

# Community College Programming for Juvenile Justice-Impacted Students

## Opportunities for Reimagining Juvenile Justice through Higher Education

Now is the moment to invest in higher education for youth impacted by the juvenile justice system. Momentum is growing in California to use higher education to combat the impacts of mass incarceration. Higher education reduces recidivism, changes lives, and builds stronger communities. Recently, California has deepened its commitment to providing higher education access to system-impacted students. However, these investments have heavily focused on serving adult populations, and a need remains for serving system-impacted young people.



**With the closure of the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), California must ensure that youth in the juvenile justice system have access to higher education and a clear pathway from detention to college and career opportunities. At the end of 2021, there were over 1,900 youth ages 15 and over in county juvenile facilities. With closure of DJJ, expectation is that the number will grow.**

**In 2020, over 11,000 wardship orders for youth ages 15 and over. Opportunities for higher education programming for Juvenile justice youth is more critical than ever.**

The higher education needs of justice-impacted youth can be met most effectively by creating dedicated programming at local community colleges. Community colleges are the primary point of entry for most incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students in California. They are accustomed to addressing challenges faced by a variety of student populations, and as described below, community colleges are uniquely situated to serve justice-impacted students. Programs like Project Change at the College of San Mateo, founded in 2013, have illustrated the success that can young people can have when provided dedicated support.

Across California, a movement has grown to expand these higher education programs in collaboration with the CA Community College Chancellor's Office Rising Scholars Network and Youth Law Center: The Pathways to Higher Education Project, comprised of community colleges, county offices of education, Probation, legal advocates, and community based organizations with a membership of over 400+ has been working together to share best practices, resources, and offer support to expand higher education programs dedicated to juvenile justice youth. Programs like Project Change, which is part of the Rising Scholars Network, show the success of degree attainment, university transfer, career pathways, and decreased recidivism. These programs reimagine what is possible for our young people with juvenile justice experience.



## The Unique Features of CA's Community Colleges:

### Open Access-

- 116 colleges statewide: courses in-person & online
- No diploma required for enrollment
- Students without a diploma or under age 18 enroll through dual enrollment (free)
- Tuition fee waivers for low-income students, Cal. Promise = 1<sup>st</sup> year free

### Broad Opportunities & Supports-

- Degrees & career pathway certificates in 175+ fields
- Courses transferable to other colleges and UC/CSU
- Supports to help build college readiness
- Assistance with basic needs resources

## Project Change Model Program Overview:

Project Change is a comprehensive community college program providing both on-campus support for system-impacted youth and college programming inside juvenile facilities.

## **Core Model Program Principles:**

### **On-site programming in juvenile facilities and at community/alt. schools**

- In-person and online instruction, supported by technology access
- Comprehensive education program:
  - Courses for UC/CSU credit and college readiness workshops
  - Multiple pathways for degrees, transfer, and/or certificate attainment
  - Dual enrollment to complete HS diploma and gain college credit simultaneously
- Access to academic counseling to ensure students are on degree or certificate paths
- Supports for students' needs and gaps: through tutoring services, concurrent supports, or training in using required technology, as needed

### **Supported transition to college campuses upon release**

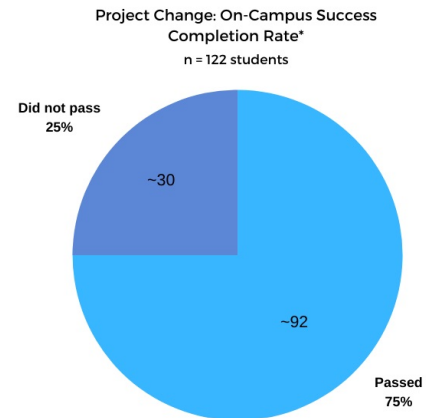
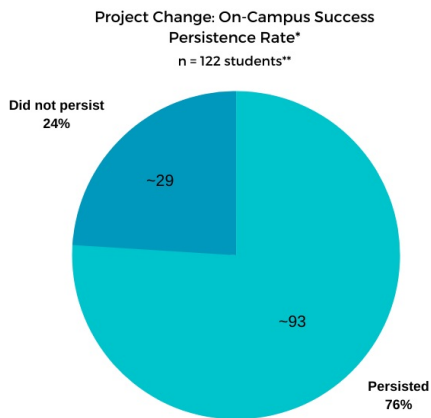
- Direct transition support: high school transcripts, placement, counseling
- Campus tours and orientations
- Fostering of peer-to-peer networks: student clubs & affinity groups to help students develop peer support networks
- Comprehensive wrap-around student support services:
  - Dedicated counseling and financial aid support
  - Basic needs resources (food, transportation, housing stipends)
  - Stipends for textbooks, technology, and other college materials

### **College buy-in and commitment to program success**

- Dedicated college program staff: program coordinator, retention specialist, counselor, and faculty who receive specialized training
- Dedicated on-campus space: office for students to meet with program staff, space for students to meet for social/peer and academic support
- Committed community partners: local high school districts, County Offices of Education, probation departments, and community-based organizations.
- Data collection: a commitment to collect data to ensure success metrics are tracked and reported.
- Amplifying student voices: elevate student voices, not to exploit their experience, but to empower them as experts, leaders, and change agents within the program.

## Outcomes for Success

Students who enroll in the Project Change program complete and pass their courses at a higher rate than other first-year, first generation community college students who have similar demographics: foster youth, first generation college students.



\*Persistence rate is defined to include students who have finished a course and enrolled the following semester.  
\*\*Includes students enrolled on-campus from both community-based settings and within San Mateo County juvenile detention facilities, including Camp Kemp, Youth Services Center, and Gateway Community School.

\*Completion rate is defined to include students who successfully passed their courses with a grade of C or higher.

"I think college has given me the tools to be able to do and be anything I want to be. I don't think I would have had that without those key relationships and those key experiences that I had in community college. Community College was my home, it was my family, it gave me community, self confidence and gave me all of the tools of who I want to be."

-Nick, College of San Mateo Project Change Alum and UCLA Student

