

# J THE JOURNAL

OF JUVENILE COURT, COMMUNITY, AND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF CALIFORNIA

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- ✓ 2024 Peshkoff Award Winner  
Pam Coronado
- ✓ 2024 Teacher of the Year  
Winner Brent Rodriguez
- ✓ Fourteen scholarly articles  
authored by distinguished  
educators

Lead

Serve

Succeed

JCCASAC  
conference  
2024



CALIFORNIA COUNTY  
SUPERINTENDENTS

PROMOTE | INFLUENCE | ADVOCATE

Cover image created with Adobe Firefly  
Prompt: staircase made out of books, books are the steps, education background, bright colors with sun in background, space for text

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# JUVENILE COURT, COMMUNITY, AND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF CALIFORNIA



## VISION

Under the direction of the California County Superintendents, JCCASAC is a professional educational organization dedicated to preparing students who are enrolled in county alternative education programs to become self-sufficient adults who lead healthy lifestyles and are competent, caring, and academically prepared for their futures.

## MISSION

The mission of JCCASAC is to support student success by creating a collegial network of County Office administrators who:

- Research and share best practices regarding new and innovative program options for at-risk students
- Provide training, support and assistance to new administrators
- Endorse and support legislation that advocates for the learning needs of all students
- Give input and guidance to the superintendents relative to the diverse needs of our student population

## GOALS

- Improve student achievement through research and sharing best practices
- Support special projects that enhance instructional programs
- Provide regular training for new county office administrators
- Conduct successful conferences with statewide representation
- Publish the JCCASAC Journal that informs superintendents, administrators, teachers, and affiliated agencies of the latest research, effective teaching practices and methodologies, and that showcases successful programs
- Provide scholarships to eligible graduating seniors in order to encourage life long learning
- Represent JCCASAC through participation in statewide committees
- Monitor legislation affecting County Office alternative education programs
- Advocate for legislation and policies that support the unique needs of our student population

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



**Joanne L. Finney**

**Principal**

**San Diego SOAR Academy at the  
Youth Transition Campus**

On behalf of the JCCASAC Board, I would like to welcome you to the 54th Annual JCCASAC Conference here in Monterey. For over 50 years, the JCCASAC Community has shared evidence-based practices and has advocated for the most marginalized students in our counties. Our work is highly specialized, and JCCASAC aims to support each county in providing the best educational experiences to its students. I am truly humbled and appreciative of our members who have gone above and beyond to share their knowledge. Through our shared experiences, we can impact our students, staff, and communities by letting them know they matter.

I am thankful for the JCCASAC organization, our history, and our shared understanding, which permits us to network with one another. While each county program is unique, we share a common vision and mission of supporting student success by creating a collegial network of County Office Administrators who research and share what is new and what is best, as well as provide training, support, advocate, and endorse legislation and give input to our state and counties relative to the diverse needs of our at-risk students. It is our deepest hope of our Board that JCCASAC continues to be your best resource. We encourage you to stay connected and become involved by frequently visiting our newly designed website, attending our Regional and General Membership meetings, and attending our culminating yearly JCCASAC Conference.

It has been an honor and a privilege serving as the JCCASAC Chair this past year. I am genuinely appreciative of having had the opportunity of being a member of this Board, and I remain grateful for their continued support. I know that each JCCASAC Board member cares deeply about our profession, our colleagues, and, most of all, our students. There is no other organization like our JCCASAC. I am positive that as new members, you, too, will get involved and network with our peers across the state and across the nation. Here, you will find inspiration, passion, and a commitment to excellence, as well as make long-lasting friendships.

We hope you take advantage of the next three days to rest, relax, and rejuvenate in beautiful Monterey. Join us in embracing the opportunity to LEAD, SERVE and SUCCEED in making sure that each person, each student, knows #YOUMATTER! I appreciate your support of JCCASAC, and I look forward to seeing you throughout the conference.

# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR-ELECT



**Mark Yost**

**Director,**

**San Joaquin County Office of  
Education**

On behalf of the JCCASAC Executive Board I would like to welcome you to the 54th Annual JCCASAC State Conference, here in beautiful Monterey, California.

I can say without hesitation that I have thoroughly enjoyed my career choice of becoming an educator. In my 38 years in education, it has been both a pleasure and an honor to serve students, families, community organizations and educators, in the capacities of a coach, para-professional, alternative education teacher, special education teacher and administrator. And I feel extremely humbled to now be able to serve as the 2024 JCCASAC Chair Elect.

The work of this organization makes a difference by providing ongoing support for students attending court and community school programs in California. This network and state conference gives us opportunities to learn about the innovative work and programs our colleagues across the state are doing that positively impact students. These court and community educational programs enable students to experience academic success as well as social and emotional growth. And JCCASAC serves as a place for us to learn from each other and share best practices.

Being a part of JCCASAC also means we are not alone when facing new challenges. As county offices experience the loss of supplemental funding sources, there will be budgetary implications. But even in financially challenging times, juvenile court, community, and alternative programs will be able to be creative, be innovative, and adapt to these changes in order to continue serving students, families, and our community.

I admire all of you who have chosen to do this work. You are difference-makers in the lives of your students in these programs. Your choice and dedication to this profession has made all of you extraordinary human beings.

This year's conference theme -- Lead, Serve, Succeed -- was chosen to encourage all of us at the conference to reflect on current practice as leaders, to enhance what works, and to tweak (or scrap) what does not work. A primary goal of this conference is for attendees to come away with the knowledge to become better leaders

with the mindset of serving those in need with humility and without reservation. Being a servant-leader will ultimately enable those around us to experience successes.

The 54th Annual JCCASAC Conference will feature inspiring keynote speakers: Hamish Brewer, known as the Tattooed Skateboarding Principal; Dr. Daisy Gonzales, former foster youth and Deputy Chancellor of California Community Colleges; and Dr. Sacha Joseph-Mathews, Vice President and Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer for California State University, Stanislaus. These next two-and-a-half days will be filled with 27 professional learning workshops that will include presentations from our county office programs, the California Department of Education, the California County Superintendents, and a special hands-on presentation by the culinary arts students from the San Joaquin County Office of Education, showcasing their food truck.

Thank you for attending the 54th Annual JCCASAC Conference! We hope you will have a memorable and rewarding experience and walk away with the continued challenge to Lead, Serve, and Succeed!



Image created with Ideogram

**Prompt:** A visually appealing graphic design of a large banner. The banner is bright and vibrant. In bold bright yellow letters, the words 'Lead, Serve, Succeed' stand out, highlighting the core values of the conference. A navy blue ribbon at the top contains the event title "54th Annual". A navy blue ribbon at the bottom contains the event's title "JCCASAC Conference". The overall design conveys a sense of motivation, growth, and unity.



## Troy Brown, Ed.D

Superintendent,  
San Joaquin County Office of  
Education

I am pleased to welcome all of you to the 54th annual conference of the Juvenile Court, Community and Alternative School Administrators of California (JCCASAC)!

It is our pleasure at the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE) to help plan this year's conference in beautiful Monterey County. And it has been our honor at the SJCOE to have been an active member of this vital committee for so many years. You understand the importance of sharing best practices, collegial interaction, and networking when it comes to providing the level of service our students deserve. This commitment to service by JCCASAC also reflects our own core values of service at the SJCOE.

The SJCOE is a service organization. In our own county, we provide educational leadership, resources, and customized services to assist our county's 14 school districts and educators. In addition to providing direct services to our county's most vulnerable students, we also hold academic competitions, promote student achievement, and strive to strengthen the community of educators through networks, professional learning, and summits focused on important issues, including school safety, chronic absenteeism, and more. For our students learning how to read, the SJCOE, along with all our county's 14 school districts and San Joaquin Delta Community College, formed the first all-county community of practice committed to working together to improve early literacy.

Our service outside San Joaquin County includes coordinating regional partnerships. We also provide the educational component at Discovery ChalleNGe Academy, a National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program serving all of Northern California. And our in-house software development department, CodeStack, powers EDJOIN, which is used throughout California and beyond. We started our Teachers College of San Joaquin to address the teacher shortage in our region by creating a path to putting high quality educators in classrooms. Through our Greater Valley Conservation Corps (GVCC), young adults ages 18 to 26 earn a paycheck and strengthen their career skills while restoring natural habitat, supporting recycling, or performing other services in a five-county region to make communities greener and cleaner places to live.



And participating in JCCASAC is a way all of us on this committee impact education in our state. I believe that this year's theme -- **Lead. Serve. Succeed.** -- says so much about this committee and the work its members have done over the years.

You strive to give students an opportunity to **succeed**. Many of the students in our programs at county offices of education face barriers to success in school and life. This does not deter you from showing students their own way to academic success that will prepare them to become self-sufficient adults with bright futures ahead of them. You know how to do this because you know your students. You listen to them and understand their individual stories. Their stories inspire you to do even more. You connect them to the path for success by meeting them where they are. You meet them without judgment, and you meet them with love.

This brings me to the concept of **service**, another part of this year's conference theme. In the programs you administer, you understand that the work you do is rooted in service, both to your students and the community in which they live. Our communities can flourish when all our students have the opportunity to thrive. You understand the responsibility you have in serving your community because you are leaders.

You **lead**. This is the third part of the theme of this conference. You are leaders in your organizations and in your counties, which is why you are all here. JCCASAC is a community of leaders, and this annual conference makes that community stronger. This is one way you share best practices and learn from one another. Collectively, you are the leaders in California when it comes to educating our state's at-risk students. Your advocacy for your students moves policy at the state level. And in your home counties, you are doing the work to create and sustain innovative programs. You guide other educators, and you cultivate talent and passion to grow and support new leaders.

Through JCCASAC, we show we understand we are on the same team. We believe our students deserve teachers and administrators who think creatively to meet their students' needs, and we never underestimate the difference we can make in our students' lives each day.

Thank you, all, for participating in the 2024 JCCASAC Conference to continue this work and have a greater impact as you come together to **lead** the state in the **service** of students, so they have every opportunity to **succeed**.



**SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**



## Deneen Guss, Ed.D Superintendent, Monterey County Superintendent of Schools

I am Dr. Deneen Guss, Monterey County Superintendent of Schools. It is with great pleasure and excitement that I extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you to our beautiful Monterey County where every day is a great day!

It is such an honor that the 54th Annual Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative School Administrators of California (JCCASAC) Conference is right here in Monterey.

Under the visionary direction of our county superintendents, JCCASAC stands as a beacon of hope and opportunity for students enrolled in county alternative education programs. Our collective mission is clear: to mold these students into self-sufficient adults who lead healthy lifestyles and are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in their futures.

As we gather for a few days of learning and knowledge exchange, we do so with a shared mission: to support student success, foster innovation, and champion the diverse needs of our students. Together, we form a powerful network of educators, administrators, and advocates united in our commitment to creating a brighter future for every student who walks through our doors.

The theme of this year's conference: Lead, Serve, Succeed is so fitting for the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of alternative education. Our role as leaders is more crucial now than ever before. It is through our collective efforts that we pave the way for a brighter tomorrow, where every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

As we are here together, let us embrace the spirit of collaboration, innovation, and empowerment. Let us seize this opportunity to learn from one another, to exchange ideas, and to chart a course toward a future where every student's dreams are within reach.

On behalf of the entire JCCASAC community, I extend my deepest gratitude to each of you for your dedication, passion, and unwavering commitment to the success of our students.

Welcome again, and I hope you enjoy the conference and your stay here in beautiful Monterey.



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# A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

## SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION'S "QUEST" ALLOWS STUDENTS TO CHALLENGE THEMSELVES AND EXPLORE THE WORLD

A group of high school students on bicycles pedaled their way down a path winding through a mountain meadow surrounded by tall peaks of the High Sierra.

Their route passed connections with other paths that could lead these students just about anywhere, but they knew the path to follow. They kept pushing -- mile after mile -- alongside a river down a trail that eventually hugged the coastline of deep Lake Tahoe.

The natural world opened up to them as they pushed themselves even harder to keep cycling, even as the trail turned upwards into the thin, mountain air.

Some had never been to these mountains before. None had ever had an experience quite like this.

This is an example of a Quest, an out-of-classroom experience available to students in the one.Program, the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE) alternative education program.

Whether they take place in the mountains or in a museum -- a one.Program Quest is designed to challenge students and broaden their horizons. Completing a Quest is an accomplishment -- a badge of honor that promises future challenges can be overcome, too.

"It's like going on different adventures," said Macie, a student from one.Main in Manteca. It's the surroundings, but it is also having the experience with different people, too, she said. "So, it's kind of like stepping out of my comfort zone," she said. "Yeah. It's nice."

A one.Program Quest challenges students to do something new and adventurous, said Lucas Homdus, one.Program coordinator.

"The Quest is important to students because it allows them to experience something that is a little bit bigger. It gives exposure to the world, and it gives opportunities for relationship building," Homdus said.

"It's kind of the essence of who we are in the one.Program," he said.



Through small-school settings and a dedicated team of educators and support staff -- the one.Program puts a premium on building relationships with students to help them find success that might have been elusive in other school environments.

The Quest builds a connection that lasts, he said.

"It's something that doesn't go away," he said. "It's that shared

experience that students are able to have with each other and their teachers. That's a connection that happens during those Quests."

Quests for one.Program are peppered throughout the school year. They could focus on the arts, bring students to a zoo, or let students try their hand at playing a round of disc golf. This year, the program added a Quest that gave students a chance to hike and kayak around Lodi Lake, opening up a unique outdoor experience in students' backyard.

The trip to Lake Tahoe is called the Honor Quest. It is the only overnight trip and offers the most challenges. This year's Honor Quest started with the 23-mile bike ride.

It's a logistical challenge, too. The support team from the one.Program coordinates the trip and comes along with a truckload of supplies used to keep students well-fed the whole time.

The theme of relationship building and working together applies across the one.Program, for staff members as well as students.

On a Quest, office staff who might have only known students as a name on a computer screen volunteer to join the support team and get to know the students they serve, said Ryan Flores, a coordinator with the program's Student Services department.

"We're all working together to provide an opportunity and good experience for these students to do something challenging," he said. "It's definitely a team effort."

To Orbelin, a student in the one.Program, it just felt different being in the mountains.

He described noticing the difference in the amount oxygen in his lungs at high altitude when he biked up a steep slope. And the scenery kept changing -- rushing past him on the downhill straightaways, "like a roller coaster," he said.

Then he saw Lake Tahoe for the first time. He got off the bike, took off his shoes and socks and felt how cold the water was.

Jason Huntsinger, a math and science teacher at one. Charter Bianchi in Stockton, was there when Orbelin and other students stepped into the lake.

"The different modes of learning were all kicking into high gear and they were enjoying it. They were satisfied with the destination they'd come to,"

Huntsinger said. "For me, that was the moment I was like: This is all worth it."

Callbacks to the trip could be used to bring real-life examples into classroom work in math and science, he said. "Now it's not just an ambiguous example from a textbook. Now I'm able to use an example of an adventure I've been on with students to teach mathematical concepts."

But most of all, he built stronger relationships with his students on the quest. "Building relationships is everything. If you don't have a relationship with a student, you can't teach them."

Looking back at the end of the first day, Shadi, one. Charter Bianchi student, admitted that she had been a little nervous about the long bike ride, at first. But that didn't last. "It was very fun, I enjoyed it."

She and her fellow students had finished setting up their tents at Camp Richardson. Trees towered over campsites a stone's throw away from the Lake Tahoe shore. Shadi took it all in, sharing how much she loved being surrounded by nature.

"I feel like I needed this. Personally. Just getting away from social media," she said. "I feel like these kinds of field trips are important to kids who need them."

A chipmunk scurrying around the central campsite was fast becoming a sort-of mascot to students as well as the staff setting up to start cooking the evening meal.

"We're going to have a campfire -- right there -- and just spend time with people and get to know new people," Shadi said. "We're going to eat good tonight!"

After filling up on post-dinner s'mores, the students and adults made a large circle around the campfire.

Gathering in a circle is something that happens frequently in a one.Program classroom. It's a time to check in, connect, and -- if a student is feeling up to it -- share what they're feeling.

Homdus asked them to share their feelings on the day.

"Tired."

"Happy."

"It was really pretty, and I'm super sore."

"Beautiful."

"At peace."

Liberty, a one.Main student, talked about laughing with her teacher and classmates, stopping along the way to take photos.

"The best part of the day was the people I was with," she said. "They made the experience even better."

When it was time to end the circle, Homdus closed the day the same way he started it: Leading the group in a short cheer: "One. Two. Three. one.!" ending with a single clap.

Then, the students went back to their campsites.

Daniel, from one.Bianchi had been to Lake Tahoe before, but not to camp. He lay down in the back of a truck and looked up at the night sky.

Without any streetlights, the sky looked a lot different than it did in Stockton, he said. "It was almost unreal. I felt it was an out-of-body experience."

He said he felt good about what he had accomplished that day. He was more comfortable riding his own single-gear bike, so he didn't have the benefits of a low gear to help him up the hills. Still, he said he felt like he could do it again.

The students went back to their tents to sleep, with promises of new challenges and experiences the next day would bring. They knew it would involve a steep, high-altitude hike that would take hours. But they also knew that the reward at the end was a pristine lake surrounded by wilderness.



Before first light, the one.Program team worked in the dark to cook up enough pancakes and sausage to carry the students forward.

Then the sun rose on a new day and the next challenge.

**More online:**

**Join the one.Program team on an Honor Quest to Lake Tahoe in [this video feature](#).**



# ONE.CRUIKSHANK HOLDS ART COMPETITION SPEAKER SERIES AND FIRST FACILITY-WIDE ART SHOW!

one.Cruikshank students and staff engaged in a four-part Ethnic Studies speaker series this year highlighting specific messages and lessons key to student growth and development. These lessons include themes of self-love, perseverance, community, critical consciousness, and hope. Part of the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE) one.Program, one.Cruikshank is a court and community school located in San Joaquin County Juvenile Hall.

In August of 2023, television broadcast professional and current play-by-play announcer for the Sacramento Kings, Kyle Draper, spoke to students on perseverance and acceptance as he shared his story about



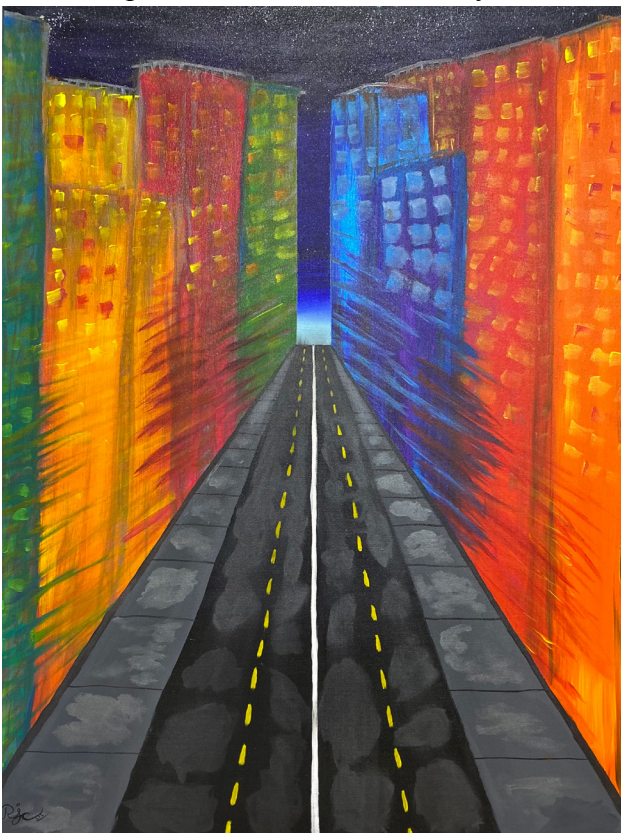
**Best in Show / First Place - High School**  
"New Beginnings" by K.G.

growing up in Philadelphia. Students were able to connect to his journey and the powerful message of saying “no” to harmful situations or issues that would bring him away from his path.

The lessons gleaned from Mr. Draper’s speaking engagement were the focus on the corresponding art competition students were able to participate in. “Students worked on these paintings for nearly two months,” one.Cruikshank Director Doug Silva said. “The final products were meaningful and high-quality. For students, this project was an outlet and provided connection and power to their messages.”

In October of 2023, former one.Program graduate Crystal Sanchez addressed students with the theme of self-love. Her message, shared alongside her former one.Program teacher Vicki Lock, centered around finding space to love herself after living her formative years in survival mode.

“Ms. Lock spoke life into me. She saw in me what I was not able to see in myself,” said Crystal.



**First Place - Graduates**  
"Light At The End" by R.C.



Upon graduation, Crystal obtained her bachelor's degree in criminal justice and is now employed at the SJCOE.

Attendees of Ms. Sanchez' speaker series were able to view the winning artwork from one.Cruikshank's first facility-wide art show. Congratulations to each of the winners:

**Best in Show / First Place - High School**

"New Beginnings" by K.G.

**First Place - Graduates**

"Light At The End" by R.C.

**Distinguished Landscapes**

"Stillness At The Mountains" by A.C.

**Honorable Mentions**

"Vision Of Serenity" by S.P.

"Sacred And The Faithful" by D.F.

"Sunny Beach Day" by L.M.



**Distinguished Landscapes**  
"Stillness At The Mountains" by A.C.



**Honorable Mention**  
"Vision Of Serenity" by S.P.



**Honorable Mention**  
"Sacred And The Faithful" by D.F.



**Honorable Mention**  
"Sacred And The Faithful" by D.F.

# THE IMPACT OF CHILD FIND OBLIGATIONS ON DISCIPLINE IN EDUCATION

BY MICHELLE TAYLOR-LANGHAM,  
DIRECTOR, SPECIAL EDUCATION/ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION  
KERN COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

## **The Impact of Child Find on Discipline in Education**

It is estimated that 1.3 million youth in the United States have a disability (Grant, 2020). With a number this high, the education system must have a system in place to properly identify and prioritize the system of assessment and supports for these students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) includes a legal requirement known as Child Find. Child Find requires local education agencies (LEA) and all schools to locate, identify, and assess all children with a disability or suspected disability (Zirkel, 2018). Some general education students, who have not been identified as eligible for special education, could be entitled to the procedural safeguards under IDEA (Dome, 2016). If the student that is referred for discipline has a suspected disability and the school or local education agency failed its Child Find obligations to identify the student as a student with a disability, the school may be liable for compensatory services, civil tort claims, and the student may suffer damages to their wellbeing.

## **Practices, Policies, or Procedures that Relate to Child Find Obligations**

The federal law states that each state must have in effect policies and procedures to ensure that all children with disabilities residing in the state who may be in need of special education supports or services are located, identified and assessed (IDEA, 2004). Federal law drives state policy and procedure. Each state creates an education code at the state level. Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA), Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and school districts create board policy and administrative regulation based on the federal and state law and education code. This law includes children that are homeless, wards of the court/state, attending a private school, attending a court school, migrant, or on a homeschool waiver. Any student must be evaluated regardless of the severity of the suspected disability

according to the law (Zirkel, 2018). If the school district does not agree with a request to evaluate a child, an educational right's holder or guardian may request a due process hearing through the office of administrative hearings (OAH). In addition, the interpretation of the federal law by the Department's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) and Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) provide "pattern of strength and weakness" in intervention including response to intervention (RTI), severe discrepancy, and research-based alternative (Zirkel, 2018). These interpretations often result in "dear colleague" letters that assist in best practice in local education agencies and schools.

## **Importance of the Impact of Child Find Obligations on Discipline in Education**

Whether or not a student is entitled to procedural safeguards as a student with a disability for the purposes of a conduct violation will depend on whether the district had a basis of knowledge, sometimes referred to as reasonable suspicion in some states. A basis of knowledge is established when the district knew or may have known that the student was, or may be, a student with a disability at the time of the conduct violation (Dome, 2016). By analogy, school districts' Child Find obligation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) depends at a threshold matter on an accurate awareness of its specific meaning. Yet, the primary modern meaning—the legal obligation to evaluate an individual child upon basis of knowledge or reasonable suspicion of eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004)—represents a marked shift from the focus of Child Find in the original version of this legislation, which was to disseminate notice to parents of historically excluded children with disabilities of the availability of special education services (Zirkel, 2015). A basis of knowledge can be established by a parent, guardian, or educational right's holder

requesting special education assessment. It can also be established by a parent, guardian, or educational right's holder expressing concern to supervisory or administrative personnel that the student may be in need of special education. Additionally, a district may have a basis of knowledge if a teacher or other school personnel has expressed specific concerns about the student to supervisory or administrative personnel. This is the safeguard that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) had in place for students with disabilities – the school system itself. In some cases, a student may be referred to a Student Success Team (SST) but not yet be evaluated for special education and have a conduct violation. Many schools and local education agencies have implemented a response to intervention strategy to students referred by teachers or other school personnel prior to a formal comprehensive assessment. A more recent discussion around the basis of knowledge and conduct violation is mental health hospitalizations (Dome, 2016). If a district has knowledge of therapeutic or mental health hospitalization or mental health hold, there may be a basis of knowledge of an existing disability. If a basis of knowledge exists at the time that the student engaged in the conduct violation, then the student is entitled to procedural safeguards and the district will need to determine whether it has authority to move forward with discipline in the same manner as students without disabilities. If it is determined that there is a basis of knowledge, the student is entitled to an expedited educational assessment to determine special education eligibility. If assessment is conducted and the student is found eligible as a student with a disability their conduct violation will now go through a manifestation determination review to determine if the conduct violation was a manifestation of their disability. The manifestation determination will also review whether or not the student was receiving a free and appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act aligned with their identified needs according to the assessment at the time of the conduct violation. If the manifest determination review cannot answer yes to both of the questions in

review, the student will not be able to be disciplined in the same manner as their non-disabled peers (Dome, 2016).

### **Steps Taken to Address the Impact of Child Find Obligations on Discipline in Education**

Federal law mandates that each state department of education follow the federal law mandates surrounding Child Find. Ultimately, each local education agency (LEA) and school must have a Special Education Local Plan approved by the state department of education and the board that is inclusive of board policy and administrative regulations that clearly follow the Child Find obligations under the federal law. General education students that have not yet been identified as a student with a disability but are in the process of a conduct violation that may result in removal from school are addressed in 34 C.F.R. 300.534. This federal education code speaks specifically to protections for children not determined eligible for special education and related services. Overall studies encourage all states to embark on productive, evidence-based evaluations (Derrington & Sharpiro, 2004). To ensure that all local education agencies (LEAs) and schools are following Child Find mandates and providing intervention for general education students, districts should provide training to all staff that have interaction with students multiple times a year with emphasis to staff that provide tier two and their three supports in academic, social emotional, mental health, or behavioral support to general education students (Zirkel, 2015).

Federal law mandates the need for each specific state to have policy and procedure for Child Find under IDEA. Each state creates state education code and policy that follows the federal mandates and those state level education codes drive local and district level board policy and administrative regulation. Despite special education law being in place for over 45 years, there are still holes in the practices (Grant, 2020).

Research of 15 states revealed that most local

education agencies still rely primarily on parent referrals (Grant, 2020). Consistent research shows that the practices and policies are ineffective and inequitable. The most recent data submitted to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) shows that students coming from parents or families that are not equipped with the resources, knowledge, or other privileges may not be able to advocate for their students leaving the students unidentified as a student with a disability and the student disproportionately identified as having a conduct violation rather than a disability (Office of Civil Rights, 2018).

### **School Discipline in Students with Disabilities**

Minority groups in special education continue to be disproportionately represented in discipline. Data collected from state and federal departments of education consistently shows African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students with disabilities receiving disproportionate discipline in local education agencies and schools (Burr & Payne, 2023). In reviewing data from policies and practices, most public education systems are relying heavily on exclusion from the classroom as the primary discipline strategy (Burr & Payne, 2023). Skinner introduced the idea of operant conditioning in the 1930's and explained the basic principles of reinforcement, extinction, primary and secondary reinforcers, the Premack principle, punishment, schedules of reinforcement, generalization, and discrimination (Schunk, 2020). Based on Skinner's research and what is known about behaviorism, the idea of relying primarily on exclusion and punishment is not an evidence-based practice of discipline that will motivate a student to change a behavior or master a new skill. It is important that schools and local education agencies are tracking data on exclusion for all students but most importantly students with disabilities. Students are missing out on instruction and learning opportunities every time they are removed from the classroom (Burr & Payne, 2023). Some schools have started to implement exclusion logs to help identify patterns of conduct

violations, behavioral deficits, and possible mental health needs (Grant, 2020). Anytime a student with a disability is facing discipline or a conduct violation, careful consideration should be made to determine if the behavior or conduct violation is related to the student's disability. If there is a possibility that there is a correlation to the student's disability additional measures should be taken to support the student in the educational environment including but not limited to additional assessment, functional behavior assessment, educationally related mental health services, behavior intervention services and /or referral to community agencies for additional services (Dome, 2016).

### **Criminal Behavior and School Discipline in students with Disabilities**

In recent years, there has been a focus on the correlation between criminal behavior and school discipline. A recent study compared 143 students in juvenile justice systems that were identified as students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers in the same juvenile justice system (Grigorenko et al., 2019). The study showed that when the students with disabilities were receiving the supports and services aligned with their identified disability as a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) aligned with Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004), the students with disabilities were less likely to receive policy violation, out-of-school suspensions, and in-school suspensions. An important finding of this study was the pattern of behavior for students at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system. The study was able to suggest that further research should be done in the area of students with a high percentage of recidivism (Grigorenko et al., 2019). The study suggested that in reviewing school discipline and patterns of behavior and conduct violations prior to involvement with the juvenile justice system or recidivism the student may be able to receive intervention to intercede criminal involvement. Another study looked at the use of exclusionary discipline in schools and the correlation to elevated

risk of arrest and incarceration (Jackson, 2022). The study used data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS). While the study recommends that more research be done on this topic, the research that was reviewed indicated that students that had been subjected to exclusionary discipline had interaction with law enforcement at a younger age and had experienced law enforcement intrusiveness during their encounters. The study focuses on community and school partnerships focusing on restorative practices rather than exclusionary and intrusive encounters for students.

### Gaps in Research

Despite the increase in available information on Child Find violations, Office of Administrative Hearing, and Office of Civil Rights, there appears to be limited research and data on the correlation between early intervention of identification of students with disabilities under Child Find and discipline. The data showing a relationship between students not yet being identified as a student with a disability not receiving appropriate supports and services having a conduct violation as a result of not receiving a Free and Appropriate Public Education “FAPE” come from students and families filing for due process and exercising their procedural safeguards under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). There is very little data from the families that may be disadvantaged or are not educated on their rights. As research has shown, most schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are relying on parent and guardian referrals for initial special education assessments and not following the guidance of federal and state mandates. Additional research to determine how many students that receive expulsions resulting in a student’s change in

placement are suspected of having a disability needs to be done. This research would allow schools, local education agencies, and ultimately lawmakers to review data and determine what changes need to be made. When reviewing discipline data for each state, students are either identified as having a disability or not. Research in this area may be difficult so to the gray area of students not yet identified (California Department of Education, 2023).

### Conclusion

If Child Find practices and policies don’t change, students from environmentally disadvantaged homes

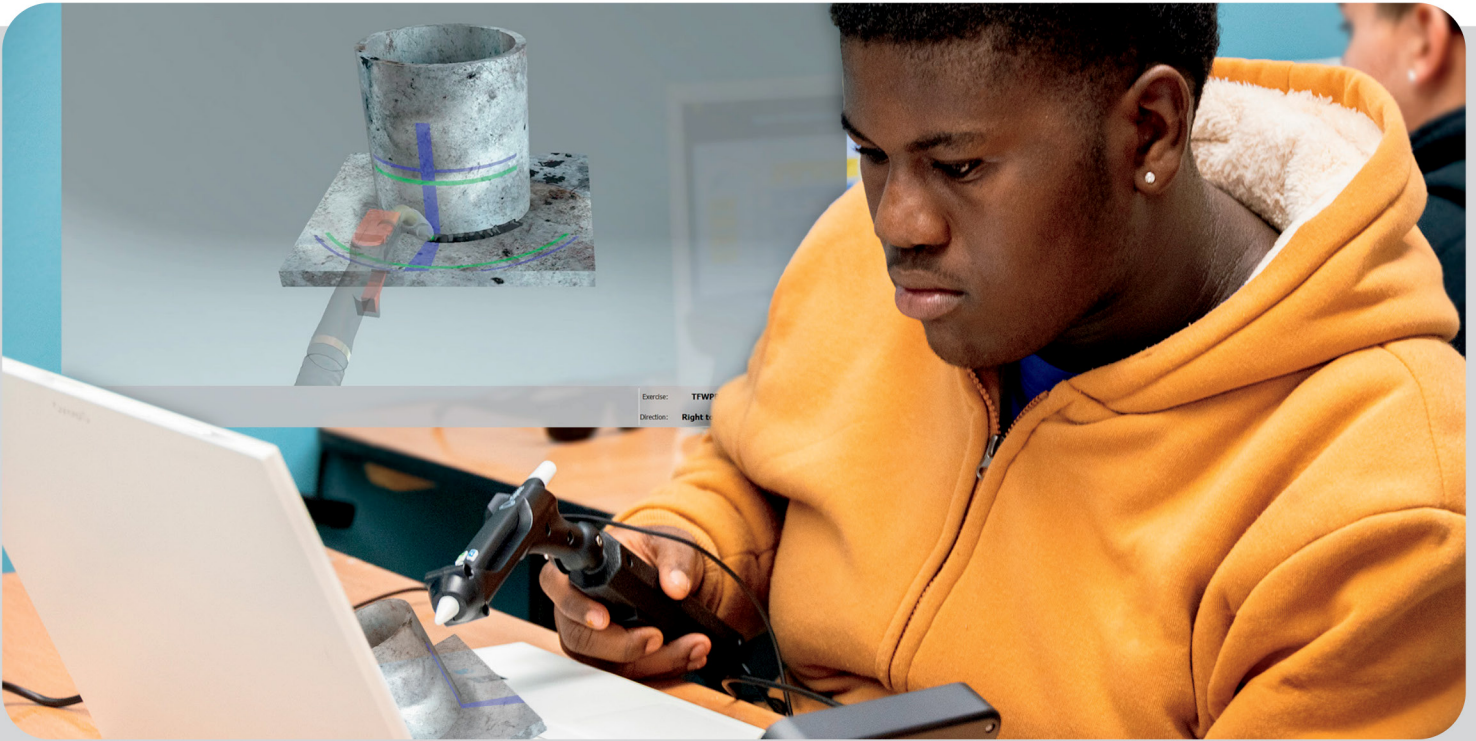
**"...when the students with disabilities were receiving the supports and services aligned with their identified disability as a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) aligned with Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004), the students with disabilities were less likely to receive policy violation, out-of-school suspensions, and in-school suspensions."**

will continue to be overlooked by Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) itself has the Child Find requirement to be a safeguard for students. Research has shown that schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are relying mostly on parents and guardians to request initial special education assessment. The impact of

Child Find obligations and violations will continue to have an effect on discipline in education if schools and LEAs do not have effective and equitable practices in place to identify and assess students with suspected disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and Child Find should not be a procedural safeguard for the privileged middle class, but rather a safeguard for all students regardless of environmental, background, or demographic information. Research points out that these students that are not being identified by Child Find and having exclusionary discipline measures imposed on them including expulsion and change of placement may have long-term effects that could have been avoided by early intervention, assessment and services.

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# A New Era of Inclusion: UDL meets Generative AI to Reimagine Learning

By Ryan Hinkle, Jina Poirier, Brianne Parker, and Anne Wolff  
Orange County Department of Education

## UDL and AI: Working Together to Create a More Inclusive Learning Experience

As educators, we all dream of a classroom where every student, regardless of learning style or ability, feels engaged, challenged, and supported. Our team believes that this dream is finally within reach, all thanks to the idea of combining Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with the ground breaking potential of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI). The challenge will be in making sure we're learning about this new tool in tandem with our students, every step of the way. This collaborative process will nurture a genuine learning experience, rather than making assumptions that AI will be used for a means of cheating or taking the easy way out!

Many of us are familiar with the UDL framework, but let's offer a quick refresher and define it for our readers. UDL, created by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), is an educational framework built on three guiding principles: multiple means of representation, offering information in diverse formats; multiple means of action and expression, providing various ways to demonstrate understanding; and multiple means of engagement, fostering motivation and interest. These principles ensure all learners, regardless of individual differences, have equal access to knowledge and the opportunity to become expert learners. As alternative educators, we are all too familiar with the concept of designing for the individual needs of our students; after all, this is what we do! So what exactly is AI? We figured that the perfect way to provide an accurate definition would be to go to the source itself. We asked ChatGPT 4, "What is generative AI?" and this was the response: "Generative AI refers to artificial intelligence systems that have the capability to generate new content, insights, or data that is similar but not identical to the material they were trained on.

This includes creating text, images, music, and other forms of media by understanding patterns, styles, and structures from the training data, thus enabling them to produce original and creative outputs." Basically, it is a powerhouse of possibilities!

Having established a common understanding of UDL and AI, let's explore the limitless possibilities of blending these two tools. The UDL framework acts as a roadmap for teachers, helping to design lessons that are inclusive and accessible for all students. However, implementing UDL can be complex (Singh, 2023), but not out of reach. According to Cornell University (2023), at the heart of accessibility lies the principle of ensuring all learners, including those with disabilities and specific learning challenges, can meaningfully engage with and benefit from their educational experience. Think about it. This accessibility combined with the new opportunities provided by integrating AI, the sky's the limit!

This new technology, capable of generating new content and scenarios, empowers educators to amplify the impact of UDL principles and create truly inclusive learning environments (Singh, 2023). Consider all of the ideas that you have wanted to create and bring to life for students but time was a constraint. Using a tool like AI would empower us as teachers to create five versions of an assignment rather than just two options. Broadening the range to even more students. Imagine teachers leveraging AI to instantly transform a text-heavy lecture into an engaging audio narration, a captivating slideshow, or a series of interactive quizzes (Singh, 2023). This caters to diverse learning styles and preferences, embodying the UDL principle of multiple means of representation (CAST, 2018). Similarly, AI can automatically summarize complex texts, making them accessible to learners with reading difficulties, exemplifying how AI can address specific needs (Singh, 2023).



The powerful connection between student confidence and achievement is well-known to all of us. Using AI-powered tools for feedback and editing can be an impactful way to empower our students on their learning journey!

The possibilities extend far beyond content reformatting. AI can create personalized learning paths, tailoring instruction to individual strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles (Singh, 2023). Envision our students receiving unique sequences of lessons, activities, and assessments, crafted by AI based on their performance and preferences. This personalized approach aligns perfectly with UDL's emphasis on multiple means of action and expression, empowering each learner to demonstrate their understanding in ways that resonate with them (CAST, 2018). The possibilities of personalized learning are seemingly endless. Furthermore, AI can introduce interactive learning through AI chatbots (Singh, 2023). These chatbots can engage students in dialogue, present questions, respond to answers, and provide feedback. We will talk more on how we can use chatbots to ignite conversations for our English Language Learners (ELLs) later in this article. This personalized, conversational approach caters to those who learn best through interaction, reflecting the UDL principle of multiple means of engagement (CAST, 2018). Moreover, AI can significantly improve accessibility by transforming learning materials into formats designed specifically for learners with disabilities. Imagine videos automatically generating captions, complex visuals gaining audio descriptions, or challenging texts being simplified into easily digestible versions (Singh, 2023). This removes barriers and grants equal access to knowledge for all, embodying the spirit of UDL in its purest form (CAST, 2018).

**Prompt DALL-E:** *create an image to demonstrate the connection between AI and UDL*



While UDL and AI offer a powerful combination, accessibility remains paramount. Here are key considerations, adapted from the CTI Accessibility Guide (Cornell University, 2023):

1. AI-generated content should incorporate alt text for images, headings for structure, and clear language.
2. When requiring AI use for assignments, ensure the tool itself is accessible to assistive technologies.
3. Review all AI-generated content: As AI is trained on specific datasets, it might not accurately represent diverse identities. Carefully review content for inclusive language and accurate representation.
4. Use AI to expand, not restrict: Fear of academic dishonesty shouldn't limit flexible learning opportunities offered by AI-powered assignments. Explore ways to address integrity concerns while maintaining accessibility for all.

The fusion of UDL and AI marks a new era in education, an era where inclusion and personalization are not aspirational ideals but tangible realities (Singh, 2023). This powerful combination has the potential to break down barriers, unlock opportunities, and empower every learner to reach their full potential. However, remember that technology alone cannot replace the irreplaceable role of educators. The human touch, with its empathy, guidance, and support, remains vital in nurturing young minds (Singh, 2023). We want to emphasize that relationships and human connection are and will always be the most important factor in learning.

Our students need to feel safe and seen in order to learn. As mentioned in the book *Universal Design for Learning in English Language Arts: Improving Literacy Instruction Through Inclusive Practices*, "...SEL helps learners acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand

and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Novak et al., 2023, 30). The bond cultivated between teacher and student will always be needed. By integrating UDL principles, leveraging the innovative possibilities of AI, and prioritizing accessibility for all, we can create a future where every student can truly experience the joy of learning, regardless of background or individual differences. This is the exciting new era that awaits us, an era where education becomes truly universal, and the potential of every learner can truly shine.

### **Generative AI and English Language Learners**

We totally get it. "Imagine" has popped up more

times here than we can count. But hey, that's just because the opportunities for our students are mind-blowingly endless! Imagine a world where mastering a new language feels as personalized and engaging as playing your favorite video game. As technology progresses, AI has become a promising tool in the realm of education, particularly in language acquisition. As Rusmiyanto et al. (2023) observed, "the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in developing English language learner's communication skills" has become increasingly significant, marking a transformative era in educational methodologies.

**"...AI has opened the door for educators to support their ELLs, with tools that incorporate things such as text-to-speech, language translation, speech-to-text, video captioning and subtitles, and much more."**

This is the future envisioned by researchers like Rusmiyanto and his colleagues in their exploration of AI in language acquisition. In today's globalized world, mastering English is no longer just a bonus, it's a key that unlocks doors to education, collaboration, and career opportunities. Recognizing

this growing need, researchers are turning to AI to revolutionize the way we learn. Imagine practicing your pronunciation and getting instant feedback from a friendly AI voice coach, who tailors the feedback to your specific proficiency level, strengths, weaknesses and interests. Utilizing chatbots that can provide instant feedback and guidance, so that you increase your language processing abilities or better understand complex texts. If we are being honest, the ease of checking grammar and punctuation while writing this article is beyond amazing, and all four of us have a master's degree or higher.

Teachers are forever changing their craft as they struggle to find resources and methodologies that support an inclusive learning environment.

Fortunately, AI has opened the door for educators to support their ELLs, with tools that incorporate things such as text-to-speech, language translation, speech-to-text, video captioning and subtitles, and much more. Wang and Liu argue “that learners who used the application(s) exhibited enhanced speaking skills and greater confidence in real-life communication situations” (Wang, Y., Liu, H., 2019 as cited in Rusmiyanto et al., 2023). They also note that “AI technologies, such as speech recognition systems and virtual tutors, have a positive impact on developing English language learners’ speaking skills.” It is undeniable that AI is creating a new pathway for students to learn English and it is argued that the benefits of AI outweigh the costs.

The story of AI in language learning is just unfolding. Researchers are excited about its potential to transform education, but they emphasize the need for responsible use and continuous exploration. The future of learning English depends on embracing innovation while ensuring ethical and effective integration of technology into the classroom. So, the next time you think about learning another language, remember that you might soon be sharing the learning journey with a friendly AI companion, making the process more personalized, engaging, and ultimately, more successful.

### **Unleashing the Transformative Power of Generative AI**

AI emerges as the next groundbreaking innovation set to revolutionize education. Preceding it, inventions like the overhead projector (1930), photocopier (1959), and handheld calculator (1972) reshaped classrooms (The Evolution Of Technology In The Classroom | Purdue Online, n.d.). Decades later, the Internet, marked on January 1, 1983, and publicly accessible on April 30, 1993, further transformed

education (A Brief History of the Internet, n.d.; Ring, 2023). AI has the power to transform education again. Incorporating AI into education not only marks a significant technological leap but also offers immense potential for advancing UDL. AI-powered tools can dynamically adapt content delivery and assessment methods to accommodate diverse learning styles, preferences, and abilities, thereby fostering inclusivity and equitable access to education for all learners. As one example, AI-powered language translation tools can break down language barriers, ensuring that multilingual learners (MLL) can access content in their first language, promoting comprehension and participation. Using the tools to provide MLL access to complex text can better support them as they begin to analyze the same text in English and use sentence stems to discuss with their classmates. AI doesn’t take over for the teacher or prevent students from learning additional languages, but rather, it eliminates a barrier to ensure students are more prepared to contribute to meaningful discussions with their classmates.

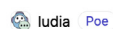
One tool to assist with UDL implementation is an AI chatbot called LUDIA. Dr. Katie Novak first recommended this tool in her blog post AI for UDL: A Review of the AI Tool LUDIA. “LUDIA is an AI chatbot designed by two UDL practitioners, Beth Stark and Jérémie Rostan, to support the implementation of UDL” (Novak, 2023).



Image created with Ideogram

Prompt: large banner that says "Universal Design for Learning". in bold colorful letters.

When prompted with the question “I have multilingual learners in my class. Using content standards, how can I universally design a reading assignment?”, LUDIA responded with the following:

 Ludia Poe

Okay, thanks for providing that context. When designing assignments for ELs, the most important thing is ensuring multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression based on their needs and strengths. A few suggestions:

1. Barriers: Lack of language scaffolding and adaptation can limit comprehension and engagement for ELs.

Checkpoints:

- 1.1 Offer linguistic supports
- 1.2 Offer knowledge building supports
- 1.3 Activate background knowledge

Solutions: Provide cognates/definitions for challenging vocabulary, visual/multimedia versions of texts, and build background knowledge through meaningful discussions tapping prior knowledge.

2. Barriers: Conventional reading assessments stress students differently based on native language.

Checkpoints:

- 3.1 Offer flexible formats
- 3.2 Offer augmented forms of production

Solutions: Allow alternate assignments like creating a graphic novel version, writing a song/poem summary, or role playing a scene. Scaffold assignments with templates, sentence starters etc.

(Universal Design Ludia, 2017)

Dr. Katie Novak's endorsement of Ludia underscores its significance as a practical aid for educators striving to make their classrooms more inclusive and accessible to diverse learners. Novak's acknowledgment in her blog post underscores Ludia's relevance in modern educational practices. Ludia stands as a testament to the transformative potential of AI technology in education. By harnessing the power of artificial intelligence, Ludia catalyzes the evolution of teaching practices, inspiring educators to embrace innovation and equity in their pedagogical endeavors. As UDL continues to gain prominence as a cornerstone of modern education, Ludia serves as a beacon of guidance, enabling educators to navigate the complexities of inclusive teaching with

confidence and efficacy.

Idaho State University, in collaboration with Ed3 DAO, has pioneered a groundbreaking initiative by developing a self-paced course titled "Using AI to Enhance Universal Design for Learning (UDL)." This innovative course represents a significant milestone in the realm of education, as it endeavors to provide a comprehensive guide for diverse learning journeys. At its core, the course is designed to empower educators with the knowledge and tools necessary to effectively leverage artificial intelligence (AI) in order to facilitate learning experiences that cater to the needs of all learners. By adhering to the principles of the UDL framework, the course emphasizes the creation of inclusive and engaging educational environments that accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of students. (Using AI to Enhance Universal Design for Learning, 2024) The utilization of AI technologies within the educational landscape represents a paradigm shift, one that holds immense potential for enhancing the educational experience and maximizing learning outcomes for all individuals. By integrating AI into instructional practices, educators can personalize learning experiences, identify areas of improvement, and adapt teaching methodologies to better suit the needs of each learner. Central to the philosophy of the course is the recognition that the future of education lies in embracing emerging technologies and equipping students with the skills and knowledge required to navigate an increasingly digital world. As educators, our responsibility extends beyond imparting subject matter expertise; we must also ensure that our students are equipped with the necessary tools and competencies to thrive in an ever-evolving technological landscape.

By empowering educators with the expertise to effectively integrate AI into their instructional practices, the course seeks to foster a culture of innovation and inclusivity within educational institutions. Through the adoption of best practices in AI-enhanced teaching and learning, educators can play a pivotal role in shaping the future of education and preparing students for success in an increasingly technology-driven society. As pioneers at the forefront of incorporating AI into the educational setting, Idaho State University and Ed3 DAO are committed to advancing the field of education and championing inclusive learning experiences for all. Together, we are redefining the possibilities of education and paving the way for a future where every learner has the opportunity to thrive.

### The Powerful Combination: UDL and AI

According to Cornell University, AI technologies offer new possibilities for creating accessible learning materials, such as audio descriptions and personalized learning paths. We leveraged AI to create this choice chart, considering diverse learning styles and offering multiple means of expression to engage all learners. Within seconds we had a choice chart based on a previous lesson. AI as a tool for providing choice and voice is powerful. We can't ignore it. Gone are the days of time-consuming adaptations. With AI by our side, we crafted a universally designed choice chart in a flash, offering multiple pathways for all learners to express their understanding. Cornell University acknowledges AI's potential as an accessibility tool but emphasizes the need for thoughtful implementation. They recommend following accessibility guidelines and reviewing AI-generated content for bias and representation. This ensures responsible use of AI that aligns with UDL principles like providing multiple means of access. This is just the beginning - AI's ability to streamline inclusivity

cannot be ignored. The example below is pulled from our adopted inclusive English Language Arts (ELA)

The screenshot shows a digital choice chart for the book 'Refugee'. At the top, it says 'Instruction Day: 2', 'Refugee', and 'Read Pages: 18-33'. The chart is titled 'Let's Discuss...' and is divided into two main sections: 'Class Discussion' and 'Share your Thinking'. The 'Class Discussion' section includes a 'Class Discussion:' prompt with four numbered questions: 1. Have you ever had a friend or family member who had to leave their home or country? 2. What was the experience like? 3. How do they feel about it now? 4. How would you feel if you had to move to another country unexpectedly? Below this is a 'Contract Learning:' section with a prompt: 'Consider using one of the options on our [CL Choice Chart](#) as a tool to allow students to respond through conversation, presentation, or writing.' There is also a 'Chapter Audio Link' for 'Pages 18-33'. The 'Share your Thinking' section has three prompts: 'In my opinion... It occurred to me that... I noticed that.....', 'Build on an Idea' (You made a good point when you said... Even though... I think... Yes, but it's also true that.....), and 'Ask a Question' (Can you give an example of...? What do you mean by...? What would happen if...?). A small 'RP' icon is in the bottom right corner.

curriculum. [ACCESS 2 Character Education \(ACE\)](#) engages students in high interest novels through the use of Restorative Practices, UDL, and Character Education, while utilizing an interactive 21st Century model. ACE incorporates the MTSS initiatives, UDL frameworks, and California State Standards. As a team, we definitely agree that we need to update this mission statement as the 21st century is almost over! We also need to add the synergistic power of UDL and AI combined! As the world embraces AI, so too must education. While ACE served us well for five years, it's time to step into the future, hand-in-hand with our students. By including them in the process of reimagining our inclusive ELA curriculum, we can harness the power of AI alongside established frameworks like UDL to offer personalized learning for each student. Our students deserve to be active participants in shaping their education, not passive recipients of knowledge.



**Choice Chart:** Discussing "Refugee" by Alan Gratz

**Theme:** Exploring themes of leaving home, displacement, and adaptation in "Refugee".

**Instructions:** Choose TWO options from each section to complete. You can choose different options from each section or focus on one theme.

**Section 1: Personal Connections (Choose 2)**

Option	Prompt	Medium
<b>Story Share:</b> Share a story from your own life (or someone you know) about moving to a new place. What were the challenges and joys of the experience?	I think of someone I know who has moved... / I remember a story about someone who left their home...	Written, Spoken, Podcast, Video
<b>Imagination Station:</b> Imagine you have to leave your home and everything you know behind. What would you take with you? Why? How would you feel?	If I were in their shoes, I think I would... / I wonder what it would be like to...	Drawing, Painting, Sculpture, Song, Dance
<b>Creative Corner:</b> Write a poem, song, or draw a picture that expresses the emotions someone might feel after leaving their home.	This story reminds me of... / This makes me think about...	Music Composition, Photography, Collage, Film, Drama Performance

**Section 2: Text Analysis (Choose 2)**

Option	Prompt	Medium
<b>Character Spotlight:</b> Choose a character and analyze how they experience leaving home and adapting to a new environment. Use textual evidence to support your analysis.	This character reminds me of... / I wonder how this character feels about...	Essay, Comic Strip, Infographic, Blog Post, Presentation
<b>Theme Tracker:</b> Choose a theme (e.g., courage, hope, loss) and track how it develops throughout the book. Provide specific examples from the text.	This story shows that... / I wonder if...	Timeline, Mind Map, Chart, Venn Diagram, Social Media Campaign
<b>Letter Writing:</b> Write a letter to one of the characters from the book, offering them advice or support based on their experiences.	Dear _____,	Video Letter, Interview Script, Dramatic Monologue, Song, Spoken Word Poetry

**Bonus:** Share your work with a classmate or small group and discuss your thoughts and understanding of the book.

**Remember:**

- Use evidence from the text to support your responses.
- Be respectful of different perspectives and experiences.
- Have fun and be creative!

This revised choice chart offers a wider range of options for students to express themselves, catering to diverse learning styles and preferences. It encourages students to use various media and tools to demonstrate their understanding and engage with the themes of the book in a meaningful way.

**Considerations and ethical implications**

As of this publication, there is no tried and tested way to check if a student used AI to assist with their assignments. While technology is being developed, and some methods have been employed, fabrication via AI is a legitimate fear. The use of AI in an educational setting causes a great deal of apprehension as its use can teeter dangerously between questionable fidelity and its use as a beneficial educational gizmo. However, let's not forget that educators had very similar concerns with the advent of the internet.

We are definitely dating ourselves, but we remember clearly the resistance by many educators to embrace the internet as a valuable educational tool during its infancy. (It should be noted that these individuals are likely the same ones who still have a Betamax machine that has been blinking 12:00 since 1982). Can you imagine education today without the internet? Were there growing pains with the internet? Yes, of course!. We remember not so fondly overseeing computer labs in the days before technological defensive measures like Gaggle were employed. It was a constant battle between preventing students from accessing adult images and thinking they won \$10,000 from a pop up screen. That was not so long ago and look at where we are now. Does that mean that the internet is now completely safe and free from anything nefarious in an academic setting? Absolutely not. Students, and adults, are still facing the dangers of getting catfished, pig slaughtered or salmon slapped. Ok, the last one might be fictitious but the other 2 are very real. As technological advances continue, students and scammers will always attempt to find a way over those perceived barriers. AI will be no different. However, the tide is already starting to turn and many developers and educators believe that the benefits will greatly outweigh the threats.

Yet wanting students to develop AI literacy on their own is folly. Much like any other novel subject presented in the classroom, students need well established guidelines to use AI effectively. It encompasses not just the technical know-how but also an awareness of the ethical and societal implications of AI (Walter, 2024). It's important to emphasize the broader potential of AI in education and how it can be leveraged to enhance learning rather than detract from it. Below are some

guidelines to consider:

- **Educate on Responsible AI Use:** Provide resources and training to both educators and students on how to responsibly use AI tools. This includes understanding the limitations of AI, avoiding plagiarism, and using technology as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, critical thinking and learning.
- **Promote Academic Integrity:** Stress the importance of promoting academic integrity and ethical behavior among students. Discuss how educators can integrate discussions about ethics and responsible AI usage into their curriculum.
- **Encourage Collaboration:** Emphasize the value of collaboration and teamwork in learning. Highlight how AI can be used to facilitate collaborative projects and group discussions, fostering a culture of knowledge sharing rather than individual competition.
- **Engage in Dialogue:** Encourage an open dialogue between educators, students, and technology developers about the responsible use of AI in education. This can help address concerns, share best practices, and develop guidelines for ethical AI usage.

Just like the Internet, AI is another tool to add to our teacher tool bag. We need to teach our students how to use it for good. We cannot pretend that it doesn't exist because we as educators are afraid of it. Doing so will make you a dinosaur in education. Your new nickname will be DontryAIatops. If we truly want to reimagine education we need to include our students. Now, we invite our students to join us on this journey of co-creation.

They are the future, and their insights are invaluable in designing a curriculum that integrates AI's potential with proven tools like UDL. Our students deserve a learning experience that evolves with them, empowering them to thrive in an ever changing world. By bringing students along with us, we are highlighting the possibilities of valuable use versus “cheating” or “taking the easy way out”.

## **Conclusion**

Inclusivity and accessibility in education continue to be some of the driving forces behind productive learning. The marriage of UDL and AI can break down the barriers that have been designed to stand in the way of student success. As technology continues to evolve, so does the pedagogy of teaching and learning. Similarly, our students’ skill sets align with the generation in which they are linked; thus, creating a need for an ever changing set of pedagogical ideals.

As mentioned earlier, the AI bot LUDIA exemplifies a game changing approach tailored for UDL principles. By harnessing the power of AI, LUDIA enables educators to design learning experiences that are responsive, flexible, and inclusive, fostering an environment where every student can succeed. In essence, the synergy between UDL and AI represents a paradigm shift in education, where the focus shifts from uniform instruction to personalized learning journeys. By embracing the principles of UDL and harnessing the capabilities of AI, educators have the power to unlock even more potential in all of our students, thus empowering them to achieve academic success and fulfillment in their unique educational pursuits.

Furthermore, the coaction of AI and UDL has the potential to benefit multilingual students. AI powered tools can offer personalized language support, translation services, speech to text, virtual reality for immersive language learning, as well as adaptive content delivery, catering to the diverse linguistic backgrounds and needs of students. These tools can facilitate comprehension, engagement, and participation, ultimately enhancing the learning experience for multilingual students and promoting inclusivity in the educational setting.

No two students possess identical strengths and learning preferences. While some individuals thrive in expressing themselves through written essays, others may find their strengths lie in delivering engaging presentations. This fundamental understanding of diversity in learning styles and abilities is at the heart of UDL. UDL emphasizes the importance of providing students with customized pathways to achieve success, acknowledging and honoring their unique skills and learning modalities. With the integration of AI into educational practices, educators are empowered to do a deep dive into tailoring assignments and learning experiences to meet the individual needs of students.

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**Image created with ChatGPT 4.0**  
**Prompt:** diverse group of teenage students sitting around a tree and reading a book together in a serene outdoor setting; aspect ratio 16:9; graphic style



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# Getting Started: A Quick Guide For New Court and Community Schools Principals

By Sibané Parcels

Santa Clara County Office of Education

Undeniably, juvenile-court and community schools are quite different from traditional schools. However, this fact may not be so obvious to administrators who have never led a court and or community school. Even with many years of leadership experience in mainstream settings, a new court and community schools administrator can feel like a novice when starting in an alternative education leadership role. Completing tasks and handling responsibilities that should be routine may feel like taking a shot in the dark. However, navigating the complex world of juvenile court and community schools does not need to be cumbersome. With the right information and mindset, a new administrator can effectively lead an alternative education program with confidence and success. Thus, before diving in with both feet, new leaders should consider the following courses of action as beginning steps, including adequately planning for the new school setting, recognizing the significance of community partnerships, and creating a plan to improve student academic outcomes.

## **Adequately Prepare and Plan for the New School Setting**

Intentional preparation and planning may appear to be insignificant steps. However, because new juvenile court and community schools administrators are going into uncharted territory; this step is very important. Creating a solid game plan for learning and leading the program is critical for success. Therefore to prepare, new court and community school leaders should get familiar with the overall program, plan for effective communication, and assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Purposeful focus in these areas will establish the best foundation for a successful year.

## *Get Familiar With The Program*

Making time to learn as much as possible about the school before taking the helm is the best approach. If possible, a great way to start is to meet with the previous site administrator. At times, a principal may be moving into another role within the organization or planning to retire. In these cases, most leaders would be happy to meet and discuss the program's successes and challenges before moving on. In fact, this may be part of the plan to transition from one principal to the next. However, if the prior site administrator is not available, meeting with another leader in the organization who is familiar with the program is also an effective strategy. Usually, meeting with an assistant superintendent, director, or human resources leader can be just as effective. In either case, the new principal should plan to have a confidential and candid conversation regarding all aspects of the program.

Further, in court and community school programs, it is not unusual for administrative teams to oversee multiple sites. In most cases, this is the norm. For example, the juvenile hall facility is only one iteration of court schools' settings. Camps, ranches, or secured residential treatment facilities may also be included as part of the administrator's responsibility. Like court schools, there are a variety of community school environments. Because each setting is fundamentally different, it is critical that the new principal take time to become familiar with each site. A new leader should plan time to visit each location and get a feel for the various environments. During each site visit, the principal should plan to walk through the school department to see the layout of the space, observe lessons if classes are in session, talk with students, teachers and other staff if available, and formally meet core partners.

A brief site visit can yield a lot of information about the program, people, and overall climate of each school. The visit may also be a time to learn about how other agencies support youth in the facility and how the school and the other organizations may be able to work together to support students. Finally, a visit to the sites may be a practical time to check badge access to the different facilities and learn about the security protocols in place. Depending on the core partner's availability, the new principal may be able to see the non-school areas of each site including the living units, cafeteria, library, court room, and the medical department. The more a new leader can learn and understand about the operation of each site, the better prepared to support students. Finally, a visit to the sites may be a practical time to check badge access to the different facilities and learn about the security protocols in place. Depending on the core partner's availability, the new principal may be able to see the non-school areas of each site including the living units, cafeteria, library, court room, and the medical department. The more a new leader can learn and understand about the operation of each site, the better prepared to support students.

Finally, other great resources for learning about your court and community schools program are the annual reports. Student academic achievement, budget allocations and expenditures, and accreditation reports are packed with valuable program information. Spending a bit of time reviewing these documents can provide a high level view of the program, give context for future planning, and contribute to effective leadership. To start, academic performance reporting and data provides a snapshot of student academic strengths and challenges.

**"School partnerships with community based organizations is a good idea at any school, but partnerships are critical for the effectiveness of court and community schools."**

Although this satellite data is not always the most current or comprehensive, these reports can highlight achievement gaps in specific content areas and between student groups. As a result, achievement data may provide a starting point for planning professional development focus areas. Next, budget reports can be a great place to learn about funding sources, including grants and other short term capital that might fund current resources, specific staff, or services. Depending on the financial health of the program as well as additional revenue that may or may not be coming in, it may be necessary to make adjustments for future spending. Lastly, accreditation reports highlight the strengths and challenges of the schools. Typically, the school staff has done a thorough job of identifying the processes and initiatives that have contributed to positive student outcomes. As well, areas of improvement are clearly spelled out which also helps to focus the work ahead.

#### *Create a Communication Plan*

Court and community school settings are complex ecosystems. As a result, communicating one message to multiple agencies, which themselves have a specialized jargon, is not always straightforward. Therefore, establishing regular modes of communication with all interest holders is key to effective leadership. Teachers, staff, students, families, and community partners all need consistent, clear, and correct information throughout the school year. Creating a plan for regular communication ensures that a routine is set for everyone involved. To design a communication plan, determine the best mode of communication for each interest holder and decide on the timing and the content to be shared.

For teachers and staff, communication happens both formally and informally. Because informal communication is often unplanned, takes place as a result of the regular business of the day, and may only include individuals or a few people at a time, it may be best to focus on formal communication opportunities like staff meetings and weekly bulletins. A weekly bulletin or newsletter is a great place to remind staff about upcoming scheduled events, meetings, guests or volunteer presenters, testing schedules, and professional development. As well, weekly communication can include staff recognition and appreciations or holiday and break reminders. Weekly bulletins and staff meetings ensure uniform information is disseminated, promote openness and transparency, and mitigate confusion and scheduling conflicts. Staff meetings also create a space for collaboration, teambuilding, and learning communities.

Students and families need the information that impacts them directly. Because of the transient nature of student enrollment, it is necessary to orient students and families to the school environment as soon as possible which takes an intentional planned process. Further, engaging with the juvenile justice system is understandably stressful for students and families; therefore, a trauma-informed approach to communicating information to them is critical. Providing students and families with knowledge about the school, including what can be expected, how special education and other services are provided, if applicable, and how the student's academic records are impacted is important. Furthermore, families should receive basic information including an updated bell schedule, school calendar, and student handbook.

Regular engagement with community partners through multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings

is the most effective strategy for communication. Since several agencies work collaboratively together in court and community schools, often in the same space to serve young people, it makes sense to meet and discuss student progress. For the court and community schools principal, the MDT meeting is the place to bring the academic perspective, provide information regarding upcoming events, engage in collaboration, and understand compliance. In turn, the school leader will learn other agency's perspectives regarding student progress, hear updated policies and procedures, and get additional information that may impact the school's operations.

#### *Review Teaching and Learning*

The instructional leader in court and community schools program is tasked with not only knowing student academic standing, but also creating a plan to improve student outcomes. Obtaining a high level view of teaching and learning is the best place to start. To do this, get familiar with the curriculum and identify specific academic areas on which to focus. In alternative education classrooms, it is typical to have multiple grade levels and academic abilities together. In court schools in particular, young people may be grouped by probation with safety and security considerations in mind. So, a teacher may have older middle school and younger high school students in one class. Ensuring that the appropriate curriculum is available and being taught to various grade levels is a challenge. A new administrator should discover what resources are available, learn the adoptions timelines, and become aware of what instructional practices are being implemented. As discussed earlier, making regular classroom visits and analyzing available data will provide invaluable information regarding student engagement and learning as well as instructional effectiveness.

With this information, the principal can determine academic, social or emotional focus areas for professional training.

### **Recognize the Significance of Community Partnerships**

School partnerships with community based organizations is a good idea at any school, but partnerships are critical for the effectiveness of court and community schools. Young people who attend alternative programs come with a myriad of personal challenges and barriers. Providing wraparound services that address all obstacles a student might face would greatly tax the school's time and financial resources. Leveraging community partnerships can provide essential support to young people while requiring minimal educational resources.

Core court and community schools partners include probation, county mental health, non-profit organizations, districts, county offices and others. Unlike traditional school settings, community partners play a major role in the school's community and students' overall experience in the program. A court and community school leader will rarely spend a day without direct or indirect community partnership collaboration.

#### *Probation*

If you lead juvenile-court schools, including juvenile hall, camps, or ranches, probation is an essential partner. Typically, the school department is housed in the county facility and the probation department has ultimate oversight. Leading a school within this professional dynamic often takes a major paradigm shift especially for administrators coming from traditional schools. Customarily, principals have the final say regarding the operations of their school site. However, in juvenile court schools, the regular

functioning can be disrupted at any time by probation to ensure safety and security of the young people, staff, partners, and the facility.

The best practice for working effectively with the probation department is to build strong, collaborative, and trusting relationships. To begin building a good partnership, the principal must maintain regular communication. Leadership team members should attend regular meetings with probation. If there is not a planned multidisciplinary team meeting currently happening, speak with probation leadership about scheduling one. When possible, participate in training opportunities with probation to understand the scope of their work and how it might impact school operations. Include probation in assemblies, graduation, and other positive events to reinforce the collegiate relationship.

Probation is an important partner in community schools as well. Students enrolled in your community school may be on probation, wearing a tracking device that is monitored by probation, or was court ordered to attend the community school. Although probation's presence is not as pervasive as in the court schools, often they will visit the community school campus to check in with students or request attendance or behavior information from school staff. Again, building a collaborative relationship with probation is essential.

#### *County Mental Health*

Many young people enter court and community schools with backgrounds riddled with traumatic experiences. Finding themselves incarcerated or expelled from their district school only compounds the mental stress with which young people are experiencing. Commonly, mental health professionals are part of the team that supports youth in juvenile-court and community schools.

Like the school department, the county or city mental health agency is housed inside the court and community school facility in most cases. Especially in many court schools, youth have round the clock access to mental health support. On occasion, a young person may suffer a mental health crisis while incarcerated. Having a professional trained to handle the emergency is vital.

Because students have access to mental health support whenever needed, establishing a protocol to excuse students from or admit them into class is necessary. Probation should be consulted regarding the logistics of student movement. Also, teachers and other staff should be aware of appropriate responses and the best approaches to take when students are in a mental health crisis. The mental health staff can train the school to identify and refer someone in crisis.

Finally, you may oversee an academic program located in a residential treatment facility for teens. Similar to the professional relationship with probation, a collaborative partnership with the mental health or medical staff should be cultivated. Essentially, the school is part of a larger ecosystem where young people are receiving a variety of services. Regular communication and teamwork with the hosting agency is paramount.

### *Non-Profit Organizations*

You don't need to look far to find organizations that want to partner with and support court and community schools. Many nonprofits operate with the mission of helping vulnerable youth. They offer young people support in a variety of areas including, tobacco-use prevention education, healing yoga, therapeutic art, leadership training, street law, tutoring services, and so much more. If a school program had to fund even a couple of these services, it would be prohibitive. In most cases, there is no

cost to the school because the community based organization (CBO) has procured funding through grants, state or federal dollars, or other means.

Nonprofits bring value to the program at little or no cost to the school. But getting the benefit does take coordination and a concerted effort. Depending on the number of CBOs providing service during the year, this may be the responsibility of an assistant principal or lead teacher. However, the principal should address any concerns and evaluate the outcomes of the services as part of building and maintaining strong community partnerships.

Once the school team hears the CBO's proposal and agrees to have the organization come and provide a service, consider the following:

- Who, from the school, will oversee the project?
- Is there any cost associated with the service?
- Have the volunteers gone through the background check process and been vetted?
- What are the time constraints for the project? Number of days? Hours per day?
- Which students would benefit most from the service? Is the student selection process equitable?
- Is there a space on site for volunteers to use?
- What materials or technology is needed?
- Does there need to be a probation or other staff in attendance?
- When will the project start and end?

Strong community and school partnerships are formed when well executed service projects yield positive outcomes for students. Often, projects are repeated year after year resulting in a positive impact on more young people.



### *District and County Offices*

For most young people, court and community school programs are temporary placements. It is common for students to stay enrolled for four to six weeks and then withdraw upon release. Since minors are required to attend school, creating a seamless transition plan is necessary to ensure there is no break in school attendance. When court and community schools partner with the district office for transition, students and families can bridge back to their home schools with minimal delay.

Each district office has requirements for enrollment. Navigating the process may feel daunting to families who want to get their young person back into school as quickly as possible. Having a court and community school staff member coordinating transitions will be a support to both the student and the district throughout the process. As well, providing each student with an updated transcript, Individual Education Plan (IEP), and other academic records mitigates delays in enrollment. Anything that can be done to guarantee a “warm hand-off” will be beneficial for students.

The county office plays a different role than the district office, but is equally important. Through the county office, an administrator has access to experts in various areas. When identifying a staff training need, the principal can tap into the county office’s resource of experts. Consider reaching out for professional development support with English learners, special education compliance and procedures, academic content, social-emotional learning, restorative and trauma-informed practices. Partnering with experts can save time and ensure the staff has up to date and research based training.

Overall, community partnerships are key for effectively leading court and community school programs. The complex ecosystem of court and

community school requires collaboration, teamwork, trust, flexibility, and communication. Start building those relationships on day one by leaning in and creating a space for connection.

### **Create A Plan To Improve Student Academic Outcomes**

Many students enter court and community schools with significant academic deficits. Gaps in learning can be attributed to chronic truancy, high levels of stress or trauma, and overall disengagement with school. Creating a plan to move justice engaged students towards positive academic outcomes feels challenging, but it is possible with intentional planning and practice. Because of the transient nature of student enrollment in alternative education programs, both short and long-term students attend simultaneously. Obviously, the longer a student stays in the program the more impact focused intervention will have on learning. However, regardless of the length of time enrolled, all students benefit from effective, research-based instructional strategies. A principal’s plan should include implementing trauma informed practices, taking a deep dive into data, and applying a program wide instructional strategy.

### *Implement Trauma-Informed Practices*

As mentioned earlier, many students enter court and community schools having experienced different levels of trauma in their lives. Understanding trauma, its impact on the learning brain, and how to support young people living with trauma is the first step. To start, a principal cannot assume a staff knows what trauma-informed practices look like in school, therefore the framework needs to be taught and consistently revisited. Staff awareness begins with establishing and understanding common language around trauma-informed practices.

The more the concepts and language are assimilated into day to day school culture, the more normalized they will become within the school community. It is critical that the principal prioritize trauma-informed practices and communicate the importance of the framework to all interest holders.

Further, the staff will need to conduct a close review of school policies and procedures. A trauma-informed school minimizes unnecessary trauma and loss reminders<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, policies and procedures that are triggering or may cause further harm should be revised or eliminated. Policies to consider for revision, include: discipline, instructional practices like a reading aloud requirement, student orientation, and transition procedures.

Finally, using a research based structure for program wide implementation is also important. A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) can help determine how trauma-informed practices are integrated into the school culture. The three level framework allows for appropriate trauma-informed support depending on the need intensity of students and staff. At level one, trauma-informed practices are provided for all students and staff and may include a positive school climate, general wellness support, and emergency management<sup>2</sup>. At level two, early intervention for at risk students and staff is introduced. The school may offer student screening and threat assessment protocols<sup>3</sup>. Lastly level three, is reserved for intense support including referrals for intense individual treatment or trauma specific treatment<sup>4</sup>.

When trauma-informed practices become part of the school culture both students and staff are more regulated and able to be more positive and productive.

### *Take A Deep Dive Into Data*

It would be difficult to improve student academic outcomes without looking closely at data. Data can provide a starting place for planning improvement. In court and community school programs, data points may be skewed or missing, so it is critical to analyze data from multiple sources.

The first step is to determine what data is available. Keep in mind that young people in the court and community school setting may be coming in with chronic truancy and an overall disengagement from school. It may be difficult to find state assessment data or other formal test results for certain students. Important questions to consider are: What is the most recent student data available? What assessments or other data are in the student's cumulative folder? These questions and others may help be helpful for determining what data is accessible. Summative assessments or satellite data provides a high level overview of student achievement and is a snapshot of one moment in time. Although this data doesn't provide a full picture, it may reveal academic gaps. As well, a student's performance on specific sub-strands can provide more insight into areas that need more intentional instruction.

Moreover, teacher assessment and classroom observations are another form of data that should be explored. Unlike the more formal standardized tests, map data provides more up to date and relevant information. Teacher generated tests, essays, projects, and other assignments shine a light on student ability and allow the teacher to hone in on very specific fundamental skills that need to be addressed.

Finally, reviewing street data or student background information is a powerful way to understand some of the root causes for a student's educational challenges and deficiencies.

Street data may also shed light on trauma and loss as well. Gathering street data can be as simple as engaging in conversations with students and families to learn more about the student. As well, reviewing cumulative folders is another effective way to collect information.

Whether through dialogue or a file search, the staff should explore the following:

- Did the student experience any home or school instability?
- Was the student ever tested for special education services? What were the results?
- What is the student's attendance history?
- Is there a history of homelessness? Foster Youth? Social Services or Justice Engagement?
- What has been the progression of behavioral concerns?

Data mining of satellite, map, and street data will provide the principal and staff with enough information to have substantive discussions about student progress, develop a plan that targets specific gap areas, and strategize a plan of implementation.

#### *Apply A Program Wide Instructional Practice*

The research and discussion that the staff engaged in during the data mining phase can be utilized to plan how to improve student academic outcomes. Choosing one academic skill as a focus and one instructional strategy to put into action can be a viable starting point. Using staff meetings and professional development time to dive deep into data and decide on content strands is time well spent. It is important to provide staff with the time to have meaningful conversations, collaboration and planning.

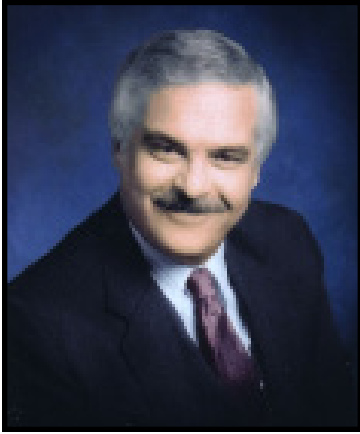
Academic deficiencies often go back to the early years in a student's educational experience. Therefore, deciding on foundational skills on which to focus usually makes the most sense. Teaching fundamental concepts like reading comprehension or number sense can begin to fill in the gaps and strengthen the foundation for students to grow academically. As a consequence, the staff puts into action the best instructional strategy, provides opportunities for practice, and assesses for mastery. Finally, utilizing an inquiry cycle to plan, implement, assess, and reflect, as well as conducting regular classroom observations by the administrative team supports improvement of the process and promotes positive student academic outcomes.

These considerations for a new principal are the starting point. So much reflection, passion, and energy goes into the oversight of a juvenile-court and community schools program. With deliberate thought and planning, a new administrator can effectively lead a successful program.

#### **References**

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, School Committee. (2017). Creating, supporting, and sustaining trauma-informed schools: A system framework. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/creating\\_supporting\\_sustaining\\_trauma\\_informed\\_schools\\_a\\_systems\\_framework.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/creating_supporting_sustaining_trauma_informed_schools_a_systems_framework.pdf)

# JOHN PESHKOFF AWARD



John Peshkoff (1935-2006) was one of the founding fathers of JCCASAC (then known as Juvenile Court School Administrators of California). John served as the JCCASAC president in 1977-78 and again in 1990-91.

He advocated for legislation and practices which support quality educational services for students in alternative education programs. He also served as a mentor, friend, and cheerleader to his peers and colleagues in the field.

The John Peshkoff Award is presented annually for memorable vision, service, leadership and commitment to JCCASAC students and programs.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2024 PESHKOFF AWARD RECIPIENT PAM CORONADO FRESNO COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Hili Hili (hello), hoyowush nim (my name is) Pam Coronado. I'm incredibly honored to be chosen by the Juvenile Court, Community and Alternative School Administrators of California (JCCASAC) board to receive the John Peshkoff award. I was overwhelmed with gratitude upon receiving the news from Joanne Finney and Mark Yost and at once began thinking about all the amazing educators who have received this award before me. I've learned so much from you over the years and feel very fortunate to even be considered for this recognition.



I began my teaching career for Fresno County Superintendent of Schools in 1993 as a Community School teacher for a class of group home students. I eventually taught in all programs in Court and Community Schools, including the Fresno County Jail for adult learners and the Court School program located within the Juvenile Justice Campus. In 2001, I moved from the classroom to school administration serving as Coordinator, Program Manager and ultimately as Executive Director. I knew from day one with my first group of students that my heart belonged to serving our at-promise youth.

# JOHN PESHKOFF AWARD

I was introduced to the JCCASAC organization early on in my career as the best professional organization to turn to for collegiality, networking, professional development, and legislative advocacy. As we all know, traditional workshops and conferences did not always apply to the work we do in alternative education; upon learning a new methodology or teaching strategy we would go back to our classrooms to modify it so that it worked for us. At the JCCASAC conferences, we did not have to rearrange or change anything we learned. We got it, right from the start, that this was a place for us. I was fortunate to serve on this distinguished board from 2014-2021 and consider colleagues who served before, during, and after my term as some of the hardest working, most compassionate and caring educators I've had the privilege of knowing. Our at-risk students are extremely fortunate to have you in their corner leading and innovating educational programs that best meet their needs.

I retired from Fresno County Superintendent of Schools in 2021 and now spend time with my grandson and advocating for my tribal community. Outcomes for Native American students are not on par with most general education students with an overrepresentation of our students involved with the justice system. I continue to advocate for equity and cultural awareness of our American Indian/Alaska Native students both locally and across the state. As a tribal citizen of the Picayune Rancheria of the Chukchansi Indians I serve on the education committee and the local school district's title VI committee, support all urban Indian students by serving on the board of the Fresno American Indian Health Project, an Urban Indian Health Care program that serves American Indian/Alaska Natives residing in Fresno County, and serve on the American Indian Education Oversight Committee for the California Department of Education.

I respectfully end with a call to action that I believe county offices are best positioned to spearhead: first is the Tribal Land Acknowledgement Act of 2021. In this act we have an opportunity to recognize the First Peoples' of the land in which we live. You can model this process for your school districts by meeting with your local tribal communities to create land acknowledgement statements to recognize the original nations on whose land we live, learn, and work. A big kudos to San Diego County Office of Education for all the work you are doing in collaborating with your local tribes and creating a land acknowledgement for your region. Secondly is AB1703 California Indian Education Act that encourages local school districts to create task forces of educators to collaborate with local tribal communities to share tribal history and culture and to develop Native American curriculum and classroom materials. This bill also encourages local districts to identify the extent of the achievement gap between Native American students and their non-Native peers and come up with strategies to close them. Big kudos again to San Diego County Office of Education and Humboldt County Office of Education for your work on the model Native American Curriculum project. Please be on the lookout for this model curriculum in 2025.

I am humbled and honored to accept the John Peshkoff award on behalf of all the amazing JCCASAC Board leader's past, present, and future.

Mich gayis (Thank you,)

Pam

# PREVIOUS JOHN PESHKOFF AWARD RECIPIENTS

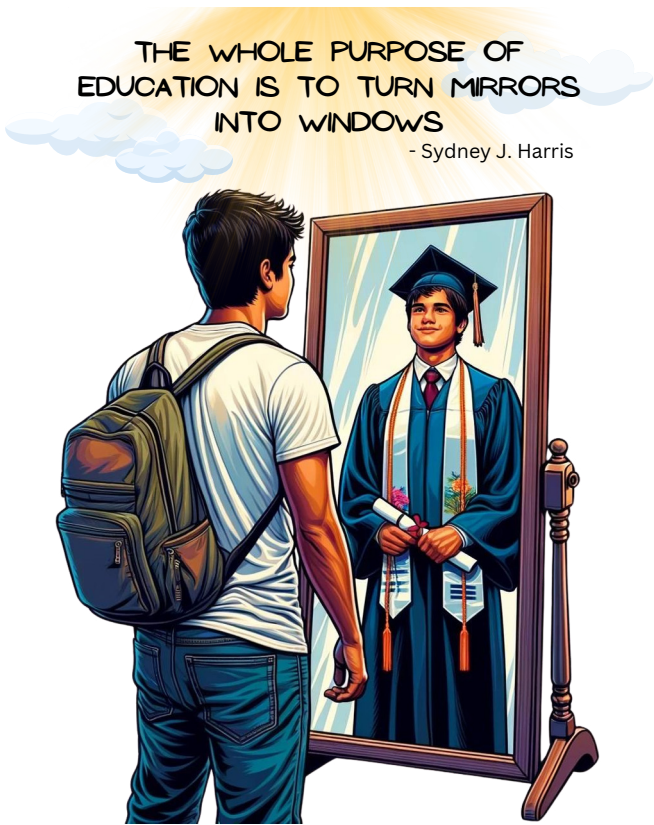
2007 Mary Louise Mack Sacramento	2007 Bob Michaels Santa Clara	2019 Talka Walser Stanislaus
2008 Janet Addo Orange	2008 Charles (Chuck) Lee San Diego	2021 Janine Kaeslin San Joaquin
2009 Ken Taylor Kern	2009 Bill Burns San Mateo	2022 Monalisa Vitela Imperial
2010 Dolores Redwin San Diego		2023 Wendy Frink San Joaquin
2011 Bianca Bloom Contra Costa		2024 Pam Coronado Fresno
2012 Gerry Riley Los Angeles		<p>THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION IS TO TURN MIRRORS INTO WINDOWS - Sydney J. Harris</p>  <p>The illustration shows a young man from behind, wearing a white t-shirt, blue jeans, and a green backpack. He is looking into a large, ornate mirror. In the reflection, he is wearing a blue graduation gown and cap, holding a rolled-up diploma. The scene is set against a background of soft, white clouds.</p>
2013 Jean Hughes Kern		
2014 Mary Lou Vachet Orange		
2015 Sandy Mast Santa Cruz		
2016 Jacqueline Flowers San Joaquin		
2017 Sean Morrill San Joaquin	2017 Michael Watkins Santa Cruz	
2018 Deni Baughn Orange		

Image created with ChatGPT 4.0

Prompt: high school student wearing t-shirt and jeans and nothing on their head looking into a mirror and seeing themselves wearing graduation cap and gown and holding a diploma; vector style; colorful

# HONORING JCCASAC PAST PRESIDENTS

1970 - 1971 Don Purdy Santa Clara	1981 - 1982 Joe De Mello Contra Costa	1992 - 1993 John Stankovich Kings	2003 - 2004 Jacqueline Flowers San Joaquin	2014 - 2015 Monalisa Vitela Imperial
1971 - 1972 Chuck Lee San Diego	1982 - 1983 Roy Savage Riverside	1993 - 1994 Bob Michels Santa Clara	2004 - 2005 Jeanne Dukes San Luis Obispo	2015 - 2016 Telka Walser Stanislaus
1972 - 1973 Doug Booth San Mateo	1983 - 1984 Ken Kammuller Marin	1994 - 1995 Larry Springer Los Angeles	2005 - 2006 Paula Mitchell Santa Clara	2016 - 2017 Christian Shannon Kern
1973 - 1974 Joe De Mello Contra Costa	1984 - 1985 Wayne Toscas Santa Barbara	1995 - 1996 Claudette Inge Alameda	2006 - 2007 Maruta Gardner San Diego	2017 - 2018 Wendy Frink San Joaquin
1974-1975 Marshall Lomax Los Angeles	1985 - 1986 Greg Almand Contra Costa	1996 - 1997 Ken Taylor Kern	2007 - 2008 Peter Kostas Mendocino	2018 - 2019 Katy Ramezani, Ed.D. Orange
1975 - 1976 John Hull Sacramento	1986 - 1987 Hedy Kirsh Orange	1997 - 1998 Mick Founts San Joaquin	2008 - 2009 Mary Lou Vachet Orange	2019 - 2020 Pam Coronado Fresno
1976 - 1977 Rocco Nobile San Diego	1987 - 1988 Shirl Schmidt Shasta	1998 - 1999 Dolores Redwine San Diego	2009 - 2010 Mary Bell Sacramento	2020 - 2021 Pam Coronado Fresno
1977 - 1978 John Peshkoff Santa Clara	1988 - 1989 Chuck Lee San Diego	1999 - 2000 Vic Trucco Sonoma	2010 - 2011 Sean Morrill San Diego	2021 - 2022 Jason Hasty, Ed.D. Los Angeles and Johnny Rice Santa Cruz
1978 - 1979 Jerry Matney Orange	1989 - 1990 William Burns San Mateo	2000 - 2001 Janet Addo Los Angeles	2011 - 2012 Janine Cuaresma San Joaquin	2022 - 2023 Johnny Rice Santa Cruz
1979 - 1980 Miltie Couteur Butte	1990 - 1991 John Peshkoff Orange	2001 - 2002 Michael Watkins Santa Cruz	2012 - 2013 Deni Baughn Orange	2023 - 2024 Joanne L. Finney San Diego
1980 - 1981 Marty Familletti Riverside	1991 - 1992 Orene Hopkins Contra Costa	2002 - 2003 Jeanne Hughes Kern	2013 - 2014 Gary Vincent Monterey	

# CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2023 - 2024 JCCASAC SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

## ABOUT THE JCCASAC SCHOLARSHIP:

Twice a year, the Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative Schools Administrators of California (JCCASAC) offers scholarships to Court and Community School graduates who will be attending college or have passed the GED within the 2022-23 school year. The scholarship is intended to pay for tuition and/or books up to \$500. Two scholarships are awarded in the southern section and two in the northern section each January and June. Each county may submit two applications per semester (for a total of four in a year).

**V. Villanueva**  
Stanislaus

**C. Prado**  
San Diego

**J. Zanders-Davis**  
Shasta

**M. Magdaleno Rosas**  
San Joaquin

**E. Gisselle Mendez**  
Imperial

**A. Rahman Gawusu**  
San Diego

**Julieta Prado Garcia**  
San Diego

**M. Escobar**  
San Diego



**CALIFORNIA COUNTY  
SUPERINTENDENTS**

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# PAST SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

2009 - 2010 Y. Martinez San Bernardino	2010 - 2011 A. Barahona Orange	2012 - 2013 A. Meier San Joaquin	2013 - 2014 M. Sanchez Kern	2015 - 2016 N. Ibañez San Joaquin
2009 - 2010 R. Rea San Bernardino	2010 - 2011 K. Osuji San Joaquin	2012 - 2013 R. Martinez-Ramires Santa Cruz	2014 - 2015 R. Elis San Joaquin	2015 - 2016 J. Casillas Monterey
2009 - 2010 C. Willard San Joaquin	2010 - 2011 C. Shelton San Joaquin	2012 - 2013 R. Astudillo Orange	2014 - 2015 S. Gonzalez Ventura	2016 - 2017 R. Brown Stanislaus
2009 - 2010 F. Alejandres San Bernardino	2010 - 2011 J. Perez San Joaquin	2012 - 2013 R. Astudillo Orange	2014 - 2015 I. Villalobos Stanislaus	2016 - 2017 J. Straughen Stanislaus
2009 - 2010 E. Santos-Lawas San Joaquin	2011 - 2012 F. Vilifana San Diego	2013 - 2014 J.D. Cordier Contra Costa	2014 - 2015 H. Johnson San Luis Obispo	2016 - 2017 J. Nicolette-Burr Nevada
2009 - 2010 J. Elkins Sacramento	2011 - 2012 D. Perce Merced	2013 - 2014 M. Mackey Mendocino	2015 - 2016 J. Elwel Los Angeles	2016 - 2017 M. Montgomery Mono
2009 - 2010 T. White San Joaquin	2011 - 2012 D. Stone San Luis Obispo	2013 - 2014 D. Thornbrugh Santa Cruz	2015 - 2016 A. Medina Los Angeles	2016 - 2017 J. Romero San Diego
2009 - 2010 J. Hernandez San Bernardino	2011 - 2012 A. Guzman Monterey	2013 - 2014 R. Turner Napa	2015 - 2016 T. Stone Kern	2016 - 2017 D. Lopez Los Angeles
2009 - 2010 S. Viliquette San Joaquin	2011 - 2012 S. Francis San Luis Obispo	2013 - 2014 A. Hayworth San Luis Obispo	2015 - 2016 N. Jones Kern	2016 - 2017 J. Padilla Kern
2009 - 2010 J.L. Figueroa San Bernardino	2011 - 2012 J. Patrick San Bernardino	2013 - 2014 B. Lazoya Kern	2015 - 2016 J. Erbe-Reyes Santa Cruz	2016 - 2017 M. Zermeno Los Angeles
2010 - 2011 Y. Orduno San Joaquin	2011 - 2012 K. Kaur Kandola San Joaquin	2013 - 2014 S. Moss Orange	2015 - 2016 A. Leonard Santa Cruz	2017 - 2018 D. Orlando Merida Monterey

2017 - 2018  
V. Avila Guerra  
Monterey

2018 - 2019  
M. Sandoval  
San Joaquin

2022 - 2023  
R. Vasquez  
Imperial

2017 - 2018  
G. Perez  
Orange

2018 - 2019  
M. Ybarra  
San Joaquin

2017 - 2018  
M. Tran  
San Diego

2018 - 2019  
A. Vasquez  
San Diego

2017 - 2018  
H. Baumer  
Orange

2018 - 2019  
J. Alvarez  
San Diego

2017 - 2018  
G. Pott  
Los Angeles

2022 - 2023  
A. Dominguez  
San Joaquin

2017 - 2018  
N. Aguillon-Palermo  
Monterey

2022 - 2023  
B. Humanes  
Imperial

2017 - 2018  
F. M. Soto  
Placer

2022 - 2023  
S. K. Amador  
San Diego

2018 - 2019  
D. Grant  
San Francisco

2022 - 2023  
J. Vega  
Riverside

2018 - 2019  
D. Rodriguez  
Stanislaus

2022 - 2023  
J. Williams  
San Francisco

2018 - 2019  
Silvestre Viga  
Kern

2022 - 2023  
N. Oliveras  
Santa Clara

2018 - 2019  
A. Rubio  
San Diego

2022 - 2023  
A. Alora  
Kern

# JCCASAC:

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## ENABLING EDUCATION



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# JCCASAC Teacher of the Year - 2024

JCCASAC board members are excited to announce the sixth annual JCCASAC Teacher of the Year award recipient and nominees. County operated school administrators from across California were encouraged to nominate one of their outstanding court, community or alternative school teachers for this extraordinary recognition. JCCASAC seeks to celebrate excellence and honor teachers who are exceptionally dedicated, knowledgeable, and inspire students of all backgrounds and learning abilities while carrying out the mission and vision of JCCASAC. These teachers are passionate, collaborative professionals dedicated to empowering students to become competent, creative thinking and caring adults who lead healthy lifestyles and are academically prepared for an ever changing and global economy.

## Congratulations to Brent Rodriguez Stanislaus Office of Education

The Stanislaus County Office of Education is excited to celebrate Mr. Brent Rodriguez as the JCCASAC Teacher Of the Year. Mr. Rodriguez is a culinary arts instructor at the Stanislaus County Arts Institute (SCAI) and the Stanislaus County Juvenile Hall programs. His remarkable dedication to his student's academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development is apparent in how his students talk about him. One student said, "Chef Rodriguez is not just an instructor; he is a mentor... (and) what sets him apart is his dedication to each student's growth. Another student gave this snapshot of Mr. Rodriguez, "Chef R. is always showing up to class with a smile, positive attitude, and drive to interact with his students. Never have I had such great communication with a teacher".

Mr. Rodriguez's teaching philosophy revolves around mutual respect, individualized attention, and innovative methods. Despite the logistical hurdles of teaching in two different locations, he ensures that students at SCAI and Juvenile Hall receive invaluable culinary instruction. His initiative in establishing a mobile culinary lab at Juvenile Hall, circumventing facility restrictions, highlights his determination to provide equal opportunities for all students.



Integrating essential life skills into his curriculum, Mr. Rodriguez builds skills in resume writing, budgeting, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and customer service.

Some of these skills are reinforced with real-world application through a student-operated cafe at SCAI. Mr. Rodriguez's impact extends beyond the classroom, as he actively engages in community service with programs such as Love Turlock and assists with donations at local food banks. His mentorship is highlighted in his work with Big Brothers Big Sisters and with grieving teens at Jessica's House.

Mr. Brent Rodriguez epitomizes the very essence of what it means to be an exceptional educator. His dedication and profound commitment to student success have transformed countless students. While we celebrate Brent's accomplishments, we also reflect on the impact he has had on student learning. This impact is the reason he is our Teacher

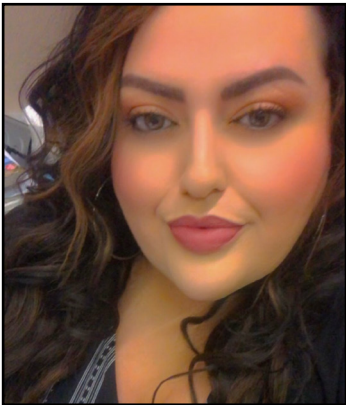


Image created with Ideogram

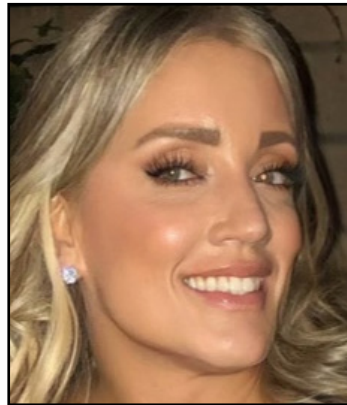
*Prompt: A vibrant and festive illustration featuring a large, eye-catching banner. The banner is adorned with the words "Congratulations Teacher of the Year 2024 Brent Rodriguez" in bold, colorful letters. The design incorporates a celebratory background with confetti, balloons, and streamers in a variety of vivid colors. The overall atmosphere is joyful and triumphant, perfect for honoring an outstanding educator., illustration*

# JCCASAC Teacher of the Year-Nominees

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF OUR TEACHER OF THE YEAR NOMINEES!



**Wendy Aja**  
Teacher  
San Diego



**Bobbie Connor**  
Teacher  
Orange



**Joshua Davis**  
STEM Teacher  
Solano



**Chris Geist**  
Teacher  
Ventura



**Jorge Hernandez**  
Sped. Ed. & CTE Teacher  
Kings



**Anthony Iglar**  
Teacher  
Madera



**John "Ryan" Merkle**  
Sped. Ed. Teacher  
Kern



**David Olivares**  
Teacher  
Los Angeles



**David Paniagua-Ortiz**  
Teacher  
San Joaquin



**Russ Rob**  
Teacher  
Contra Costa



**Brent Rodriguez**  
Culinary Arts Teacher  
Stanislaus



**Steve Sanchez**  
CTE Teacher and Career  
Readiness & Work Experience  
Santa Clara

Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative School Administrators of California



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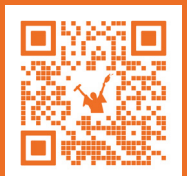
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# Unlocking the Reading Code to Address Reading Challenges and Empower Minds

By Jacqueline Newman, Program Specialist Reading Intervention  
Orange County Department of Education

## Transforming Education

Imagine a classroom where every student possesses the key to unlock the reading code. Imagine a school where literacy is the beacon of thought and imagination. Imagine a school district that leads through literacy and engages its communities through transformative education. Imagine a world where every student possesses the key to unlock the boundless treasures of knowledge and imagination through the power of reading.

Far too long have educators experienced the angst that comes with knowing our students are not reading at the capacity they should be. Students who struggle to read feel hopeless and do not see a clear future ahead of them. Struggling readers look to educators for support, only to find that they are falling behind.

Luckily for educators, we no longer have to imagine what a structured literacy approach to reading instruction looks like. We have the knowledge needed to address problems that all struggling readers have. The solution is in the Science of Reading.

Literacy is the gateway to knowledge, empowerment, and success. The science of reading stands as a beacon of hope. Understanding how individuals learn to read, why some struggle, and what methods prove most effective are not just academic pursuits; they are a societal imperative.

## The Crisis Hiding in Plain Sight

The National Report Card is a resource used to measure student achievement. It offers a window into our K-12 education system and what our students are learning. The National Report card states that 37% of twelfth-grade students scoring at or above proficiency on the NAEP reading assessment possess the knowledge and skills in reading that would make

them academically prepared for college. This leaves us with 63% of twelfth-grade students reading below proficiency, as of 2019. Scores have declined in reading at grades 4 and 8 compared to 2019. (NAEP Reading: National Average Scores, n.d.) Alarming, this percentage hasn't changed much since 1971.

These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions and evidence-based approaches to improve reading outcomes for all learners. As we confront the findings of the national report card we can work towards closing the achievement gap and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to unlock the transformative power of reading. For decades, without knowing it, educators have taught their students the habits of struggling readers. American public schools have adopted curriculum that teaches students how to be poor readers. Decades ago, cognitive scientists have debunked theoretical strategies that involve the three cueing system. Yet these debunked theories remain embedded in curriculum used across the nation. The three cueing system includes memorizing words, using context to guess words, skipping words that are unknown. These debunked strategies make it harder for students to read. (Hanford & Goodman, 2019) Unfortunately, students who struggle with reading never catch up to their peers. Today, we have the knowledge and capacity to address reading deficiencies in our struggling readers

## The Science of Reading

The Science of Reading is a vast body of interdisciplinary research based strategies and best practices that teach students how to read, especially for students who are at risk. The Science of reading is not an ideology or philosophy of teaching. It is not a fad or a trend. It is not a political agenda.



It is not a new idea and definitely not a one size fits all approach to reading instruction. It is not a single component of instruction, such as phonics. It is not a program of instruction. The Science of Reading helps to inform our practice. To quote Willingham (2017) “seeking to make a reader out of a child who does not read is an educational goal, not a scientific one.” Scientific insights should inform education practice by adding to a teacher’s “toolbox” of how their students make meaning of text.

The Science of Reading is derived from researchers in multiple fields which includes;

- Cognitive Psychology
- Communication Sciences
- Developmental Psychology
- Education
- Special Education
- Implementation Science
- Linguistics
- Neuroscience
- School Psychology

Our knowledge of how the brain acquires the skill of reading has evolved. Reading is not a natural skill that humans are born with. Reading is a man made invention created about 4600 years ago. Reading was left to scholars and kings and was mainly used to transcribe laws and document transactions.

(Patra, 2021) Today, the purposes of reading are for learning, for entertainment, to communicate, to discover new knowledge, to escape reality and an array of endless personal reasons. In the classroom, asking students to read widely

-beyond the textbook- is a highly regarded strategy of giving students access to the language and ideas that all students need to be successful in school and beyond. Teachers don’t have enough time to tell students everything they need to know, and students can’t learn it well enough just by listening and

writing. (Filkins, n.d.)

### **Responding to the crisis**

Amidst a growing reading crisis plaguing our juvenile court and community schools, organizations like ACCESS are rising to the challenge with innovative solutions grounded in scientific principles. By embracing evidence-based practices, these institutions are revolutionizing literacy instruction and equipping students with the essential skills needed to thrive in school and beyond.

The dedicated and diverse workforce at ACCESS Community Schools and Juvenile Hall includes teachers, paraprofessionals, tutors, ELDA’s, administrators, counselors, psychologists, family and community liaisons as well as an abundant array of support staff, who work directly with students on a daily basis. Together, they form a cohesive network of professionals committed to providing comprehensive support, personalized guidance, and innovative solutions to address the unique needs of every learner. Their collective expertise, unwavering dedication, and compassionate approach exemplify the heart and soul of the ACCESS community, ensuring that students receive the resources, encouragement, and care they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

The ACCESS community is rising to the challenge with innovative solutions grounded in scientific principles. By embracing evidence-based practices, they are revolutionizing literacy instruction and equipping students with the essential skills needed to thrive in school and beyond. There has been a focus on increasing knowledge capacity in the Science of Reading, amongst our community of support staff at ACCESS Community Schools and Juvenile Hall.

Program Specialist, Jacqueline Newman, created and implemented a six part training series to build knowledge, amongst those who work directly with students on a day to day basis. Building staff capacity is opening the door to literacy for ACCESS students, who have fallen through the cracks and are now at a disadvantage, not only educationally but also socially, emotionally, and economically. Secondary students who struggle with reading are at a major disadvantage amongst their peers. Most struggling readers have adopted “habits” that make it appear as if they are reading appropriately. Secondary students who struggle to read can be categorized as either having a phonological awareness deficit or a multisyllabic word decoding problem. How do we find out which one our students are struggling with?

To understand how a student develops into a skilled reader, we look toward two frameworks aligned with science. As educators, it’s imperative that we familiarize ourselves with these frameworks as they are used to inform reading instruction and assessment.

## Two Frameworks - One Goal

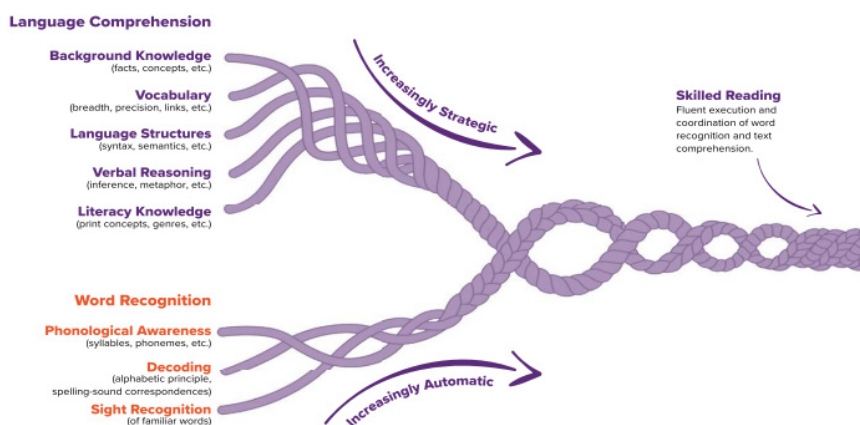
The Simple View of Reading has been validated by over 150 scientific studies. It shows us that reading comprehension is the product of two components - word recognition and language comprehension. If either of these components are weak, reading comprehension is out of reach. No amount of reading skill in one component can compensate for the lack of skill in the other.



Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7, 6-10.

important as the other. We must familiarize ourselves with each sub skill so that we can provide solutions for our students who are struggling with reading. There are two main components to the reading rope, just as there is to the Simple View of Reading. The first component is word recognition, which includes phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition. These skills are finite and must be taught to mastery. (Lawson, n.d.)

Scarborough’s Reading Rope is a visual metaphor for the development of reading skills that lead to skilled reading. The idea is that reading is like a rope that is made up of many different strands. Each strand is interwoven with each other. If one strand is loose or weak, it affects the integrity of the entire rope. Each reading skill is just as



The Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001)

There are only 26 letters in the English alphabet and 44 phonemes all together. The Oxford English dictionary estimates that there are about 170,000 words in current use. These words can be categorized into six different syllable types. We can teach the alphabet, phonemes and syllables to mastery. This is an attainable task. We, as educators, have the power to provide the key to our students so that they can unlock the reading code. Unfortunately, this is the area where our students have a reading gap. Students do not master these foundational skills in early grades, causing them to have reading difficulties in subsequent years and grades. The reading gap of an early learner will only increase in size as they become older, if the gap is not addressed. The Matthew Effect, also known as the Matthew principle, refers to the concept of accumulated advantage in society. This suggests that those who start with an advantage, will likely accrue more advantages in life. This is similar to the saying “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”. Students who have a gap in knowledge will have an increase in that gap as their educational experiences progress. We must put a stop to this cycle and close the reading gap once and for all.

### **Universal Assessment**

Now that we understand the two frameworks to the Science of Reading, we can easily identify students who need support with their reading and writing skills. The first step is to assess students, using a universal screener. Results from the universal screening tool will identify students who may or may not have a need for reading intervention. In order to make sure you identify the right students, a second set of assessments are needed. At ACCESS, we use i-Ready as a universal screening tool. i-Ready assesses students in word recognition and language comprehension - both components of the frameworks

listed above. This universal screener is given as a temperature check. It provides a basis to begin with. Students who score two or more grade levels below are flagged as having a possible need for further investigation. With teacher anecdotal evidence and i-Ready reading scores, students are further assessed in decoding, readability, fluency, comprehension, and writing skills. The data derived from these assessments provides teachers with an overall reading profile for their students. Imagine knowing exactly what skill a student needs to achieve in order to become a proficient reader? It’s being done at ACCESS. We know exactly what the student needs and how to support them. As stated previously, the majority of struggling readers in the secondary setting are experiencing phonological awareness and multisyllabic word decoding issues.

### **Strategies**

The symptoms to phonological awareness difficulties are as follows:

- Difficulty decoding
- Spelling difficulties
- Difficulty with sound based activities such as rhyming and correctly pronouncing words
- Trouble attaining sounds of a new language - for English Learners

If your student spells the word “journal” as “joural” or writes “than” instead of “then” or writes “conclution” for the word “conclusion”, they may have a phonological awareness problem.

The evidence that students are struggling in this area is clearly displayed in the students' written and oral language. Listen to the way your students pronounce certain words. Make sure to positively correct students' pronunciation so that this doesn't hinder their written and oral language outcomes.

Educators can address this problem by including the following in their instruction:

- Rhyming
- segmenting/blending word parts
- Word part manipulation
  - Roots and syllables
  - Individual sounds

There are also common symptoms a student shows when they are having difficulties reading multisyllabic words. When coming across a longer unknown word in a text, students may:

- Guess a word they know that is visually similar
- Attempt to read the beginning of the word and garble the end
- Skip the word all together

We address this problem by following a syllable mapping activity. In this activity, students will identify the vowels and consonants in a word. This leads them into identifying syllables in each word. Direct and explicit instruction in the six syllable types is crucial for students to overcome challenges with reading multisyllabic words. As educators, it's imperative that we learn the six syllable types so that we can confidently teach them to our students. We should also reference the six syllable types when introducing new vocabulary words.

### **Looking to the Future**

Overall, the challenges faced by struggling readers extend beyond the academic realm, impacting various aspects of their lives and opportunities for future success. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions, personalized support, and a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. ACCESS is embarking on a journey to solve the reading crisis and addressing it head-on. Together, we will unlock the power of literacy and pave the way for a brighter future for all.



Image created with Adobe Firefly

Prompt: *the science of reading; hispanic teen reading book; bright sunny day*

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Image created with ChatGPT 4.0

Prompt: please create an image that shows the love of reading for diverse teens, bright vibrant colors; vector style

# Breaking Boundaries: The Power of Virtual Reality in Juvenile Rehabilitation

By Megan Mercurio  
San Francisco Unified School District

In the realm of juvenile justice, where the stakes are high and the potential for transformation immense, innovative approaches are essential. Amidst the stark walls and guarded corridors of juvenile detention centers, a new frontier unfolds—one that transcends physical boundaries to offer immersive experiences capable of reshaping perspectives and inspiring change. It is here, within the walls of confinement, that the transformative power of virtual reality (VR) takes root, offering a glimpse into a world beyond the confines of incarceration.

Enter "Step to the Line," a virtual reality journey that plunges participants into the stark realities of incarceration, serving as a potent catalyst for reflection and change. As the world outside fades away, we find ourselves ensnared in a labyrinth of fences, adorned with menacing barbed wire, a chilling departure from the freedoms we once cherished. Each step forward into this oppressive realm tightens the grip of incarceration, with cold metal bars and cramped cells enveloping us, leaving no room for escape. Here, amidst dimly lit corridors and shadowy cells, we encounter the stark truth of life behind bars—a reality that leaves an indelible mark on our souls.

This VR experience has profoundly shaken my students, igniting a fervor for change as it reveals the harsh reality of life behind bars and the 2.3 million adults currently incarcerated in the USA. Introducing my students to this reality is not merely a goal; it's my mission as an educator. Frequently, I've observed that some students don't harbor a genuine aversion to the system; some even joke about incarceration as a mere "sleepover" with friends. This misguided perception starkly contrasts with the grim reality of adult incarceration, where inmates can spend up to 23 hours a day in their cells. Our juvenile hall offers a markedly different experience with minimal time spent in locked cells. My aim is for them to gain a profound understanding of these stark differences. Furthermore, I'm concerned that making the juvenile

hall environment more comfortable might reduce their sense of urgency to avoid the system and could potentially contribute to institutionalization.

In a later exercise, inmates and predominantly white volunteers stand face to face, responding to statements like, 'I heard gunshots in my neighborhood growing up,' 'violence took place in my home growing up,' or 'I've earned a four-year college degree.' Participants gravitate closer to or farther from a central line, depending on their resonance with these experiences, illuminating shared human struggles and highlighting the troubling racial disparities between inmates and volunteers.

"Step to the Line," empowers socially conscious students determined to shatter the shackles of their oppressive circumstances and chart a new course. Later, as inmates graduate, proudly walking in cap and gown to accept their diplomas, it triggers an unexpected but deeply moving emotional response from my students, both young women and men. Their tears are not tears of despair but symbols of hope and inspiration, affirming their belief in their capacity to transcend their situation.

Building on this inspiration, my mission extends to inspiring younger students and encouraging older ones to not just change, but to redefine themselves as scholars, breaking free from the label of inmates. To support this goal, I obtained institutional approval to seek a grant for college sweatshirts for the youth. These sweatshirts are more than garments; they serve as a visceral, daily reminder for these young minds of the paths they are forging beyond the shadows of their pasts.

Furthermore, we've established a partnership with Incarceration to College, where formerly incarcerated college graduates and students visit weekly to share their stories of scholarly achievement.

These mentors serve as living proof that, despite the odds stacked against them, achieving scholarships and accessing higher learning opportunities is not an impossible dream.

One profoundly moving instance exemplifies the power of "Step to the Line." Cookie, a student battling severe mental illness and a tendency towards violence, was deeply affected by the experience. Overwhelmed by the haunting reality that the VR experience unveiled, Cookie collapsed into a bean bag chair, her sobs echoing the despair she felt. With tears streaming down her face, all she could utter was, "I don't want to go to prison." This unfiltered, raw reaction epitomizes the contrast between the world my students know and the reality that awaits them should they continue along their current path.

The voices of students who have experienced "Step to the Line" reveal the profound impact that they have had. Consider Zoey, a formerly homeless student who was born inside a prison and had given up on education. She expressed, "I feel connected

to the experience because I answered yes to almost every one of the questions, and it made me sad to see how many dropped out like me, but it made me happy to watch them graduate because it gives me hope that I can still graduate eventually and walk across the stage in a cap and gown, and my mom will be watching down and me, and she will be proud of me."

Then there's King, a young man who had previously been involved in violent incidents, and whose youth was spent in juvenile hall, disavowing school, said, "The experience made me think about staying out of prison and jail because I see it is not the place for me. It made me feel like going to college and graduating from high school because I saw the inmates in their

30s just now graduating."

"Step to the Line" doesn't only reveal the harsh realities of the adult prison system; it kindles a determination for a better life beyond the walls that detain them. My students' tears are not only poignant reminders of their resilience but a testament to the powerful blend of education and transformative virtual experiences, capable of evoking profound personal change.

As we conclude our exploration of "Step to the Line" and its impact within the realm of juvenile justice, we are reminded of the profound capacity for change that lies within each individual. From the chilling immersion into the realities of incarceration to the

tears of hope and inspiration that follow, this virtual journey transcends mere simulation, becoming a catalyst for personal transformation and societal progress.

Through partnerships, initiatives, and unwavering dedication, we continue to sow the seeds of possibility and resilience within

the hearts and minds of our students. From college sweatshirts as symbols of aspiration to mentorship programs that defy the odds, we stand poised to guide and empower the next generation of scholars, leaders, and changemakers.

As we navigate the complexities of juvenile justice and strive for a future defined by empathy and opportunity, let us carry forward the lessons learned from "Step to the Line." For in the intersection of technology and humanity, we find not only the potential for redemption but the promise of a brighter tomorrow, where every individual is empowered to step beyond the confines of their circumstances and into a life of possibility and promise.

**"...my mission extends to inspiring younger students and encouraging older ones to not just change, but to redefine themselves as scholars, breaking free from the label of inmates."**



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# Choices and Options for Local Youth

By Judy Boring, Public Information Officer,  
Stanislaus County Office of Education

When does making a choice that can impact your life begin? Is it the first time you realize the choice is yours to make, or is it a decision made by someone else? Either way, we live with the outcomes. For a teenager who makes a poor choice or decision, it may place them in Juvenile Hall.

One of the Stanislaus County Office of Education (SCOE) responsibilities is to directly serve the most vulnerable student populations, including those incarcerated or on probation. In partnership with Stanislaus County Probation at the Education West Campus Court School, SCOE's Educational Options Division provides teachers so students in juvenile hall can attend school daily and work towards meeting graduation requirements.

In addition to the school lessons, SCOE looks for innovative and successful programs to help students. A new culinary arts class started last fall helps students earn a ServSafe Certification in Culinary Arts while they are enrolled in the program. The certificate will help the student qualify for a job in the food service industry.

Another focus of the staff is on the social emotional learning (SEL) needs of students while addressing English Language Arts standards. By combining SEL with academic support it sets students up for a greater chance of success. This year teachers at the West Campus Juvenile Hall have also introduced students to Walls That Talk. SCOE partnered with Kings County Office of Education to develop an English Language Arts curriculum to meet the needs of the at-risk population in Juvenile Hall. The direct instruction lessons of Walls That Talk are based in hip-hop culture including media, visual and performing arts. Staff is building a program using

music and allowing students to express themselves through song writing. "Students are able to explore past experiences and really work through those times to begin healing themselves," said Principal John Luis.

An outcome of the program is that students can tell their own stories and start to self-reflect. One student going through the program at the West Campus shared, "I just feel like we are very lucky to have the music program in the facility because a lot of the kids need some way to express their emotions and need an outlet for that expression. It just gives me something to put down on paper and express my deep emotions. I feel like it helps me a lot."

**"Music is a way that teachers can get the students to open up and begin sharing their stories with them."**

Expressing and sharing emotions with other youth in the class shows vulnerability. In most cases not something these youth have shown because of violence or chaos in their lives.

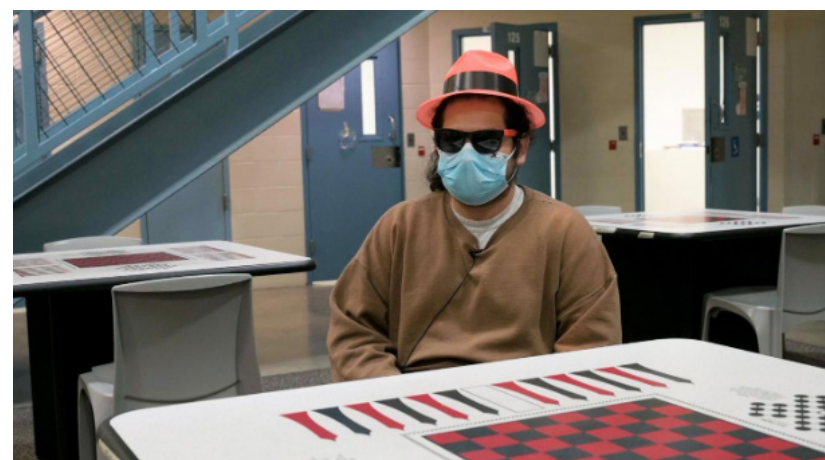
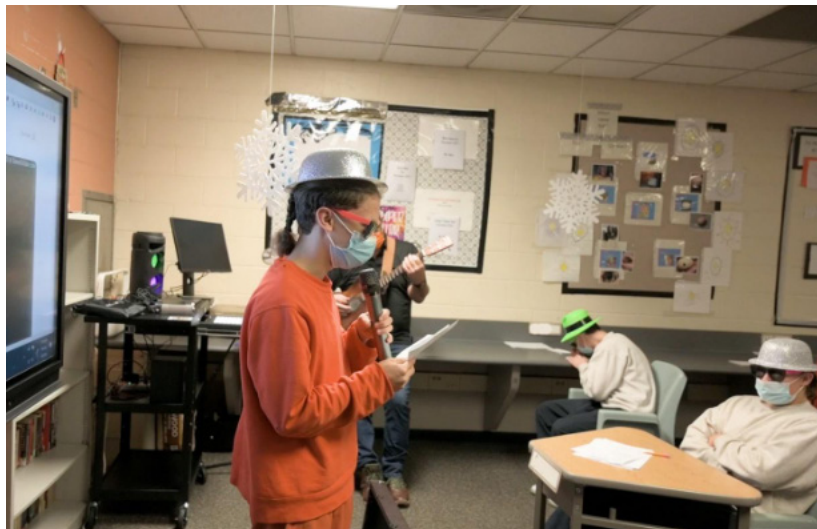
However, being vulnerable is one of many steps that break down walls and help build relationships and trust with others.

"I've already seen a huge change in both their physical and emotional well-being and the way that the students speak and carry themselves," said Teacher Marlene Bravo. "They are learning to address their emotions on a positive level and are able to go back into the community being able to express how they feel without their fists."

Music is a way that teachers can get the students to open up and begin sharing their stories with them. "Music is a different way to express your emotions and something special for me," said a West Campus student.

To learn more about Walls That Talk and other programs offered at SCOE or visit <https://stancoe.org/division/educational-options>.

*Students photographed are wearing masks, sunglasses, and hats for confidentiality.*



# Unlocking Creativity and Potential: LACOE's Graphics Communication CTE Program in Juvenile Court Schools

By Mary Sanchez and Gerald Melendez  
Career Technical Education (CTE) Educational Programs LACOE

Career Technical Education (CTE) programs provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the workforce. However, bringing meaningful CTE courses into Juvenile Court Schools has traditionally been a challenge due to a variety of factors. These schools serve students involved in the juvenile justice system, and they often face high levels of teacher turnover, student turnover, and low completion rates. Despite these challenges, two Juvenile Court School sites in the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) have successfully implemented a Graphics Communication CTE Program. This article examines the strategies used to overcome the challenges and the impact of the program on students.

LACOE's approach is one of exposure and with the guidance of two exemplary instructors, this program has not only engaged students but also fostered their creativity while illuminating the diverse career avenues within graphics communication. Students have eagerly embraced their educational journey, actively participating in various activities and projects.

Exposure to industry is a key element of Career Technical Education and through the instructors' noteworthy efforts, students can showcase their artistic talents through participation in various contests and competitions. Additionally, students in the program are enlisted to create projects such as designing graduation covers, save-the-date materials, and other posters for multiple of LACOE's events. Most recently, students crafted OSHA 10 industry posters needed for marketing purposes.

As part of the exposure approach, Career Engagement Events are implemented to bring the industry into the classroom in-person, virtual, and when possible, in close coordination with probation, students are cleared to attend events. One Career Engagement Event was when Aaron Draplin, a prominent figure in the graphic design industry, shared his journey virtually with all program students. His candid narrative resonated with many students, mirroring their own experiences, and his engaging presence inspired them with the possibilities within the field of graphic design. Draplin's transparency in recounting his path to success served as a source of motivation for students, reinforcing the value of perseverance and determination in achieving their goals. Another Career Engagement Event had two students who created OSHA posters visit LACOE's reprographics unit within headquarters. Students were provided with a PowerPoint presentation which was then followed by a tour of the facilities. The event culminated with the unveiling of their posters, printed and framed.

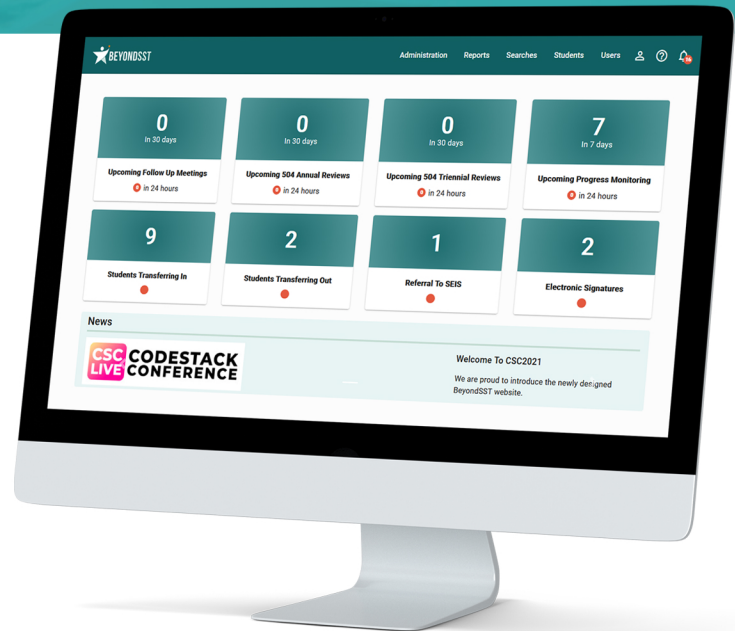


This success underscores the importance of CTE programs in Juvenile Court Schools and serves as a testament to the transformative power of hands-on learning experiences. As these students continue to thrive and explore their potential, it is evident that with dedicated educators and meaningful opportunities, they can overcome challenges and chart a course toward a promising future in graphics communication and beyond. LACOE is committed to enhancing CTE programs and exposure to students, aiming to offer diverse opportunities that inspire, educate, and cultivate a mindset of endless possibilities. By introducing new experiences, we aspire to continue fostering creativity, skill development, and passion among our student body, preparing them for success both academically and professionally not only in the classroom but also in their communities.



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# The Value and Promise of Ethnic Studies: Empowering Teachers and Students through Ethnic Studies Professional Development and Micro-Certification Program

Professional Development, Curriculum and Instruction Unit,  
Educational Programs LACOE

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the value of incorporating diverse perspectives and cultural competency into education. One significant initiative addressing this need is the development of ethnic studies professional development programs. These programs aim to equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to effectively teach and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom.

The call for ethnic studies in education arises from the acknowledgment that traditional curricula often overlook the histories, experiences, and contributions of underrepresented communities (Armstrong, 2021). Ethnic studies professional development programs seek to address this gap by providing educators with specialized training that fosters cultural competence and an understanding of the diverse narratives that shape our society.

Cultural competence is supported in the ethnic studies classroom with culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). CRP is a student-centered and enriching pedagogy with three components key to ethnic studies pedagogy: “building upon students’ experiences and perspectives, developing students’ critical consciousness, and creating caring academic environments” (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 10). Research suggests that culturally responsive approaches improve student achievement and well-being, especially among those facing negative academic stereotypes (Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paris & Alim, 2014; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Ladson-Billings (2021) identifies

sociopolitical consciousness as the “most ignored” component of CRP. This component is the center of ethnic studies and introduces students to content that is all but absent in the traditional classroom, enriching and empowering students to know themselves and their histories.

Unlike past multicultural programs, ethnic studies has been shown to have academic, cognitive, social, and emotional value for students (Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) and can improve their academic achievement, engagement, and sense of agency (Cabrera et al., 2012; Cammarota, 2017; Dee & Penner, 2016; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

**"Dee and Penner (2016) found that ethnic studies participation increased high school student attendance by 21 percentage points, cumulative ninth-grade GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23 credits."**

LACOE has begun to engage teachers in a micro-certification program which began in May 2023. LACOE has teamed with ethnic studies experts and California State University Chico to launch a year-long professional development

program that offers an Ethnic Studies Micro-Certification for teachers. Through deep discussions, study, and practice of ethnic studies content and pedagogy, teachers are developing expertise in the disciplines of ethnic studies. Upon completion of the year-long micro-certification, teachers will have designed ethnic studies lesson plans, unit plans, and course outlines that are responsive to their student’s demographics and needs.

It should be emphasized that ethnic studies are particularly important to provide for incarcerated youth.

Ethnic studies curriculum and teaching take up the notion Hamer and Johnson (2021) suggest wherein schools reverse the school-to-prison pipeline by utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2006, 2021) engaging students in “self-education as a way to develop and affirm identity” (p. 102). LACOE’s ethnic studies micro-certified teachers are preparing to lead the way in providing educational experiences for our youth that hold the promise of significant academic and social value for them. Studies show that both students of color and white students benefit socially from ethnic studies with increased acceptance and understanding of one another (Sleeter, 2011). Furthermore, Dee and Penner (2016) found that ethnic studies participation increased high school student attendance by 21 percentage points, cumulative ninth-grade GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23 credits. In 2021, Bonilla, Dee, and Penner found high school ethnic studies students experienced an increase in longer-run academic engagement and attainment including probability of postsecondary matriculation. LACOE recognizes the promise of ethnic studies for our youth and is investing in it through our new Ethnic Studies Micro-Certification.

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**Los Angeles County  
Office of Education**



**TRANSFORMING  
LIVES THROUGH  
PURPOSE DRIVEN  
EDUCATION**

**BREAKOUT SESSION 5**




**STEVE  
WARD**

**LEARN HOW PURPOSE  
DRIVEN EDUCATION  
CHANGES THE  
LIVES OF:**

**THURSDAY,**

**MAY 9TH, 2024**

 **11:20 - 12:20**

**POINT**   
**LOBOS 1**

- **THE HARD TO REACH, HARD TO TEACH**
- **AT PROMISE YOUTH AND ADULTS**
- **STUDENTS WITH LEARNING CHALLENGES**
- **STUDENTS WITH IEP & ITP'S**
- **ADULTS**



*SCAN ME*

# From Networking to Creation: How a Conference Sparked a Collaborative Book

By Jina Poirier, Coordinator  
Orange County Department of Education

## Thoughts and Insights from an Enthusiastic Alternative Educator

I am profoundly grateful for the privilege of having spent the majority of my career at the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE). Specifically, within the Division of Alternative Education (ACCESS). I've also had the incredible opportunity to branch out and teach in various local districts and private non-profits before returning to OCDE/ACCESS in different capacities. You know, looking back, getting laid off from multiple districts during the 2008 recession was a blessing in disguise. Although at the time it didn't feel like a positive thing. It really pushed me out of my comfort zone, and, believe it or not, I think it made me a stronger educator! Heads up to my math-savvy teacher friends: no need to tally up my years to guess my age. Let's just say I've been in the education game for a good while, and every day I'm more convinced that this is the path I was destined for, especially when it comes to alternative education. I can't imagine a career in any other field.



Anyone with a passion for at-risk youth or adults in the state of California knows that coming to the annual Juvenile Court, Community and Alternative School Administrators of California (JCCASAC) conference has and always will feel like home. This conference was one of the first to specifically cater to the needs of alternative educators, unlike the majority of conferences designed for more traditional settings. JCCASAC provided a platform for participants to exchange ideas and insights that can be directly applied in our distinctive settings, such as juvenile court schools, community schools, group homes, or youth challenge academies.

We all know the challenges of falling in love with a curriculum or behavior support structure that we learn about in a session only to realize it needs tweaking to fit our unique environments. Teachers are busy! Administrators are busy, too! The extra effort required to modify or completely overhaul tools or strategies intended for conventional settings only adds more to our workloads. Thus, taking us away from our students. That said, JCCASAC is like our own version of Cheers, where, just like Norm from the beloved '80s sitcom, we're among our own. There's no need to explain our context when we chat over coffee during breaks; attendees at JCCASAC simply understand one another. It's similar to meeting that lifelong friend for lunch and picking up right where you both left off.

So, why am I sharing all of this? I'm happy you're curious. About five years ago, while attending JCCASAC, a seemingly small encounter sparked a project that deserves a huge THANK YOU to the JCCASAC team for making it possible. It's almost as if JCCASAC played matchmaker, like match.com, bringing together a group of alternative educators with an international education superstar! Or to borrow the words of a clever and humorous LinkedIn commenter, they referred to her as the Taylor Swift of UDL: Dr. Katie Novak! Oftentimes we wonder what we get out of professional learning conferences. Is it worth the time commitment or cost to send staff?

This story is an example of why we make an effort to come together and share our stories. Provide some insight to the power of connection with the same goal of student success in mind. Our lucky meetup at the JCCASAC conference kicked off a team effort to write a book about [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) in English Language Arts \(ELA\)](#). Mixing personal stories with solid research, it shows just how game-changing these conferences can be for sparking new ideas, making cool connections, and ultimately enhancing our experiences for students and families.

### **Maximizing Opportunities at Professional Conferences**

A lot of districts view conferences as a way for teachers to score some professional development points. It aligns seamlessly with our well-known frameworks like, the California Multi-Tiered

System of Support (CA MTSS) and the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), as it focuses on empowering educators to enhance their skills, exchange effective strategies, and keep abreast of the latest trends. These professional learning events are ideal spots for teachers to collaborate, exchange tips, and test out new approaches. The whole aim is to enhance educators' skills in a connected and comprehensive manner, all while focusing on improving outcomes for students, families, and educational partners.

Professional conferences act as crucial arenas for professional growth, giving educators the chance to dive into the newest research, build collaborative networks, and develop fresh practices. When folks gather at a conference, the burst of creativity and innovation can be phenomenal. That's precisely what unfolded for our team of four alternative educators

who, after a chat with Dr. Katie Novak at the 2019 JCCASAC conference in Newport Beach, California, embarked on a collaborative venture that grew into something significant, impacting not only our classrooms and districts but also the broader educational community. It underscores the unique value of these gatherings: you can show up, grab some insights, and individually advance. However, the real magic is in forging connections with peers over common interests, sometimes starting from a mere chat over coffee en route to another session. The four of us are still blown away by Dr. Novak taking the time to come to our breakout session. After all, she is the Taylor Swift of UDL and we were

presenting our universally designed ELA curriculum. Huge props to Pam Tupy at OCDE for spotting the magic in what we were doing and giving Dr. Novak the nudge to swing by our session! You're the best, Pam!

**"It's not just about going to the conference; it's also about spreading the word on the cool stuff you learn there, helping everyone level up together."**

### **Beyond the Conference: Igniting Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing**

It's not just about going to the conference; it's also about spreading the word on the cool stuff you learn there, helping everyone level up together. Let's not miss out on sharing with our teams after attending! There's so much energy in keeping the conversation going well after the conference is over! We should approach our staff who attend conferences as we do our students, possibly crafting a universally designed method for sharing insights upon return. How about a choice chart of options, similar to what we prepare for our students? The power of ChatGPT can help make it happen with minimal effort. Allow me to demonstrate.

**Prompt:** ChatGPT - *create five options for how teachers can share what they learned from attending a professional conference with staff when they return with UDL in mind*

**ChatGPT Response:**

Certainly! Incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which focus on providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action & expression, here are the enhanced options:

- 1. Interactive Workshop with UDL Integration:** Organize a workshop where teachers can experience the conference learnings through various UDL-aligned activities. Include options for engagement (e.g., hands-on activities, group discussions, role-playing), representation (visuals, auditory materials, handouts), and action & expression (opportunities to apply concepts in practical or creative ways).
- 2. Multimedia Presentation Series:** Develop a series of presentations that utilize multiple media formats (videos, podcasts, slides, interactive quizzes) to cater to diverse learning preferences. Allow colleagues to choose which presentation format they prefer to engage with, offering them control over their learning path.
- 3. Resource Sharing with Collaborative Elements:** Create a shared digital space where resources are accessible in various formats (text, audio, video). Encourage staff to contribute their own resources or insights, creating a collaborative and dynamic learning environment. Include discussion boards or forums for ongoing dialogue and reflection.
- 4. Peer Coaching with Flexible Options:** Offer peer coaching in various formats to accommodate different learning styles and preferences. This could include in-person sessions, video calls, written exchanges, or collaborative lesson planning. Provide opportunities for both structured and more open-ended interactions.
- 5. UDL-focused Discussion Groups:** Facilitate discussion groups where participants can explore the conference themes through the lens of UDL. Use guiding questions that prompt participants to consider how they can apply UDL principles in their own teaching. Offer various ways for participants to express their thoughts and insights, such as spoken contributions, written reflections, or creative expressions.

By integrating UDL principles into these options, teachers can model inclusive learning strategies while sharing valuable knowledge and insights from the conference, fostering a more engaging and accessible professional development experience for all staff members.

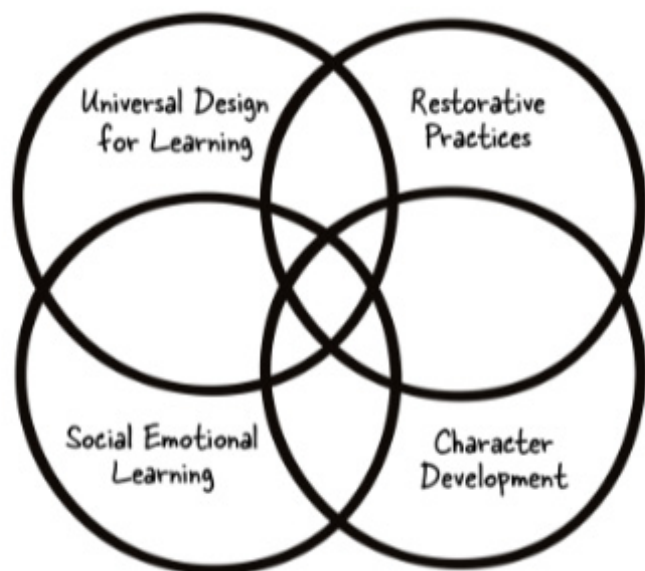
This is just one simple example of how we could easily design a system of sharing our learning experiences to build capacity in our team upon return. By sharing our learning and not just keeping it to ourselves, we can amplify our impact, creating a ripple effect that not only enhances our work but also profoundly benefits our students and their families, fostering a community-wide culture of growth and collaboration.

**The Book: Universal Design for Learning in English Language Arts**

The fact that a connection between our team in California and Dr. Novak on the east coast, grew over five years, despite a global pandemic, speaks volumes about our dedication to supporting students.

This solid relationship launched a project proposal to CAST Publishing, enabling us to connect with fellow educators across the U.S. and internationally. Major props to our mentor, Dr. Katie Novak, for her faith in our work. She recognized the potential in what this close-knit team from Orange County, California, was up to. Her encouragement not only propelled our project forward but also set so many other opportunities in motion. Not to mention the chance to highlight the work surrounding at-risk youth and alternative educators across the nation.

With Dr. Novak leading the charge on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), our group was all in on making sure that UDL wasn't just a fancy term but a real practice. The Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) really came through with a stellar professional development program for us in alternative education, mixing in some ELL strategies from EL Achieve with UDL, SEL, and Restorative Practices. This sparked a pretty exciting transformation in our educational approach. This visual is an excellent way to illustrate what we all had in mind. We didn't want the training to be just a one-time event. Instead, we aimed to create something we could share with our teachers that would exemplify the power of integrating best practices!



A few of us from the ACCESS program got inspired and decided to push the boundaries. We envisioned a way of teaching that's not just business as usual but can be adapted across various subjects. We all know the drill with the usual 'check the box' professional development—it feels great in the moment but can fizzle out back in the daily grind. Our goal? To come up with a straightforward, adoptable model that relieves teachers from always having to start from ground zero. We aimed to weave actionable strategies right into the English Language Arts curriculum, making it easier for teachers to try out and integrate new approaches.

This initiative was about more than just beefing up our professional development—it was about turning it into a real, hands-on tool that genuinely shifts how we teach, ensuring that our professional learning leads to dynamic, inclusive, and effective teaching strategies that uplift every student.

And here's the exciting part: the culmination of our efforts is a new book, part of CAST's UDL Now! series. It's designed to be a thorough guide for educators keen on fostering literacy in a diverse classroom. The book underscores using UDL principles to nurture a vibrant, collaborative, and inclusive literacy environment that respects and responds to the varied needs and backgrounds of our students. It's not just about the basics of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language development; it also delves into how social-emotional learning and character education intersect with literacy, offering a holistic take on empowering our students.

## **Closing Thoughts from this Enthusiastic Alternative Educator**

To wrap up my thoughts, it's clear that the journey from a simple networking opportunity at a conference to the creation of a collaborative book is a testament to the power of connection, shared vision, and dedication to our craft. The experiences shared at the JCCASAC conference weren't just fleeting moments of inspiration; they became the seeds for a group project that aims to keep the conversation going.

Our story is a reminder of the untapped potential that lies in professional gatherings. When educators come together, united by a common purpose and a shared passion for enhancing the learning experience for all students, the possibilities are endless. Our encounter with Dr. Novak was serendipitous, yet it underscores the significance of being open to opportunities that such conferences provide.

The development of our book is not just about sharing knowledge; it's a beacon for educators everywhere, demonstrating that when we collaborate, share our insights, and apply our learning, we can create tools that have a real, lasting impact. This isn't just about improving our individual classrooms; it's about elevating the entire educational community, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive in a learning environment that's designed to meet their unique needs.

Let this story inspire you to not only seek out professional development opportunities but to actively engage with them, to share your learnings with your peers, and to look for ways to collaboratively enhance the educational experiences we provide. Our journey from a conference conversation to a comprehensive guide for educators is a powerful reminder that when we come together, share our passions, and work towards a common goal, we can truly make a difference in the world of education.

Channeling the wisdom of Coach Ted Lasso, who once said, "For me, success is not about the wins and losses. It is about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field. And it ain't always easy, but neither is growing up without someone believing in you." In the spirit of this message, this enthusiastic alternative educator urges us all to carry forward the momentum, the insights, and the collaborative connections we've fostered. Let's continue to learn from each other, to share our successes and challenges, and to collectively strive toward creating more inclusive, engaging, and effective educational environments for all our students. By doing so, we're not just focusing on the 'wins and losses' in education; we're committed to nurturing the best versions of our students, both inside and outside the classroom. After all, it's through our shared efforts that we can achieve the greatest impact, not just in our classrooms but across the nation and beyond!

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Image created with ChatGPT 4.0

**Prompt:** *Illustration of a diverse group of high school students sitting in a circle on chairs, engaged in a social emotional learning session. The room features a large chalkboard prominently displaying 'Social Emotional Learning' in bold letters. The students, representing various ethnicities including some with disabilities, are interacting enthusiastically. The faces of the students are drawn more naturally to reflect realistic expressions. The room is decorated with colorful bookshelves, educational posters, plants, and a bright window showing a sunny day outside.*

# Peace Literacy, Virtual Reality, and Alternative Education

By Tom Kostic, Mauricio Michel, Vern Burton, Paul K. Chappell, and Sharyn Clough  
Orange County Department of Education

## Introductory Remarks from Tom Kostic

In the spring of 2021, a cohort of high school educators in the OCDE ACCESS program, including Mauricio (Mo) Michel and me, were invited by our then principal, now Assistant Superintendent, Vern Burton, to attend a series of training sessions on a new approach to social emotional learning (SEL) called Peace Literacy. With start-up funding from the Orange County Community Foundation, the Peace Literacy Institute partnered with OCDE to offer the training. One of the features that made the Peace Literacy training unique was their realistic response to the challenges we had been seeing with digital technologies like smart phones and social media, as well as their presentation of the potential benefits of newer digital technologies, especially virtual reality (VR), for students in the alternative education classroom.

When Vern approached Mo and me about joining the Peace Literacy cohort, I was initially apprehensive due to my lack of knowledge about VR and how it worked, but Mo was tech-savvy, and once Vern explained the engaging qualities of the program and the potential for decreasing aggression among our students, we signed up. During COVID, Mo and I had seen a large shift in the reason that students were being referred to alternative school settings. No longer were students coming in simply because of issues with truancy or because they were behind on credits. After over a year of isolation, with their peer communication restricted to social media and online platforms, we were now seeing a marked increase in student referrals for aggressive behavior. I was fascinated with the prospect of having another tool in my tool kit, to help students who were acting out of anger and rage.

The Peace Literacy training series culminated in a VR pilot project in November of 2021 where Mo and I had our students participate in the Peace Literacy curriculum using headsets in virtual reality. In the

last section of this paper, I'll share some details about that profound experience, and provide updates on our ongoing work with the Peace Literacy Institute. For the next few sections, I'll turn it over to Paul K. Chappell and Sharyn (Shari) Clough to provide some background on Peace Literacy.

## Background by Paul K. Chappell

I began developing what became the Peace Literacy curricular approach back in 2001, influenced by the realization that my public-school education had not been designed to help students like me. Born in 1980, I grew up in a violent household in Alabama, the son of a Korean mother and a Black father who brought home his own trauma as a veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars. As a multi-racial outcast, I experienced severe childhood trauma both at home and in school, which filled me with extreme mistrust and rage. Struggling with behavioral problems in school, I was kicked out of elementary school for fighting, almost kicked out of middle school, and suspended in high school for fighting. My mistrust and rage reached a point where I developed a mass shooter personality in high school and fantasized every day about shooting my classmates. Trapped in the painful terrain of mistrust and rage, I needed an education system that did not yet exist, one that would give me skills for building trust within myself and with others, and for replacing the desperate cry of rage with the far more powerful language of waging peace. Waging peace is a strategic approach to creating positive change in our lives, communities, and the world.

Peace Literacy views peace not as a sentimental wish or cliché, as it is so often viewed today, but as a set of practical skills, as a life-saving literacy that is even more complex than literacy in reading and writing. My training in both the military and in nonviolence informs how I think about Peace Literacy. I graduated from West Point in 2002, was deployed to Iraq, and left the army as a captain in 2009.



When I was at West Point, I realized that soldiers receive excellent training in waging war, but most people receive no training in waging peace. Furthermore, our society teaches us harmful habits that actively undermine our well-being, along with the well-being of others. At West Point I wondered: What would our world be like if people were as well-trained in waging peace as soldiers are in waging war? What would happen if people took waging peace as seriously as people take waging war?

After I left the military, I trained with civil rights leaders Bernard Lafayette, C.T. Vivian, and James Lawson, who worked closely with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. My military and nonviolence training taught me important leadership and life skills that I wished I had learned in my K-12 education. These skills empowered me to build trust, cultivate calm in the midst of turmoil, and develop empathy, integrity, appreciation, self-worth, and a sense of purpose and meaning—all of which now inform the Peace Literacy curriculum.

### **Peace Literacy Curriculum**

We have a curriculum for learners of all ages, designed to be used online, in traditional classroom settings, and in virtual reality. One of the conceptual scaffolds undergirding all of our curriculum is the insight that our physical senses, especially our eyes, perceive very little of reality. To acknowledge how little our eyes are capable of seeing, consider that all around us and everywhere within us, there is a vast microscopic reality that is invisible to our naked eyes. The microscopic lifeforms on this planet, which include bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms, are estimated to outnumber the stars in our universe. But before the microscope was invented, which is most of human history, people did not know that an invisible reality was all around them, and that the human body contained a far more complex reality than our naked eyes could perceive, consisting of

around 100 trillion cells and microorganisms (Stein, 2012). Peace Literacy is like a microscope. Just as a microscope reveals a vast microscopic reality that is invisible to our naked eyes, Peace Literacy reveals the vast reality of the human condition that includes our social and emotional world, which extends far beyond what our naked eyes can see. So much of the human condition is invisible to our naked eyes, because so much of our humanity is non-physical. Rage, mistrust, empathy, integrity, appreciation, self-worth, purpose, and meaning are not like a physical object that we can see and touch. We cannot weigh them on a scale or measure them with a ruler. They are invisible in many ways, yet their effects on our lives and the world are as real as anything that is visible.

The Peace Literacy curriculum uses metaphors and allegories to make the invisible visible. Metaphors and allegories have been used in all known cultures (Brown, 1991) and can be powerful and effective teaching tools. Aesop's fables such as Tortoise and the Hare, Boy Who Cried Wolf, and North Wind and the Sun are allegories that use metaphors to transform abstract concepts into important life lessons that can be visualized, making them seem tangible and more real. These stories increase accessibility, because they communicate abstract concepts in ways that can be understood even by young children, yet these stories also communicate deep wisdom that is important to the lives of adults. All major world religions, along with countless philosophers throughout history, have used metaphorical storytelling, including allegories and parables, to transform abstract and invisible ideas into something that can be visualized. In his "I Have a Dream Speech," King references metaphors over ninety times.

Students use metaphors all the time—they are “heartbroken” or complain about “getting stabbed in the back”—using everyday language to transform feelings such as grief and betrayal, which are non-physical and cannot be weighed on a scale, into things that can be visualized.

In our experience, the power of metaphors and allegories is underutilized in modern education. Our Peace Literacy curriculum brings **three new approaches** to this timeless and global form of teaching.

The **first** approach is to use multiple metaphors to convey a single idea (Chappell and Clapes, 2019). The Peace Literacy curriculum describes empathy metaphorically as an eye that allows us to see what our physical eyes cannot see. The Eye of Empathy can perceive the causes of psychological pain in others and in ourselves, which gives us more ways to respond to these causes of pain. Empathy is also described metaphorically as a muscle that can become stronger through training, development, and persistent use, and will atrophy through lack of use. Why use more than one metaphor to describe empathy? Metaphors are like perspectives. If we use two metaphors to explore an idea, it is like seeing the idea from two different perspectives. Each perspective gives us unique and important information about the idea. The metaphor of an eye conveys that empathy increases our ability to perceive, examine, and understand both the causes of a problem and its potential solutions. The metaphor of a muscle conveys that empathy is something that we can make stronger through active use and can atrophy through lack of use, which not only communicates the idea of growth mindset, but also the risks of inactivity. Peace Literacy focuses on nine muscles that encourage growth mindset, including empathy, which students can strengthen with practice (Chappell, 2012; Chappell, 2017). These nine muscles of our humanity are empathy, hope, reason, conscience, appreciation (and its highest

expression: stewardship), imagination, curiosity, language, and discipline (defined here as the ability to focus and follow through).

The **second** new approach that Peace Literacy brings to the use of metaphors and allegories is combining metaphors, where all of the metaphors work together to express more complex ideas. Unlike Aesop’s fables, which are isolated and do not combine to tell a larger story, the metaphors of Peace Literacy all work together to tell a much larger story. For example, our Peace Literacy curriculum describes aggression as the heat emitted from a fire, and the fire symbolizes pain and distress (Chappell and Clough, 2021). People do not become aggressive because they feel good. Some of the fires – the painful emotions – that can cause the heat of human aggression include fear, humiliation, helplessness, frustration, shame, alienation, disappointment, insecurity, grief, and feeling disrespected. The Eye of Empathy allows us to perceive the fires beneath aggression in others and in ourselves, so that we can respond to the underlying fires – the root causes – rather than the surface heat of aggression. This shows how the empathy metaphor combines with the aggression metaphor to express a more complex idea: empathy’s ability to perceive the underlying fires of distress so that we can confront the source of pain rather than the symptom of aggression.



"Alternative Education High School Students from the 2021 Peace Literacy VR Pilot."

In a forthcoming paper “Peace Literacy as Conceptual Change: An SEL Pilot Study,” Montfort, Betts, and Clough report on the ways that 9th grade high school students think about aggression and empathy both before and after their experience with the “Fires Beneath Aggression” lessons, concluding that after their experience with the Peace Literacy framework, students showed more empathy and understanding: “Prior to the intervention, student responses that showed less empathy in answer to questions about others’ aggression followed a simple pattern identifying static, negative moral properties: ‘He was mad’ or ‘He just wanted revenge.’ After engaging with the curriculum, the students generated more empathetic and complex explanations about aggression, their own, but especially others, such as ‘I think he was having a hard time at work,’ and ‘She was sad and frustrated’” (Montfort, Betts, and Clough, forthcoming).

The Peace Literacy curriculum also offers students a large skill-set for expressing their pain in peaceful and productive ways that are more effective than aggression. To learn and practice this large skill-set, students go on a heroic journey that weaves together hundreds of metaphors into a larger epic story (Chappell, 2023). All of these metaphors combine into the Landscape of the Human Condition, where students learn how to navigate and overcome the Island of Aggression, the Island of Melancholy, the Island of the Unknown, and the Island of Conflict, along with many other environments, while unlocking dozens of treasures that can increase well-being, such as the Eye of Empathy, Doorway of Appreciation and Stewardship, and portals to the Ground of Self-worth and the Peak of Purpose and Meaning. This landscape and the treasures hidden within it are depicted across seven maps that take students on a field trip into the human condition.

To explain how a field trip into the human condition is even possible, we must discuss the **third** new approach that Peace Literacy brings to the use of

metaphors and allegories – the implementation of virtual reality (VR) as a curricular tool (Chappell, 2022).

### **Peace Literacy and VR**

According to a 2018 study, VR is a powerful educational medium. When compared to traditional and video learning methods, students using VR “showed better performance for ‘remembering’ than those in the traditional and the video conditions. Emotion self-ratings before and after the learning phase showed an increase in positive emotions and a decrease in negative emotions for the VR condition. Conversely there was a decrease in positive emotions in both the traditional and video conditions . . . Participants in the VR condition reported higher engagement than those in the other conditions. Overall, VR displayed an improved learning experience when compared to traditional and video learning methods” (Allcoat and von Mühlengen, 2018). The focus on the positive emotions associated with learning in VR is particularly salient for students whose educational experiences have often been negative.

The 2018 study focused on the ability of VR to enhance learning in traditional subjects, but VR has the potential to enhance the learning of Peace Literacy even further, because it can transform Peace Literacy metaphors into a virtual universe that students can feel embodied in and journey through together. VR can allow students to see, hear, touch, explore, and interact with these metaphors, making the ideas they represent feel far more tangible, memorable, and real. VR can also depict scale and spatial relationships in a way that no other medium can, which creates new ways of conceptualizing and remembering ideas. In our Peace Literacy VR curriculum, students can see the fires of distress in front of them, watching these flames blaze across a colossal cavern wall.

When the students look up, they can see the massive heat plumes of aggression above. Or they can be within these heat plumes and look down, seeing the fires of distress deep below. In our VR curriculum, the Eye of Empathy can literally change what students are capable of seeing in the virtual world (Chappell, 2020).

The potential of Peace Literacy and VR to transform the classroom into an epic journey that increases student engagement, understanding, and learning retention is enormous, because VR hardware is going to become dramatically better over the next ten years. Also, VR, AR (Augmented Reality), and AI are convergent technologies that will make each other stronger. VR and AR, especially when combined with AI, will provide greater accessibility than any medium that has come before, not only because this new medium can transform abstract ideas into virtual environments and objects that students can interact with using their senses, but also because of how VR creates new ways to overcome physical limits. If someone does not have the use of arms and legs, VR devices will allow them to explore and interact with the virtual world using their eye movements. If someone cannot see, VR can create a sense of embodiment through immersive spatial audio, while an AI guide provides audio descriptions of the visual environments and objects. If someone cannot see and hear, advanced haptics in the future could allow this person to touch things in the virtual world, while an AI guide narrates the journey in braille, transforming the student into a hero in a living story.

Peace Literacy recognizes that students are increasingly living their lives in a digital world, and that it is more important than ever for them to understand this technology and how it can intersect with and manipulate non-physical needs such as belonging and self-worth (Chappell, 2018b). Our Peace Literacy research identifies nine non-physical needs, all of which make students particularly vulnerable when using digital

technology: purpose and meaning, nurturing relationships, explanations, expression, inspiration, belonging, self-worth, challenge, and transcendence (defined as the need to transcend our sense of time) (Chappell, 2018a). We also show how trauma can become tangled in these non-physical needs, leading to distortions called the tangles of trauma (Chappell, 2018a). To list a few examples, trauma can become tangled in our need for purpose and meaning, leading to a suffocating sense of meaninglessness, or tangled in our need for nurturing relationships, leading to persistent feelings of mistrust, or tangled in our need for belonging, leading to alienation, or tangled in our need for self-worth, leading to shame and self-loathing, or tangled in our need for expression, leading to rage, or tangled in our need for inspiration, leading to cynicism and numbness.

We are designing Peace Literacy curriculum to help students understand why digital technology is so alluring to their non-physical needs, and how it can be used to bind people or to liberate them. In lessons currently in production, “Preparing for the Oncoming Tech Tsunami,” students learn about emerging technologies such as VR, AR, and AI, and how they can prepare themselves for this future by leveling up their humanity. The challenges of VR, AR, and AI will be so immense that they will make contemporary worries about smartphones and traditional social media seem mild in comparison. The positive potential of VR, AR, and AI will be matched by unprecedented peril. Peace Literacy uses this peril as an urgent call to action that demands a curricular response, especially for students in alternative education programs.

When Chappell grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, students like him who struggled with severe rage, mistrust, alienation, numbness, and other tangles of trauma were at the margins. Today we see that rage, mistrust, and other tangles of trauma are moving away from the margins and becoming more and more mainstream, not just in students but also in adults.

When the margins of rage and mistrust move toward the middle, this threatens our democracy and the world, and makes all forms of violence more likely. Using principles of universal design, Chappell built Peace Literacy from the ground up to help students at the margins; the result is a relevant, hopeful, and empowering curriculum that can help all students (Clough, Chappell, Miller, and Celeste 2021). Peace Literacy can empower all students to strengthen their muscle of hope during this challenging time, and to develop the skills needed to create positive change in their communities, country, and the world.

### **Concluding Remarks from Tom Kostic**

When we first attended the trainings with Paul and Shari back in the spring of 2021, they explained that Peace Literacy was informed by three main questions:

1. What if people were as well-trained in waging peace as soldiers are in waging war?
2. What if people were trained to address the root cause of problems rather than symptoms?
3. What if we taught peace as a skill set, as a life-saving literacy, with as much rigor as we teach literacy in reading and writing?

These questions have stuck with me. The foundation of Peace Literacy was completely different than any approach to SEL that I'd heard before and it fit the needs of my students perfectly. The more I listened, the more it made sense to me. It was revealing to look back at my comments on a post-training survey where I highlighted as an important take-away the simple idea of peace as a skill. Vern wrote in his survey that "This information is not only timely, but essential! PLI is giving us some very needed tools to handle a world which seems to be getting more aggressive day by day. Most importantly it provides skills our students will need to become successful and help [them] to make positive contributions to our communities."

As Mo, Vern, and I began processing all we had learned after the initial training series in the spring, we agreed that the ideas and concepts that Paul and his team shared with us were awesome and that the use of the VR technology was going to be a game changer. That fall, we took the first steps with our students into the Peace Literacy VR world, under the guidance of Paul and Shari, with Mo operating as a tech-support captain of the VR ship.

We had six students participate, one of whom, like me, elected to watch a live video feed of Mo, and five other students, who quickly took to the VR experience and were very engaged in all the activities that Paul and Shari led them through. It was particularly moving to watch these five students, all young men, immediately gather their avatars around Mo's avatar, touching his avatar's face with deep affection, something that social distancing and other social conventions kept them from doing in the physical classroom.

Together with Paul and Shari, they all journeyed on a raft across the Cosmic Ocean, to the Island of Aggression, guided by the glowing red planet Mars, the god of war. They arrived on a beach confronted by a mountain emitting three huge plumes of heat—symbolizing the three forms of aggression—and were tasked with making their way deep into the mountain to confront the Fires Beneath Aggression. The most impactful exercise was when the students arrived at the Wall of Fire. Once there, the students were asked to think of experiences and emotions that could cause them or people they know to become aggressive, and then to write these on fireballs that they could throw at the huge wall. Within five minutes, these normally reticent students had covered the wall with their words, describing the fires of distress beneath aggression in powerful terms: Death, Stress, Regret, Loss, Feeling Worried, Overthinking, The Past, Injustice, Fighting. They exceeded my expectations.

Vern echoed our assessment, writing in a follow-up report that the Peace Literacy VR training “has unlimited potential to engage the most challenging students with meaningful subject matter. The Peace Literacy Institute presents an opportunity to get in touch with their inner negative tendencies and grow as individuals. This could be the most engaging Social Emotional Learning I have seen in my 25 years as an educator.” Two years later in the fall of 2023, Vern invited Mo and me, along with two other participants from the initial Peace Literacy training, and two colleagues new to the material, to engage with new on-line professional development in Peace Literacy as well as training in the use of new Peace Literacy curriculum for our students. This new training series culminates in a Peace Literacy VR capstone for our students this spring. The plan is to expand the training to middle school educators next year. Mo and I, along with Paul, hope to present our experiences at the JCCASAC conference in May 2025. We shall keep you posted!

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### Biographical Notes

**Tom Kostic** is an alternative school educator in the Orange County Department of Education ACCESS program at the Magnolia Lyceum in Garden Grove.

**Mauricio Michel** is a paraeducator working with Kostic at the Magnolia Lyceum in Garden Grove.

**Vern Burton** is Assistant Superintendent in the Orange County Department of Education, Division of Alternative Education.

**Paul K. Chappell** is an international peace educator and author, and serves as Executive Director of the Peace Literacy Institute.

**Sharyn Clough** is a professor at Oregon State University and serves as Curriculum Coordinator for the Peace Literacy Institute.



"In the Peace Literacy VR world, students learn to navigate the human condition"

# No Crying. No Snitching. Get Revenge: The Power of the Literature Pathway to Process Difficult Topics, Incorporate SEL, and Shift Mindset

By Sarah Scheerger, LCSW, PPS and Ashlee Nishiya, MA, MLS

“Break the cycle. . . especially if the risk [is] high.”  
– Reflection from a high school Providence Court School student at the conclusion of SEL (Social Emotional Learning) Book Club.

For three weeks (eight sessions total), a certificated Teacher Librarian and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker pushed into an ELA classroom for incarcerated youths to offer an SEL Book Club.

What is an SEL Book Club? It’s a pairing between a Teacher Librarian and a mental health provider. It incorporates a carefully chosen and relevant text that organically integrates social emotional learning and mental health topics into the ELA curriculum. During each meeting of the SEL Book Club, there is a reading of the selected text, followed by processing the content in the book, highlighting SEL themes, as well as students’ reflection on their own lives and personal choices.

SEL Book Club is an innovative approach that bridges the gap by targeting ELA and literacy standards while simultaneously incorporating mental health supports and tools in a way that is accessible by all students. Typically, students receive mental health support through “pull-out” interventions, like individual therapy or group therapy. Sometimes clinicians “push in” to the classroom for SEL lessons. Providing mental health services through the SEL Book Club format reduces the amount of missed class time (since students are not pulled out of academics for group) as well as offering an organic and meaningful curriculum.

There is a natural overlap between SEL and stories: “Well-written Realistic Fiction helps readers acquire empathy as they develop their awareness of, compassion for, and sensitivity to others’ behavior while at the same time reflecting on their own” (*What the Experts Say - Spot: Realistic Fiction*). In addition to empathy and compassion for self and others, stories teach and model perspective taking,

grit/growth mindset, normalize feelings and experiences, increase insight, provide opportunities to watch characters make choices and experience consequences, and they can introduce coping skills. Reading itself can be a coping skill. The SEL Book Club model is a time-efficient way to increase access to and reduce the stigma of mental health support. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) shares an SEL framework that includes the following areas of social and emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills (“What Is the CASEL Framework?”). The SEL Book Club model makes space for students to utilize the main character of a book, their decisions and consequences as an entry point to reflecting on their own decisions (past, present or future) and the potential consequences of those decisions, reinforcing the target learning areas of the CASEL framework. Using “literature to support mental health” is not new. Anita Celucci, 2016 SLJ School Librarian of the Year finalist, discusses the term “bibliotherapy” to reference her own approach to incorporating SEL and mental health professionals into her library programs. Through her knowledge of literature and mental health, she connects students with counselors and the books they need most (*How My School Library Embraces Social Emotional Learning*). We embraced this concept by creating a shared reading experience in the classroom as a part of instructional time.

The SEL Book Club began when we connected through our work at the Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) in collaboration with Ventura County SELPA. With the support of our administration, we began the process of selecting a book and writing the SEL curriculum. We ran our first SEL Book Club at Gateway Community School and found that our different training and skill sets complemented each other well.



Ashlee Nishiya, VCOE Library and Literacy Coordinator, brought her knowledge of contemporary young adult literature, classroom management strategies, and best practices for ELA instruction while Sarah Scheerger, VCOE Social Emotional Services Specialist, brought her experience of working with “at promise” youth in a mental health capacity, managing and assessing for risk, establishing rapport, psychoeducational techniques, clinical documentation, SEL concepts, self-regulation skills, coping, and motivational interviewing techniques.

Based on its positive reception at Gateway Community School, Stefanie Rodriguez, Director of Alternative Education, asked us to replicate SEL Book Club in a second high school classroom at Gateway, and in a middle school classroom. For the middle school classroom, we selected a different book that we felt was more age appropriate. Subsequently, Dr. Teresa Vega, Assistant Principal of Providence Court School, asked us to bring the SEL Book Club to Providence, and collaborate with ELA teacher, Chris Geist, using our high-school selected text, *Long Way Down*. We modified the curriculum and presentation with this population in mind.

We chose Jason Reynold’s *Long Way Down* for our SEL book club. *Long Way Down* is a contemporary novel-in-verse (a story told through poems) that deals with gun violence and gang life and is a “mirror” book for incarcerated youth. A “mirror” book is one that reflects the lived experience of the reader and helps them to know they are not alone. In 1990, Rudine Sims Bishop, professor emerita of multicultural children’s literature at Ohio State University, wrote that books can be “windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author.

When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (1990, p. ix). In this way, books can provide an access point for students to discuss their own lived experiences through the discussion of the character and their situation and choices. Since many of our students identified themselves as nonreaders (students who can read but lack the motivation to do so), the novel-in-verse genre provided an opportunity for them to engage with the story without feeling overwhelmed by the text. To build anticipation and student “buy in” we played a video of an interview with the author during our first intervention. In the interview, Jason Reynolds, tattooed and down-to-earth, shares that he himself didn’t read a full book cover to cover until the age of 17 because books didn’t speak to him or reflect his lived experiences (Parang, 2018). While watching the video, students immediately let down their guard and seemed engaged. We also read Jason Reynold’s dedication to the students before starting the book. The dedication is as follows: “For all the young brothers and sisters in detention centers around the country, the ones I’ve seen, and the ones I haven’t. You are loved.” Not only was Reynolds relatable, but he was also someone who cared about kids like them. We had them hooked.

We broke the book into eight different sections. Rather than reading the book out loud, we played the audiobook, which increased student engagement because the author, a compelling speaker, narrates it. After each reading, we discussed the content as a large group, weaving in both literacy/ELA standards and social emotional learning/mental health concepts. Each lesson ended with a self-reflection writing activity where students could apply these concepts to their own lived experiences.

A main focus throughout the SEL book club was analyzing the three rules that were taught to the protagonist at a young age. In the book, the main character, Will, gets on an elevator with a loaded gun with the intention to kill the person he thinks murdered his brother. On his way down, we meet “ghosts” of the people who have been affected by gun violence and by “the rules.” We learn the rules Will, his friends, and some family members live by: No crying. No snitching. Get revenge.

When the students read these rules, they nodded and indicated these rules were taught to them in their own lives. In one reflection, a student wrote, “I got taught them [the rules] to[o]”. We circled back to these rules throughout the book club, encouraging discussions that challenged these rules. In the book, Reynolds writes, “Another thing about the rules: They weren’t meant to be broken. They were meant for the broken to follow” (35). Through class discussions and journal prompts, we asked students to contemplate where they learned the rules. How and when were they taught it was not okay to cry? What happens to people’s emotions and behavior when they don’t allow themselves to cry? Who benefits when teens don’t “snitch”? And, most importantly, who really benefits when the revenge cycle continues indefinitely? Is this what they would want for their own younger siblings and family members?

In our previous setting (Gateway Community School, which serves expelled youth) we facilitated SEL Book Club with this same book, but in that setting the discussions were in a format that was more similar to group therapy. In the Community School setting, students shared their own experiences out loud in a safe and supportive environment. The students sat in a circle for the group. However, at Providence, sitting in a circle wasn’t an option for safety reasons, and the classroom culture wasn’t as emotionally safe for “out loud sharing” of personal life experiences. For that reason, we utilized written self-reflection prompts to facilitate sharing. Depending on the population and

setting, this intervention can be modified to optimize impact.

As we processed the book, we incorporated the following SEL concepts into our work: anger iceberg; feelings identification and exploration (including the concept that all feelings are human and it’s how we express them that can be healthy or unhealthy); the masks we wear (how we sometimes learn to hide our feelings and how we show different parts of ourselves in different situations); coping skills, mindfulness, the ripple effect of actions; habits and patterns—how do we change them; impulse control; books as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors; growth mindset, what we can and cannot control; gratitude; and a basic CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) concepts; the link between thoughts, feelings, and behavior and how changing one of those three can impact the others. As the self-reflections progressed, we asked questions like “what advice would you give your younger self?”

One of our concerns was whether this subject matter might be triggering for some of the students at Providence. Three of the students were serving time for attempted murder, and one student was serving time for murder. For this reason, we carefully monitored their comments and their interactional styles, and we linked them to Juvenile Facility behavioral health clinicians for follow-up and further counseling support as needed. We also encouraged a growth mindset, focusing on choices moving forward.

We made a concerted effort to be fully present and high energy/engaging with the students. By the second or third session, we could feel their excitement building as we walked in. Working as a dyad (teacher/ librarian and counselor) was helpful because we could play off each other’s energy and support each other in conveying the information. For the most part, students were engaged and polite.

On the rare occasion that a class member was engaging in a disrespectful manner, we were able to support each other. Our different training and educational backgrounds complemented each other nicely: counselor training and experience lent itself to the ability to remain constantly vigilant for risk and trauma while certificated teacher training and experience allowed an integration of ELA concepts and the ability to apply classroom management techniques. Of note, the regular classroom teacher was present throughout.

There were some challenges in the implementation of our SEL Book Club. Due to the nature of juvenile detention and the unit in which we were working, we had students both leave

(be released) and enter during our eight sessions. Each time a new student was enrolled, it changed the power dynamic within the classroom, and we did see some posturing behaviors on the parts of students. Our classroom discussions included the

students, as well as any adults in the room. The adults included the teacher, a paraeducator, and probation officers. There were many interruptions throughout, with juveniles being called out or brought in, and adults stepping into the room for a variety of reasons. During the course of our eight lessons, there were three lockdowns, one of which was nearly an hour. This impacted both entering and exiting the unit and the facility. There was one occasion where a student read a few pages ahead in the book and shared a plot spoiler, which led to an argument between him and another student. After being asked to step out of the group for a moment, he became emotionally dysregulated. Since the classroom is on the unit, this was unsettling to the students in the SEL book club.

For every challenge, there were successes. The students responded well to the book choice and indicated they loved the story. In fact, many wanted

to keep reading it – and since most of the students would self-identify as nonreaders, this was particularly impactful. Trust and rapport were built and sustained. We felt this was aided by the use of icebreakers, expectations that everyone participates (even the adults), and a nonjudgmental and growth-mindset culture in which everyone matters. The students said they felt ‘respected’. We met our literacy goals and could see that the students were understanding plot points, character development, and literary devices like metaphors and figurative language. They also made progress towards ELA writing standards through their self-reflection exercises. We were impressed and touched by the depth of sharing that took place through the journal

entries. When appropriate, students were linked to the behavioral health department for follow-up and counseling.

### Outcomes

Throughout the experience, it was evident to the facilitators that students were engaged and eager for the SEL book club sessions. They presented as open, honest, and fully present. During the final SEL Book Club, we surveyed the students to learn how they felt about this experience. We organized their quotes into three different categories:

How the book club supported literacy/ELA goals:

- “I would recommend [the book] because I think it’s pretty relatable to most kids like me”
- “It is fun and better than English...It’s a very powerful book, the story is crazy and unpredictable”
- One thing I liked was “the book and the way I can relate to the story”
- One way the SEL book club could be improved is “bring more books” / “keep coming to the JF”

**“...books can provide an access point for students to discuss their own lived experiences through the discussion of the character and their situation and choices.”**

How the book club supported SEL goals:

- I liked... “how we would communicate with each other”
- “I think it is good how it is maybe less like therapy talk yk [you know]”
- I liked... “how the class participated together”
- I would recommend SEL Book Club “because Ms. Sugar & Ms. Nish are great at SEL”

How the book club supported our goal of fostering self-reflection and encouraging students to question the “rules.”

- It makes you rethink some stuff. Not me. But I know some people thinking twice.
- I would recommend this book because “it seems so real”

\*After participating in the SEL Book Club, one of the Gateway teachers, Ms. Jaimee Pollock, added *Long Way Down* to her curriculum, targeting both literacy and SEL goals.

After the conclusion of our SEL Book Club, we reflected on the experience. Without pulling students out of class or causing them to miss instructional time, we engaged them in a compelling read. They participated in discussion, writing activities, and meaningful conversations about the experiences of the characters as well as reflected on their own lives and their own choices. There was positive energy in the room, and the students seemed to look forward to our sessions. Based on the comments from the students, staff and administration, as well as our own observations, it seems clear that this intervention was a productive use of time.

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# Dual Enrollment Success for Alternative Education Students

By Johnny Rice, Executive Director

Santa Cruz County Office of Education, Alternative Education Program

El Nido High School is a Santa Cruz County Community School situated on the Cabrillo Community College Campus in Watsonville, CA. Michele, the teacher at El Nido joined the school in 2020 with a vision: empower her students through dual enrollment in community college courses. Recognizing the potential, she promptly collaborated with the community college dean and dual enrollment coordinator, along with Lori, Alternative Education's Career and College Readiness Specialist, to explore options.

Together, they identified Career and Guidance courses (CG-51 and 54) as a perfect starting point. The initial class proved to be a resounding success, prompting Michele to reach out to other schools for participation and to expand the program to include an Ethnic Studies course.

This innovative approach integrates seamlessly into the students' schedule. Community college classes are delivered conveniently during the school day via Zoom, or offered asynchronously, fostering participation and maximizing student success. As Michele emphasizes, "I wanted our students to realize that they are capable of being successful in college and learn to navigate the community college system."

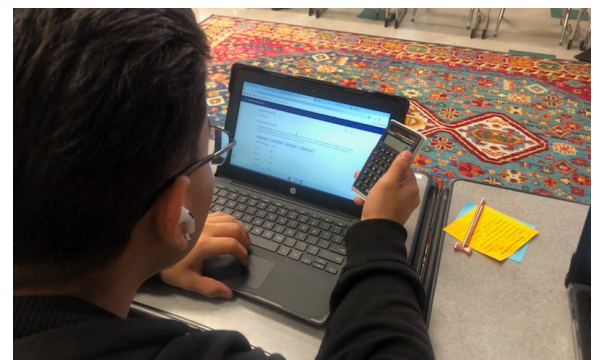
Beyond course selection, Michele meticulously prepares her students for the college experience. By mapping out the syllabus in class, she equips them with crucial time management skills. Building strong relationships with college instructors is another key ingredient. This collaboration allows for syllabus adjustments to better suit the needs of the alternative education students. Additionally, itinerant staff provides invaluable support, offering tutoring or monitoring of community college classes when necessary. Michele's commitment extends to taking each class herself beforehand, ensuring a deeper understanding of the expectations.

The program's effectiveness speaks volumes. All students have consistently achieved passing grades in their college courses. More importantly, many have experienced a surge in academic confidence, leading them to independently pursue additional college classes outside of school hours. These courses span diverse disciplines, including Communications, Women's Studies, Psychology, English 1, and Medical Terminology.

Success stories abound. Yuri, a student who participated in the program, exemplifies its transformative impact. Yuri has taken a remarkable array of courses, including CG-51, Medical Terminology, English 1A, Library 10, Psychology, Ethnic Studies, Communications, and Personal Finance. Reflecting on her experience, Yuri states, "I now have a taste for what education looks like beyond high school and I have the motivation to keep going. I am studying to be a nurse." Yuri just received notification of her acceptance into the 2024 Fall Semester Cabrillo College Medical Assistant Program.

Looking towards the future, Michele envisions a deeper integration of community college offerings into the El Nido school day. Her dream? Equipping all students with transferable English and math credits by graduation. As she aptly points out, "since college credits can be tripled on a high school transcript, wouldn't it be great if students were empowered to use college classes as a way to catch up and graduate on time?"

Michele's initiative demonstrates the immense potential of dual enrollment programs for alternative education students. By bridging the gap between high school and college, this program empowers students, fosters confidence, and paves the way for a brighter academic future.





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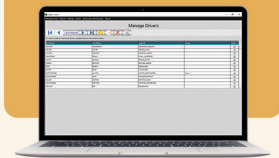
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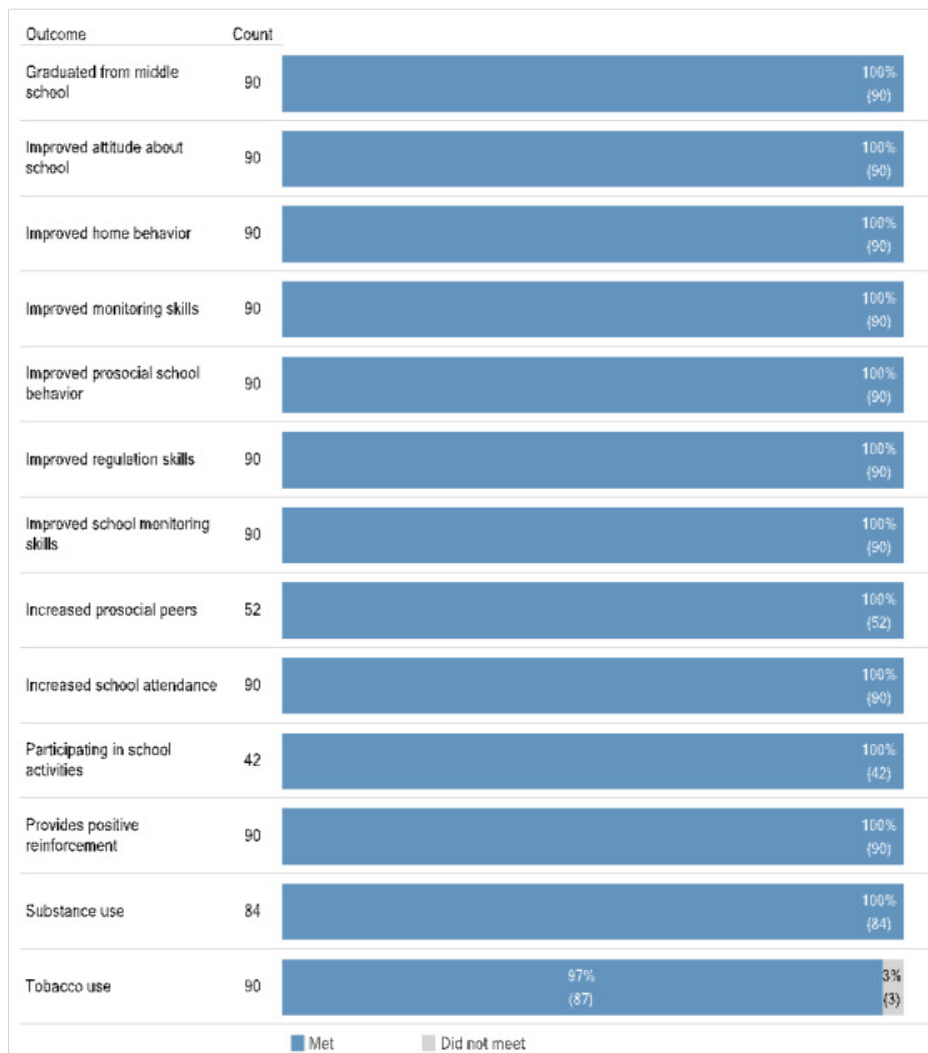
StudentNest is honored to have worked with County of Educations and Probation Departments for over 16 years in California.

Please see WestEd.org review of Studentnest services to Riverside Probation. This 3<sup>rd</sup> party review identifies outcomes achieved by the youth receiving services. On average each youth improved at least 18% based on pre/post assessments.

Currently, StudentNest is providing tutoring to over 20,000 youth nationwide in all programs



**Exhibit 103. StudentNest Youth Outcomes**





**“The more that  
you read, the  
more things  
you will know.  
The more that  
you  
learn,  
the more  
places  
you’ll go.”**

**-Dr. Seuss**

Image created with Adobe Firefly

Prompt: the science of reading; teen sitting under a tree excited to be reading a book; background is out of focus; bright sunny day; vector style; leave room for text on the left

# Thank you to our Industry Partners and Sponsors!

