

PRESS RELEASE

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California Makes Historic Investment into Post-Secondary Education Programs for Juvenile Justice Involved Youth

As the first state in the country to dedicate postsecondary funding specifically to juvenile justice impacted youth, California is setting a national model for effective youth justice investment.

On June 30th, Governor Gavin Newsom signed California's budget, which contained a historic investment of \$15 million in funding to [community colleges](#) through the [Rising Scholars Network](#): this funding represents the State's commitment to youth in the juvenile justice system to begin to replace outdated punitive and harmful interventions like incarceration with true rehabilitative supports like postsecondary education. As the first state in the country to dedicate postsecondary funding specifically to juvenile justice impacted youth, California is setting a national model for effective youth justice investment. The ongoing annual funds of \$15 million will fund model programming in community colleges to help young people who are juvenile justice system impacted have strong support and services for accessing and completing their college education.

The Youth Law Center (YLC), a national nonprofit legal advocacy group based in San Francisco, who has spearheaded efforts to create sustained funding to support pathways to higher education for juvenile justice impacted youth, believes that providing funding to allow youth to engage in postsecondary education on their local college campus versus being institutionalized is an important step towards an effective approach to youth justice.

"Fulfilling the juvenile justice system's goal of rehabilitation requires investments in youth, their families, communities and structures like community colleges that are dedicated to cultivating the potential of community members." noted Jennifer Rodriguez, YLC's Executive Director. "This is a critical moment for California to make this investment as youth return to their communities from Department of Juvenile Justice institutions, we look for alternatives to harmful probation and incarceration intervention, and while a majority of Californians (88 percent) want to see alternate investments in interventions rooted in adolescent development like postsecondary education that keep youth and young adults out of trouble, in school and on a path to a good job and a successful future," she added.

The funding will support robust model programming at up to 45 community colleges around the state and will also be used for program evaluation that will allow for replication.

The model programming, based on the award winning [Project Change model at the San Mateo County Community College District](#), includes three core components that have been identified as critical to student success:

- Dual Enrollment for students still in high school to obtain both college and high school credit concurrently to expedite their future pathways
- Guided Pathways through UC/CSU transferable courses for an integrated degree completion, transfer, career pathways approach
- Comprehensive basic needs supports with high touch, highly resourced services for students

Funds will be overseen by the Rising Scholars Network, a close partner in YLC's Pathways to Higher Education advocacy work, and an initiative of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office dedicated to serving students who have been impacted by mass incarceration. The network is comprised of more than 400 college practitioners from 75 community colleges and has taken an interest in specifically supporting juvenile justice impacted youth over the past couple of years.

"With these funds, the Rising Scholars Network will have the resources needed to continue building a statewide network of support for juvenile justice impacted youth by offering high-quality community college education and wrap-around supports. We will work to leverage higher education as an alternative to detention, use dual enrollment to provide more seamless credit and degree completion, and support one another across county and district lines as we build this new model of support that places the dreams and needs of young people at the center of what we do," said Kellie Nadler, the Rising Scholars lead spearheading these efforts.

Over the past several years, the numbers of youth in the California juvenile justice system have declined significantly and policy makers have increasingly listened to young people who have experienced the juvenile justice system for guidance about reform. These youth leaders, including Rising Scholars Project Change students, have led the way in helping state policymakers understand why community-based support systems are better than locking youth in facilities – better for the youth, their families, and their communities.

Pathways to California community colleges are especially important. As the largest higher education system in the country with more than 1.8 million students attending 116 colleges, the California Community Colleges serve the most diverse student population than any other higher education system in the state. In addition to offering transfer pathways to California's 4-year colleges and universities, California's community colleges are the largest provider of workforce training in the world, offering over 200 programs in fields as varied as welding, culinary arts, automotive technology, and renewable energy. The community college system is especially situated to support juvenile justice impacted students' success. Community colleges are located in every county across the state, offer multiple degree programs and career pathways, as well as have a mission dedicated to equity. The intention of having an alternative model to incarceration based in higher education creates opportunities for young people to build their futures with support and dedicated pathways.

"At the Chancellor's Office, we are strong advocates for supporting programs that ensure students from all backgrounds succeed in reaching their goals. This new funding will allow us to build programs for juvenile justice impacted youth that will change the lives of thousands of

young Californians, their families, and their communities. We thank the Governor for his support and look forward to putting this program into action," noted LeBaron Woodyard, PhD, Dean of Academic Affairs, who oversees the Rising Scholars Network. These funds will go to 45 community colleges to build and strengthen programs for juvenile justice impacted youth throughout the state. This expansion will be supported by the Rising Scholars team, who are committed to ensuring juvenile justice impacted young people have access to the supports needed to be successful in the higher education journey.

For more than forty years, the Youth Law Center (YLC), a national nonprofit legal advocacy organization, has improved the lives of children and youth involved with the foster care and youth justice systems so they can thrive. YLC changes systems through litigation, policy reform, creative systems change projects, training and counseling, public education and community engagement as tools for systems change. The Youth Law Center has partnered with the CA Community College Chancellor's Office Rising Scholars Network on YLC's [Pathways to Higher Education Initiative](#) which has resulted in practice and policy improvements across California to improve access to postsecondary education for juvenile justice impacted youth and invest in better futures for all.

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About Us

The **Youth Law Center** advocates to transform foster care and juvenile justice systems across the nation so every child and youth can thrive. www.ylc.org

The **Rising Scholars Network** is a network of California Community Colleges committed to serving incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students by providing degree-granting programs in correctional facilities and on-campus support for students who have experienced the criminal justice system. www.risingscholarsnetwork.org