

RAPSA JOURNAL

INCREASING TRANSPARENCY OF COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION SPENDING

Alferes, Michael and Cortez, Sara. "Increasing Transparency of County Office of Education Spending". Report Legislative Analyst Office. March 14, 2024.

<https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4883>

A recent CA Legislative Analyst Office report on the transparency of County Offices of Education (COE's) highlights the two distinct missions for COE's. "COEs provide direct instruction to students in juvenile court and county community schools. These schools serve students who are placed in county juvenile facilities, on probation, referred by a probation department, or mandatorily expelled from their school district. COEs also provide oversight and support to school districts in their county. Some of these activities are required by law, while others are optional and vary across the state. COEs receive state funding primarily through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Similar to COEs' two-part mission, the LCFF has two main components—an alternative education grant based on the number of students attending juvenile court and county community schools and an operations grant based on the number of school districts and number of students in the county. COEs generally have flexibility to use their LCFF funding from either part of the formula for any purpose."

It is important to note that county community schools are public schools that are run by county offices of education. According to the California Department of Education (CDE) website, they educate students in kindergarten through grade twelve who are expelled from school or who are referred because of attendance or behavior problems. They also serve students who are homeless, on probation or parole, and who are not attending any school. Parents or guardians also may request that their child attend a county community school.



These schools aim to meet individual student needs. Students learn academic and life skills. They also learn to view themselves in a positive way and to get along with other people. Although students may graduate from county community schools, the goal of these schools is to help students move to other levels of education, training, or employment.

The students enrolled in county-operated juvenile court and community schools (JCCS) often face significant educational obstacles, including incarceration, expulsion, probation, food insecurity, unstable housing, academic credit deficits, and mental health challenges. Research shows our at-promise students experience disparities in racial and socio-economic representation compared to their peers and have a high mobility rate. Additionally, there is a higher prevalence of students with disabilities in the students served in our JCCS programs.

The students enrolled in our JCCS programs greatly benefit from career education opportunities because they often remain in their local communities after their education and leverage the skills acquired through CTE programs to earn competitive incomes and engage as contributing members of their communities. However, our students currently lack equitable access to CTE courses, pathways, and dual enrollment opportunities. This inequity highlights the need for more focused state guidance and resources to ensure all students have equal access to CTE. Specifically naming the needs of county office-served at-promise students will improve opportunities for success once our students transition out of county-operated JCCS programs.

County community schools offer students an alternative education program that reinforces or reestablishes educational development. The standard minimum school day for county community schools is 240 minutes of instruction; minimum school day for students in attendance in approved vocational education and work experience programs is 180 minutes.

While there may be differences in how COE schools are operated and how other alternative schools are operated, what is clear is that often times COE run schools and other alternative education schools are serving same/similar demographic student population.

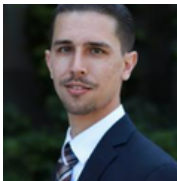
This report focuses on County Office's of Education (COE) who, in CA, serve a great amount of At Promise and Opportunity Youth students in alternative settings. In the end, the LAO provides recommendations for leaders to consider, to include metrics for appropriately having alternative accountability for students in alternative school settings. Many large partners such as LACOE are interested and these recommendations may be items other states can glean something from as well. This report contains CA focused data.

Report: [County Office of Education LCAPS](#)

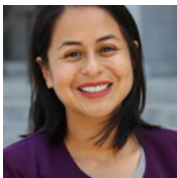
THE LAOS RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Requiring county offices to write an annual report summarizing their major activities, services, and policy initiatives.
- Establishing county office-specific outcome metrics for county-run schools. Some state accountability measurements, such as standardized test scores and graduation, rates, don't fit county schools whose students attend short-term. Alternative measures might be pre- and post-tests of skills, and program credits while enrolled, the LAO said.
- Requiring an expenditure report encompassing multiple sources that would break down spending by program. The format should enable cross-county comparisons, the LAO said. This type of reporting, which fiscal accountability groups have long called for, would establish a precedent. The administrations of Govs. Jerry Brown and Gavin Newsom have opposed uniform accountability codes as an encroachment on local control.

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