenile justice system. In the report, entitled Educational Injustice: Barriers to Achievement and Higher Education for Youth in California Juvenile Court Schools, Youth Law Center examines areas of challenge for the system and fundamental ways in which the system has been failing. The report also offers recommendations for improvement and discusses innovative, replicable programs that engage youth and enable them to advance their educational outcomes.

State and federal laws require that youth in the juvenile justice system be provided a quality education. This requirement accords with the juvenile justice system's focus on rehabilitation for youth who have had brushes with the law and need care and support to move forward on a positive path toward college and careers. In California's juvenile justice system, County Offices of Education are responsible for operating "juvenile court schools" in coordination with facility staff to carry out the educational mandate.

Youth Law Center's study, funded by The California Wellness Foundation, found that several court schools up and down the state have serious problems with truancy and suspensions. Notably, other court schools had no truancies and no suspensions over the same time period the report examines. "The fact that some programs can handle the basics of getting youth to class and providing them with the engagement needed to keep them there tells us that all court schools should be able to meet this minimum standard," noted Joy Singleton, a Youth Law Center staff attorney.

The report also highlights a deeper level of problems – that of dismal outcomes for youth who exit the juvenile justice system. A common complaint from the youth themselves is the substitution of worksheets for real teaching and classroom discussion. At least one set of data indicates that more than 40% make no progress in reading and math or, still worse, show a decline in their proficiency in these areas. Other data show dramatic numbers of youth not getting the support they need to re-enroll in their local schools as well as staggering drop-out rates. Only a tiny fraction go on to post-secondary education or a vocational training program, and substantial barriers to employment persist.

"Fundamentally, court schools evince a crisis of low expectations," explained Jennifer Rodriguez, Youth Law Center's Executive Director. "In myriad ways, instead of giving youth cause for hope and the resources and supports to realize their full potential, the system too often primes them for a downward trajectory."

While painting a grim picture, the report does offer examples of programs that have achieved notable successes. Some involve partnerships with local community colleges and support to enroll in further education and secure financial aid. Others involve on-line learning opportunities and close mentoring. "These programs show us there is so much more our youth can achieve and very real possibilities for supporting them in reaching their goals. We should not give up so easily on the promise our juvenile justice system makes to these youth for their future," said Maria Ramiu, Managing Director of Youth Law Center.

The Youth Law Center (YLC), established in 1978, is a national public interest law firm that works to protect children in the nation's foster care and justice systems from abuse and neglect, and to ensure that they receive the necessary parenting, support and services to thrive. <http://www.ylc.org/>

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