

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HOLLY J. MITCHELL
AND JANICE HAHN**

November 4, 2025

Access to Learning: Fighting for the Rights of Incarcerated Youth

All Youth in California, including those who are incarcerated, have a fundamental right to education. The Education Justice Coalition (EJC) reviewed suspension rates for the 2023-2024 school year and found that, “one in three young people incarcerated in Los Padrinos graduated from high school while nearly one in four were suspended.”¹ The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) reports that 25.7% of students at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Court School and 29.2% of students at Dorothy Kirby Center were suspended at least once - far exceeding the statewide average. The unique setting of these schools can further exacerbate the impact of suspension.

Suspensions have grave long-term effects on student outcomes and can significantly alter the trajectory of a young person’s life. When students are suspended, they lose invaluable instructional time, which negatively affects academic performance over time. ² A 2018-2019 Youth Law Center report states, “It is likely that even before entering the juvenile justice system, court school students experienced prior suspension

¹ [Who has the power? Chronicling Los Angeles County’s systemic failures to educate incarcerated youth](#)

² <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/school-suspensions-do-more-harm-good>

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or expulsions, school attendance issues...”³ Even in non-carceral settings, suspensions have been linked to an “increased likelihood of subsequent arrest as well as failure to advance academically to the next grade, or to graduate.”⁴ Furthermore, suspension rates reported by EJC raise concerns about the disproportionate impact on Black students. Suspensions in juvenile halls and camps should be avoided as much as possible to ensure students do not miss valuable learning time. The suspension process must be transparent and clearly communicated to youth, as it can affect their legal case.

Following the court’s mandate to depopulate Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, student transitions have led to a significant increase in suspension rates over the past six months. LACOE has begun addressing this increase by identifying contributing factors, expanding behavioral supports such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, and improving training for teachers and substitutes. Still, the County of Los Angeles has ongoing work to do to address the increase of suspensions in probation facilities, which serve youth who have long faced systemic disparities. Students should also have agency in shaping solutions that foster a positive educational environment. There should be clear avenues for students to provide feedback and provide support to implement programming and school climate changes. Data presented by the Youth Law Center suggest that achieving zero suspensions and expulsions is possible, offering an opportunity to examine the practices that contributed to those outcomes.

WE THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Request the Superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) in coordination with the Probation Oversight Commission (POC) and a credible academic research institution, to review and analyze suspension rates, including chronic absenteeism in the juvenile camps and halls from the 2023-2024 school year and prior years, dating back to 2014-2015, to identify trends and disparities across the juvenile facilities and report back to the Board in writing, in

³<https://www.ylc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Out-of-Sight-Out-of-Mind-Report-Nov-2023.pdf>

⁴ <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/student-suspensions-have-negative-consequences-according-nyc-study>

60 days, with findings. The analysis should include but not be limited to:

- a. Reasons for suspensions, duration of suspensions, and instructional time lost, including, but not limited to, challenges related to escorting youth to classes.
 - b. Data for suspensions initiated by probation personnel paired with justifications.
 - c. Data for suspensions initiated by substitute teachers with justifications.
 - d. Demographic disparities present in suspension data.
2. Request the Superintendent of LACOE in coordination with the Director of the Department of Youth Development (DYD), the POC, community stakeholders, youth in Los Angeles County (County), and youth-led and centered organizations, to take steps to minimize the negative effects of exclusionary disciplinary policies and continue to prioritize positive behavior interventions and supports. The steps should include the following actions:
 - a. Review the existing criteria for *Student Suspension Process at Juvenile Halls and Camps*, that is accessible to the students, to ensure they have clarity of expectations to prevent the use of zero-tolerance policies.
 - b. Implement strategies to identify and remediate learning gaps caused by disciplinary removal from class or unintended consequences from student transitions.
 - c. Develop a plan for implementation of restorative justice models, with input from external stakeholders, in the juvenile camps and halls.
3. Request the Superintendent of LACOE in coordination with the Chief Probation Officer to review and implement the Education Justice Coalition's August 2025 report, including its 18 recommendations to improve educational access in the juvenile detention facilities. This should include a joint plan to ensure that student support services for academic intervention and college/career preparations are provided, and that critical special education supports for students with disabilities

are provided. A written report back on the status of all remediation efforts and action steps in response to each recommendation should be submitted to the Board in 60 days.

4. Direct the Chief Probation Officer and Director of DYD, to coordinate with the Superintendent of LACOE to establish a youth led council at each facility to inform programming and provide ongoing feedback. The Council should meet regularly and include a youth advocate and credible messenger. Recommendations should be shared with the POC, which will meet consistently with LACOE and Probation to review and provide feedback.
5. Request the Superintendent of LACOE, and the Director of DYD, in consultation with the Chief Probation Officer, POC, the Commission for Children and Families, the Directors of the Department of Mental Health, the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiative, and all relevant County departments, and education stakeholders within the County to report back to the Board in writing in 120 days, with a comprehensive assessment of the current landscape of the “school-to-prison” nexus and recommendations on interrupting this system. The report should include, but not be limited to:
 - a. An assessment of youth in the facilities who have histories of suspensions, expulsions, and/or chronic absenteeism prior to arrest.
 - b. Identification of regions and schools that have a high representation of youth in Probation, along with potential resource gaps.

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