*Building knowledge and consensus to improve education outcomes for California's 350,000 alternative school students*

# REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA ADVISORY TASK FORCE ON ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

## September 2020

PREPARED BY

**john w. gardner center** for youth and their communities

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## SUMMARY

This report summarizes the deliberations and recommendations of the California Advisory Task Force on Alternative Schools (Task Force). The Task Force is a public service project of the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities at Stanford University and is convened in collaboration with the California Department of Education (CDE). A central Task Force objective is to provide independent advice to the CDE and the State Board of Education (SBE) as they develop an accountability system and performance data dashboard for alternative schools, known as the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS). The Task Force also aims to build system knowledge and consensus among policymakers, practitioners, and equity advocates about state and local accountability levers that would best incentivize instructional innovation and improve outcomes for students in alternative schools. Task Force leadership is distributed across three workgroups whose efforts are reflected in the organization of this report. One workgroup led deliberations over the approach policymakers should take regarding statewide accountability measures on the DASS. A second workgroup focused on developing additional recommendations for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) regarding alternative school performance measurement (local indicators). A third workgroup led Task Force deliberations on broader policy considerations that address system capacity for innovation and continuous learning and improvement on behalf of the more than 355,000 children and youth enrolled in California's alternative public schools.

## BACKGROUND

### Alternative Schools in California

The California Department of Education (CDE) identified more than 1,030 public alternative schools across the state in the 2018-19 school year.[1] School districts operate three alternative school types: continuation high schools (predominantly for credit-deficient students over age 16), community day schools (for expelled students, or students on probation), and opportunity schools (for habitually truant, or behaviorally challenged, youth who might benefit from a specialized learning environment with an individual learning plan). California's 58 County Offices of Education also operate opportunity schools and county community schools as well as juvenile court schools (for incarcerated juveniles). Of the 1,030 alternative schools identified by the CDE in 2018-19, 137 (about 13%) were charter schools that met the criteria for alternative school designation.[2] New state criteria approved by the SBE in July 2017 will enable school districts and the growing charter school sector to serve at-risk youth within a newly expanded definition of alternative schools. Consequently, the number of alternative high schools serving vulnerable youth is expected to grow in the next decade.

---

[1] See also, California Department of Education, "Active Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS)-Eligible Schools," Revised: December 3, 2019 and retrieved online at: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/activeschools.asp.

[2] The California legislature has more recently recognized "dropout recovery high schools," in which 50 percent or more of pupils are either designated as dropouts in CALPADS or were not otherwise enrolled in a school for at least 180 days. These schools must provide instruction in partnership with specific career development agencies including Job Corps, YouthBuild, and California Conservation Corps among others. California Education Code § 52052(e) (1).

California's alternative schools enrolled 355,695 K-12 students during the 2018-19 school year. Of those alternative school students, 206,720 were enrolled in grades 6-12 and represent approximately 6% of California's secondary school enrollment—about 1 in 17 students in grades 6-12 during the 2018-19 school year.[3]  These schools are designed to meet the needs of credit-deficient and other youth who face barriers to learning and are vulnerable to dropping out before completing the minimum requirements for a regular high school diploma. California law contemplates more intensive services and accelerated credit accrual strategies in these schools so that students who are vulnerable to dropping out might have a renewed opportunity to "complete the required academic courses of instruction to graduate from high school."[4]

## Status of Accountability for Alternative School Performance, 2015-2017

In a 2015 policy review, the California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) concluded that California's then-current school accountability system was failing to adequately address alternative schools insofar as it neither established clear long-term objectives nor set relevant shorter-term performance expectations for these schools (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2015). The LAO's 2015 report came as the CDE was in the process of redesigning the entire state school accountability system. As it proceeded with this work, district and county school administrators expressed concerns, consonant with the LAO report, that the CDE's initial redesign proposals did not adequately consider meaningful and appropriate accountability metrics for assessing alternative school performance. In April of the following year, SBE staff convened a stakeholder group to gather information on the characteristics of different alternative school types and to obtain feedback on the potential design features for an alternative schools accountability model. A second stakeholder meeting was convened by SBE staff in October 2016. Following on this meeting, the State Board of Education (SBE) directed the CDE to embark on a multi-year strategy to better define alternative schools and to implement a robust and coherent performance accountability system for them. Finally, at the SBE's regular public meeting in January 2017, the CDE reported that it would collaborate with the California Advisory Task Force on Alternative Schools, convened by the Gardner Center at Stanford University, to gain additional stakeholder perspectives and guidance on the design of an alternative school accountability framework.

## Formation of the California Advisory Task Force on Alternative Schools, 2017

The California Advisory Task Force on Alternative Schools (Task Force), formed in the spring of 2017, is a project of the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at the Stanford Graduate School of Education. The Gardner Center is a nonpartisan research and education policy center that supports research-practice partnerships to improve organizational effectiveness and continuous learning and improvement among youth-serving public organizations. The Gardner Center convenes and provides staff support to the Task Force with a grant from the Stuart Foundation.

---

[3] Cumulative (unduplicated) student enrollment counts for the 2018-19 school year as reported by the CDE. Data drawn from the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS).

[4] See, California Education Code, § 48430, *et seq.*, and § 51225.3.

Task Force membership includes staff to the CDE, the California Legislature, school administrators and educators drawn from a cross section of county offices of education and school districts, and charter school leaders, including current and former principals and teachers. (See Appendix I). Members include educators who are active leaders in relevant professional associations, including the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), the California Continuation Education Association (CCEA), the California Consortium for Independent Study (CCIS), and the Reaching At Promise Students Association (RAPSA)—a nonprofit collaborative of charter schools that serve at-risk youth.

Central objectives of the Task Force are to:

- assist the CDE to develop an accountability data system for alternative schools, known as the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS);

- build knowledge and consensus among policymakers, practitioners, and equity advocates about what state and district accountability levers would best incentivize instructional innovation and improvement of student outcomes in this policy area;

- document emerging exemplary practices in alternative schools that illustrate practice-based administrative, local accountability, and instructional innovations that show promise with vulnerable youth; and

- assist local districts to develop a draft set of model procedures for the identification, counseling, placement, induction, and progress monitoring of youth voluntarily placed into alternative settings.

**Formalizing a New Definition of Alternative Schools in California**

On May 24, 2017, the Task Force held its first meeting and provided feedback and recommendations to CDE administrators on a new proposed definition of alternatives schools. This definition would apply to the legislatively created alternative schools (e.g., continuation high schools, community day schools) as well as to the growing number of public secondary schools and public charter schools that seek to petition for alternative school status. This new definition will serve as the basis for exemptions from newly introduced California School Dashboard and, alternatively, for the application of accountability metrics appropriate to alternative schools.

Under the new definition, schools must have an unduplicated count of at least 70% of the school's total enrollment (upon first entry to the school) comprised of high-risk student groups to be eligible for alternative school status. The specific eligibility rules were approved by the SBE in July 2017 and the eligibility criteria were subsequently published at:
 https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/eligibilitycriteria.asp

Most notably, the revised criteria expand on the prior definition of an alternative school in two important ways: (1) the inclusion of a defined category of credit-deficient youth, and (2) a clarified definition of "recovered dropouts."  As well, the revised criteria include additional consideration

for the enrollment of foster youth, and youth who are homeless, highly mobile, or who experience significant gaps in school enrollment, as defined by the Education Code.

**A New Alternative School Accountability Framework: The Dashboard Alternative Schools Status (DASS)**

In the fall of the 2017-18 school year, the CDE introduced a framework for a dashboard of modified accountability metrics for schools that received alternative school status. This modified dashboard would (1) align with the indicators of the main California school accountability dashboard for all schools, and (2) meet the priorities set by the legislature for Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP). To accomplish this, the dashboard of modified accountability metrics would include the same indicators (e.g., graduation rate) as the statewide dashboard, but would be comprised of modified measures appropriate to alternative schools (e.g., a one-year graduation rate, rather than a four-year cohort rate). Alternative schools that qualify for modified accountability metrics will be included in the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS). The DASS program replaces the previously administered Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM).

Between May 24, 2017 and January 24, 2020, the Task Force, or smaller Task Force workgroups, were convened on 17 occasions for full-day meetings to consider different metrics and calculation rules for inclusion to the emerging DASS. Its deliberations were guided by the following principles regarding the design of a new accountability system for alternative schools in California.

**Task Force Guiding Principles**

A strong accountability system for alternative schools will:

- ensure that the emerging Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) model includes accountability for ALL students in alternative options programs and settings;

- ensure that measures are appropriate to schools that enroll youth who are at risk of dropping out of school;

- include clear and transparent measures that promise to inform school and system improvement and to promote organizational learning;

- create incentives for school capacity-building, community partnerships, and expanded learning opportunities in support of student academic success and positive youth development; and

- foster equity by making the alternative education sector, its students, and outcomes more visible to policymakers, stakeholders, and the public. This includes:

  o better district, county, and state reporting of total cumulative enrollment and system size (i.e., the number of DASS schools and total census and cumulative unduplicated annual enrollment in DASS schools by district type); and

  o promoting more publicly available information on student groups (including all student groups identified by the CDE as high risk for dropping out of school).

Following on these guiding principles, the recommendations of the California Advisory Task Force on Alternative Schools are set forth below.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Statewide School Performance Indicators**

*I. Students and Student Groups Reported on the DASS (minimum group 'N-size' for public reporting on the DASS).*

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to set the minimum number of students needed to form a student group (or a disaggregated subgroup) for accountability and reporting purposes, also referred to as N-size.[5] In California the minimum N-size for reporting of student group results in the accountability system is 30 students.

> **RECOMMENDATION:** Reduce the N-size threshold for reporting of student group results on the DASS to 15 students.

One guiding principle for the Task Force is to make students in DASS schools more visible and counted within the system. But many DASS schools enroll fewer than 200 students and will often not have enough students in a particular subgroup (e.g., English learners, or African American students) to meet the N-size requirement of 30 students. For example, in examining the 2015-16 one-year graduation rates for DASS-eligible schools, CDE analysts found that, in applying a 30 N-size requirement for students in grade 12, only about 54% of DASS schools would have a reportable graduation rate level on the dashboard. By contrast, if a 15 N-size rule were applied, analysts estimated that more than 70% of DASS schools would have a reportable graduation performance rate on the dashboard that year—an increase of about 137 additional schools. Similar results were found when examining data for the 2016-17 school year. The 30 N-size threshold thus renders a considerable number of schools and student groups invisible when determining school performance level (i.e., they do not receive one of five color-coded performance levels on the 5 by 5 dashboard) as well as for finding those schools that most need targeted supports and improvement efforts.[6]

Reducing the N-size requirement for youth in alternative settings would bring California in line with other states, which use N-sizes ranging from 10 to 25 students for accountability purposes. In a survey of 38 states during the 2018-19 school year, the American Youth Policy Forum found that twelve states used 10 students as their N-size, four states used 15, fourteen states used 20, and two states used 25. In each of those cases, the US Department of Education approved the

---

[5] Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), Pub. L. No. 114–95 (2015). Sec 1111 (C)(3)(A)(i). The ESSA reauthorizes the 56-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or 1964, the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students.

[6] Data provided to the Task Force by the CDE, Division of Accountability and Measurement. The CDE reports that LEAs, schools, and student groups that have between 11 and 29 students in the denominator for a measure, in either the current or prior years, will only have Status and Change data displayed. In these instances, however a performance level (or color) will not be displayed public dashboard.

adopted methods as statistically sound. Only six of the 38 states surveyed, including California, used 30 as their N-size threshold (Kannam & Weiss, 2019).

## II. Academic Achievement Indicator

Under ESSA, states must include an Academic Achievement Indicator that measures academic proficiency on annual statewide reading and mathematics assessments. Alternative schools are not exempted from the requirement that state accountability programs should use standard assessments that measure common learning goals for all youth in public schools.

> **RECOMMENDATION:** Endorse the CDE's proposed modifications to the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test cut-points and growth measures for DASS-eligible schools.

Task Force members remain concerned that standard assessment results may only reflect the challenges and learning barriers that students experienced in prior schools and will be less informative about the quality of instruction in alternative schools. Most students attending DASS-eligible schools are significantly behind grade-level expectations at the point of enrollment. As well, the average time that youth are enrolled in a DASS-eligible alternative school is often less than one year. Consequently, Task Force members generally prefer that school leaders and charter authorizers use results from locally administered pre- and post-intervention learning assessments to measure student *improvement* in required academic content areas and to assess school effort (i.e., academic improvement as defined by the Council of Chief State School Officers: a measure of the "academic performance of the *same* student or *same* collection of students over two or more points in time.")[7] By taking this approach, DASS schools and LEAs could report on student academic progress over the actual time enrolled in DASS schools.

Task Force members also acknowledged CDE concerns that on the 2018 California Dashboard, 93% of DASS schools with reportable ELA results, and 96% of DASS schools with reportable Mathematics results, performed at the Low or Very Low performance levels, given existing score cut-points. These results arguably impede the state's ability to meet ESSA requirements that state school accountability systems should provide for a "meaningful differentiation among schools" to support "appropriate targeted assistance" to low performing schools.[8] By reporting DASS school performance status along adjusted SBAC cut points, the CDE estimates that it will be better able to differentiate DASS schools with Low and Very Low performance, as well as to detect meaningful year-to-year progress relative to the SBAC standards.[9] This information might help school leaders to determine whether, and to what extent, the academic proficiency scores can be attributed to school effort or are an artifact of student placement into schools or to other LEA

---

[7] Council of Chief State School Officers (2017). *Considerations for Including Growth in ESSA State Accountability Systems*. Pg. 5. Retrieved from https://www.nciea.org/sites/default/files/pubs-tmp/CCSSO_Growth_Resource.pdf

[8] Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), Pub. L. No. 114–95 (2015). Title I Part A § 4.

[9] For guidance on the CDE's current approach to the Academic Progress Indicator for DASS-eligible schools, see "2019 California School Dashboard Technical Guide: 2019–20 School Year," (Appendix A, pp.199-207) available at: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/documents/dashboardguide19.pdf.

policies. This modified approach may also help the CDE to identify DASS schools most in need of targeted intervention and support. The accountability dilemma presented here has been widely recognized by other states, and some have made similar attempts to address the issues in their state ESSA plans (Kannam & Weiss, 2019). Arizona, for example, includes its alternative schools within the statewide accountability system for all schools, but applies a supplemental school report card to alternative schools that includes modified academic cut-scores on the state assessment, additional measures, and a different model for weighing the applicable indicators for state accountability.[10]

### III. School Suspension Indicator

> **RECOMMENDATION:** No change recommended to the calculation method or application of a School Suspension Indicator to DASS for alternative schools.

### IV. English Learner Progress Indicator

> **RECOMMENDATION:** No change recommended to the calculation method or application of an English Learner Progress Indicator to DASS schools that enroll English learner students.

Task Force members examined sample English learner enrollment data from continuation high schools in several large California districts. Notably, as many as one-quarter to more than one-third of enrolled continuation students in sampled districts (e.g., Los Angeles Unified, Oakland Unified, San Francisco Unified, and Long Beach Unified) were Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) in the 2014-15 school year. Given the high academic standards for reclassification, the Task Force recommends further data analysis and a survey of DASS schools by the CDE to better understand (1) the trajectory of RFEP students into DASS schools, (2) the district and sending-school policies and practices that lead to high placement rates of RFEP students into some alternative settings, and (3) best/recommended practices for supporting RFEP students to complete requirements for graduation in DASS schools.

### V. Graduation Rate Indicator

Under the federal ESSA rules, each state and LEA must calculate and report a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), disaggregated by specified student groups.[11] Alternative schools are not exempted from inclusion in the four-year cohort graduation rates reported by states and LEAs to the federal government. The applicable regulations respond to federal concerns that a "uniform and accurate measure of the four-year high school graduation rate that is comparable across states and consistently reported over time" is critical to assessing how well high schools, states, and LEAs are promoting universal high school graduation (USED, 2017:p6.). However, as noted previously, states must also develop multi-measure accountability systems that allow for assessing meaningful differentiation in school and LEA performance. Within these state school

---

[10] Arizona State ESSA Plan (Approved, 2017) at pp.30-38. Retrieved from: https://www.azed.gov/essa/draftplan/

[11] Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), Pub. L. No. 114–95 (2015), Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(iii)(II)).

accountably systems, states may calculate "extended graduation rates" (e.g., five- or six-year rates) and/or an adjusted "combined" cohort rate, provided that any such rates are consistently calculated across all schools and LEAs in the state (USED, 2017:pp11-12).

In California, the state accountability Graduation Rate Indicator for traditional high schools is based on the number of students who graduate with a regular high school diploma within four or five years of when they first entered grade 9. The measure thus reported on the California School Dashboard is a combined four-and five-year graduation rate.[12] The measure reported on the DASS as the graduation-rate indicator for youth in alternative schools is the one-year graduation rate, as further described below.

> **RECOMMENDATION:**  Endorse the SBE-approved one-year graduation rate measure for inclusion in the DASS for alternative school accountability. The Task Force further recommends that LEA classification of youth into grade 12 (the denominator for the one-year graduation rate) be based on credits earned for purposes of the DASS graduation rate.

Beginning with the 2018-19 school year, a modified graduation rate has been used in California to fairly evaluate the success and progress of DASS-eligible schools, which serve high-risk students. This modified graduation rate—called the DASS Graduation Rate—is based on alternative school students who are classified by their LEAs as being in grade 12.

## ➢  Why calculate a one-year rate for alternative schools?

The central logic of applying a cohort four-year graduation rate to individual high schools does not apply to DASS schools. For example, in a 2015-16 sample of student enrollments for all district-run continuation and community day schools in the Los Angeles, Long Beach, Fresno, Oakland, and San Francisco unified school districts, an average of only 31.4% of students were enrolled continuously from October 1 to April 1 of that year. On average, alternative schools in the sampled districts served the typical enrolled student for only about 80 calendar days during the school year (Messner, 2018).  Consequently, the SBE's approval of a one-year graduation rate for DASS schools reflects the mounting recognition across the state that students who attend alternative schools are highly mobile, including some who may be returning to school after years of being out of the public school system.

## ➢  Who is included in the one-year graduation rate?

Under the new calculation method, to be counted as graduates within the DASS graduation rate, students must:

---

[12] See, California Department of Education guidance, "Graduation Rate Calculation: Methodology for measuring performance on Graduation Rate. Retrieved at: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/gradratecal.asp, as modified November 4, 2019.

- be enrolled in a DASS school, as defined by the CDE;[13]
- have been assigned to grade 12; and
- received (1) a regular high school diploma or (2) an alternative certification approved for DASS schools (e.g., obtaining a California High School Equivalency Certificate, or an Adult Education Diploma issued by the DASS school).

### ➢ Who is in grade 12 for purposes of a one-year graduation rate?

The expectation that students should graduate within one year is based on the premise that students are classified as "being in grade 12" based on credits (e.g., possess at least 75% of the credits needed for graduation at the beginning of the year in question). This credit-based approach to grade 12 classification is consistent with practice in jurisdictions that have adopted a one-year graduation metric for alternative high schools.[14]  Students who are graduation-eligible for inclusion in the one-year rate are typically those who have accumulated the necessary credits to be on track for end-of-year graduation, regardless of when they started or how many years they have been in school. This measure, accounts for the fact that students in alternative schools may take more than four years to graduate and holds schools accountable for graduating all students (Deeds & Malter, 2016).

However, in California, classification into grades is determined by LEA policy. Therefore, the Task Force recommends that the CDE authorize and provide guidance to LEAs that classification of youth into grade 12 (graduation-eligible) be based on credits earned for purposes of the DASS graduation rate. This recommendation will require some LEAs to adopt rules accordingly for proper calculation of a one-year graduation rate that can produce fair performance comparisons across schools and districts. In the absence of LEA rule modifications, inclusion of students into the denominator for calculation of the one-year rate will be based on the grade status entered into CALPADS by the LEA. This approach is inconsistent with the goal of creating a common standard for all like schools and will make it impossible to meet ESEA requirements that the state accountability system allows for the accurate detection of "meaningful differentiation among schools."[15]

### ➢ What is an approved alternative certificate for the one-year graduation rate?

A central goal of alternative schools is to provide youth with a renewed opportunity to graduate from high school.  Accordingly, the Task Force endorses the SBE's policy decision to include attainment of a regular high school diploma and state-approved high school diploma equivalents that are honored by employers and postsecondary institutions in the one-year graduation rate.

---

[13] See, *Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS):* Modified methods of measurement for indicators that are aligned with the evaluation rubrics of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) to evaluate the success or progress of schools that serve high-risk students, Retrieved at: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/dass.asp

[14] See for example, Chicago Public Schools, which defines the one-year graduation rate as the "[p]ercentage of students with sufficient credits to be able to graduate within one year, who graduate by the end of the school year." Available at: (https://policy.cps.edu/download.aspx?ID=267).

[15] Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), Pub. L. No. 114–95 (2015). Title I Part A § 4.

These include:

- a standard diploma, **or**

- a passing score on the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE), **or**

- a high school equivalency certificate (e.g., General Education Development [GED], the High School Equivalency Test [HiSET)), **or**

- a special education certificate of completion (**if** eligible to take the California Alternate Assessment), **or**

- an adult education high school diploma, if issued by the DASS school.

➢ **Minimum enrollment requirement for inclusion in the one-year graduation rate**

The Task Force directly considered whether inclusion of graduates and non-graduates in the DASS graduation rate calculation should be bound by a minimum period of continuous enrollment that would provide a reasonable opportunity for educators to affect a student's graduation trajectory. Based on this consideration, the Task Force endorsed the SBE's approved policy that to be included in the one-year graduation rate a student must be enrolled in the DASS school for at least 90 cumulative calendar days prior to graduating, with an enrollment gap of no more than 30 calendar days. The Task Force additionally endorsed modifications to this inclusion rule for youth who graduate in the summer months, 11th grade students who graduate within the year in question, and for foster youth and youth who are homeless.

### *VI. College and Career Readiness Indicator*

California's multi-measure system of school accountability includes the College/Career Indicator (CCI) for high school graduates. A college**/**career**-**ready graduate is prepared to enter career pathway training programs, or to enroll in a range of postsecondary institutions, without the need for remediation or further developmental coursework. On the California School Dashboard, the CCI is measured by the percentage of students who complete prescribed rigorous coursework, pass a listed exam, or complete the requirements for receiving a state seal (e.g., Seal of Biliteracy). Only measures collected in CALPADS statewide at an individual student level are included in the CCI.

> **RECOMMENDATION:** Collect the following additional measures in CALPADS for consideration and potential inclusion in the CCI indicator for DASS school graduates to demonstrate meeting the prepared or approaching prepared standards.
>
> Beginning with the 2018-19 Data Collection:
>
> - Completion of Pre-Apprenticeship – Formal and Informal Programs (These measures are for both DASS and non-DASS schools.)
>
> - Completion of a State or Federal Job Program (This measure is limited to DASS-eligible schools.)

Beginning with the 2019-20 Data Collection:

- Completion of a Transition Work-Based Experience Program (This measure is limited to students with an Individualized Education Program [IEP].)

- Completion of a Transition Classroom-Based Work Exploration Program (This measure is limited to students with an IEP.)[16]

Beginning with the 2020-21 Data Collection:

- Student Internships (This measure will be considered for both DASS and non-DASS schools.)

- Student-Led Enterprises (This measure will be considered for both DASS and non-DASS schools.)

- Virtual/Simulated Work-Based Learning (This measure will be considered for both DASS and non-DASS schools.)

- Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) (This measure will be considered for both DASS and non-DASS schools.)

Many youth in alternative school programs are pursuing a pathway to further education that includes an opportunity to work at least part-time immediately upon graduation. The Task Force considered that the current CCI measures do not contain sufficient career measures for demonstrating the prepared or approaching prepared standards. As well, the Task Force took into consideration that the CCI was designed to encourage high schools to provide all students with a rigorous broad course of study that will lead to likely success after high school. In this light, Task Force members urged the CDE and the CCI workgroup to consider measures and strategies for encouraging LEAs to make more workplace learning, postsecondary dual enrollment, and "a-g" course taking options equitably available to youth in alternative settings.

**Local School Performance Indicators**

The SBE approves performance standards for local school accountability indicators that will support LEAs in measuring and reporting progress within legislatively determined priority areas.[17] The approved performance standards for the California School Dashboard generally require an LEA to:

- Annually measure progress on the local performance indicator based on locally available data. LEAs must prepare a narrative report or complete a Reflection Tool adopted by the SBE.

- Report results at a regularly scheduled public meeting of the local governing board.

- Report results to the public through the dashboard.

---

[16] These two new indicators would capture a wide range of work-based learning experiences available to students with disabilities in DASS and non-DASS schools. See, CDE guidance at: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/calpadsupdflash174.asp

[17] The state legislature has established eight education priorities to be addressed though Local Control Accountability Plans. CDE guidance on how local education agencies should address those priorities can be found at: https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/statepriorityresources.asp

The members of the California Advisory Task Force on Alternative Schools make the following initial recommendations for modified local indicators appropriate to alternative schools for inclusion on the emerging DASS.

These recommendations respond to the following priority areas:

- **Priority 5:  Pupil Academic Engagement**, including academic persistence;

- **Priority 7: Access to a Broad Course of Study**, including access to all courses required to complete the requirements for a standards-based diploma and equivalents;

- **Priority 8: Other Measures** as appropriate, including opportunities for at-risk youth (as defined within the DASS program) to prepare for continuing postsecondary education opportunities; and,

- **Priorities 9 and 10: Access to Alternative Education Opportunities and Services** for youth who have been expelled, foster youth, and youth who are homeless or highly mobile.

## I. Positive Transition Rate

> **RECOMMENDATION:**  Incorporate a positive transition rate in the DASS as a local accountability indicator. Such a rate would build on current CDE guidance in CALPADS for reporting and classifying all exits from K-12 schools in California. The Task Force further recommends that this indicator be reported by DASS school type (e.g., continuation high school(s), community day school(s)) as well as be disaggregated by identified student group, where possible.

Federal and state accountability policy for high schools currently focuses on cohort high school completion rates (e.g., the ratio of a student cohort that completes the requirements for a high school diploma within a given time frame).  State policy, however, recognizes, that not all youth who exit from school at a given point in time are "school dropouts;" i.e., students who have stopped pursuing an education program or pathway that will lead to a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Consequently, schools are required to submit and certify exit information for each enrolled student into the CALPADS system, with instructions on how the codes will be used to classify student exits (e.g., as dropouts, graduates, transfers, completers, or lost transfers). Although they are not publicly reported, the current school exit data can form the basis for calculating a positive transition rate for DASS schools.

➤ **What is a positive transition rate?**

A positive transition rate would focus on alternative school students' continued path to further education, short of a regular high school diploma or a diploma equivalent recognized in the one-year graduation rate, such as passing the CHSPE. Positive transitions might include a return to a traditional comprehensive high school, enrollment in a non-DASS GED program, verified enrollment in Adult Education, or joining the military, Youth Build, or the Job Corps where those

programs concurrently extend opportunities for youth to complete the requirements for a high school diploma.

➢ **Why Include this rate in an accountability system?**

One DASS objective is to include all students within an accountability system that creates incentives for schools to re-engage youth in learning, help them to persist in school, and accelerate their credit accumulation toward graduation and postsecondary opportunities. When paired with a one-year graduation rate, a positive transition rate would capture, within the accountability system, all youth who leave an alternative school during the academic year. These data would provide a more complete picture of how many youth are continuing on an education path and how many are actually dropping out altogether, since not all students who exit K-12 secondary schools are dropping out of a continuing education pathway. Indeed, a central goal of many DASS schools is to prepare students for a transition back to a traditional comprehensive school within their district. A positive transition rate would recognize the success rate of schools with a transfer-back school design or goal for students.

As well, a positive transition rate would create incentives for alternative schools to prepare all youth to persist in a positive continuing education pathway beyond those available in the traditional K-12 system. Some schools, including the court schools and county-run community day schools, are specifically designed to help youth make successful transitions to other educational settings beyond the K-12 system, to youth employment, or to other postsecondary pathways. A positive transition rate would help these types of "second chance" programs to adequately measure progress toward their academic re-engagement and student persistence goals.

Finally, calculating a positive transition rate could reduce any disincentives that school leaders may have to re-enrolling youth who are returning from long periods of disenrollment in school, including late-entering newcomer immigrants, youth involved in the justice system, and other disconnected youth. Past research shows that such youth often experience frequent periods of disconnection between the ages of 16 and 24. A positive transition rate would create incentives for schools to prepare such youth for transitions that keep them on a continuing education and/or employment pathway even if they are not ready to graduate when they exit.

➢ **Considerations for Calculating a Positive Transition Rate**

As a starting point, one option is for local districts to adopt a calculation method based directly on the current CALPADS designation guidelines. As such, the denominator for the rate would be an unduplicated count of all students in DASS schools who have one exit code during the academic year. The numerator would be comprised of all students in the denominator, minus those whose exit codes are specifically designated as "dropouts" under the CALPADS guidelines. This method would have the benefit of producing a standard measure that would allow for cross-district comparisons of DASS school performance.

The calculation method for a positive transition rate (PTR) was examined by a workgroup of the Task Force, comprised of current and former members ACSA's Education Options Counsel, CCSESA's Student Programs and Services Steering Committee, and the CCEA. This PTR workgroup considered several issues, including the following:

1. *Principles for identifying exit codes that denote positive transitions.* The PTR workgroup considered the following guidelines for defining "positive transitions" that are consonant with the current CALPADS designations.

   - The exit code denotes a transfer to another school or educational program with a pathway to a high school diploma or its equivalent (e.g., GED, adult education, community college, or to another K-12 program, including independent study, private schools, homeschooling, and transfers to out-of-district, state, or U.S. schools).

   - The exit code denotes a transition to a public service opportunity that incorporates a high school diploma pathway or its equivalent, including the armed services and AmeriCorps.

   - The exit code denotes a transition to gainful employment with a continuing education opportunity leading to a high school diploma or its equivalent (e.g., Job Corps, or other apprenticeship or internship program which supports a concurrent opportunity to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent).

2. *Incorporating a minimum enrollment period.* Many alternative schools enroll students who subsequently do not attend, and/or who otherwise attend school inconsistently or who switch schools after a short period of enrollment. This transiency issue is particularly acute in some county schools and in community day schools. Workgroup members believed it was important to identify and account for these transient students separately. The workgroup considered that it would generate valuable information for educators and other stakeholders if a minimum of 45 calendar days were applied to the calculation of a positive transition rate, and if a separate "transiency" rate was calculated for students who exit prior to 45 days of enrollment.

3. *Excluding "exits" that are counted in a DASS school's one-year graduation rate.* Given that the Task Force conceived of the positive transition rate as complimentary to the one-year graduation rate on the DASS, the PTR workgroup recommended that all exits that are accounted as graduates in the one-year graduation rate (in the numerator), should be excluded from BOTH the numerator and the denominator of the positive transition rate.

4. *Disaggregated reporting of the positive transition rate.* Under the current LCAP design, local indicators are reported at the district level. However, given the dire consequences associated with dropping out of an educational pathway without a high school diploma or its equivalent, the Task Force recommends that district, county, and charter leaders should be encouraged to disaggregate results by school and, where possible, by race/ethnicity, English learner, foster, and RFEP status.

➢ **Recommended Calculation Method**

---

DASS Positive Transition Rate (Local Indicator)
**Recommended Calculation Method**

Enrollment period: July 1 to June 30

**Denominator:** To be included in the denominator, a student must meet BOTH of the following criteria:

- Have been enrolled for at least 45 consecutive calendar days at least one time during the school year, and

- Have at least one exit code.

For students with multiple exit codes, use the exit code assigned to their last exit. (If a student has two or more exit codes and they met the 45-day enrollment requirement during the school year, they are included no matter how many days they were enrolled before the last exit.)

Exclude from both the denominator and numerator of the positive transition rate those students with exit codes who were counted as graduates (i.e., in the numerator) for the one-year graduation rate of the year in question.

**Numerator:** A student with an exit code (final exit code) counted in the denominator would be assigned to the numerator following the CALPADs modified protocol at Appendix II.

---

## II. Accounting for Transient Students

**RECOMMENDATION:** Incorporate a transient student rate in the DASS as a local accountability indicator. Such a rate would complement the positive transition rate.

➢ **What is a transient student rate?**

A transient student rate would provide information on the rate that students enroll and exit a DASS school before completing a minimum of 45 calendar days of enrollment.

➢ **Why include this rate in an accountability system?**

Alternative schools, especially those operated by county offices of education, which often enroll involuntarily placed youth, experience high rates of transient students. These students may include youth identified as homeless, highly mobile youth, and other youth who for various reasons are poorly connected to school. Transient students pose special challenges to school leaders, and the incidence of transiency in DASS schools may be masked by the enrollment requirements for other measures (e.g., the 45-day rule for calculating positive transition rates). Accounting for these students within the DASS may enable local school leaders to address the root causes of student transiency and provide targeted assistance to schools and students, as appropriate.

➢ **Recommended Calculation Method**

<div style="border:1px solid #000; padding:10px;">

DASS Transient Rate
**Recommended Calculation Method**

**Numerator:** An unduplicated count of all youth who enroll at in a DASS school between July 1 and June 30, and who exit after less than 45 consecutive calendar days of enrollment (excluding summer school and youth who enroll in the last 45 days of the relevant academic year).

**Denominator**: The cumulative enrollment (unduplicated) of the school for the academic year.

</div>

## III. *Graduation Credit Recovery/Acceleration Opportunity Indicator*

> **RECOMMENDATION:** Incorporate a credit acceleration/recovery opportunity indicator for programs in DASS schools. This indicator would certify that students in DASS schools have: (1) *access* to required credit-earning opportunities in all areas of study required for a standards-based diploma; and (2) an opportunity to obtain graduation-required credits at a rate that is equal to, or better than, what would be available in traditional high schools.

➢ **Why include this indicator in an accountability system?**

A central purpose of DASS-eligible schools is to offer youth a meaningful renewed opportunity to pursue credits needed for a regular standards-based high school diploma. LCAP Priority 7, for example, directs attention to the extent to which all "pupils have access to, and are enrolled in, a broad course of study" including the courses defined as required for graduation in Section 51225.3 of the California Education Code.[18] Additionally, the Education Code indicates legislative intent that students in alternative schools should have a renewed opportunity to "complete the required academic courses of instruction to graduate from high school."[19] Taken together, these state policies suggest that all students, including those in alternative settings, should be afforded an educational pathway that prepares them for college and careers, regardless of what school they attend or where they live.

The Task Force considered that credit recovery or acceleration is also a key policy objective underlying the creation of alternative programs. To meet this critical objective, LEAs should ensure that youth placed in alternative settings have access to programs and courses, including

---

[18]  Section 51220 and Section 51225.3 of the California Education Code specify the course of study leading to a diploma for grades 7 to 12, to include English, Social Sciences, Mathematics, Science, and one course from among the Visual and Performing Arts, foreign languages or CTE courses.

[19] California Education Code, Section 48430.

blended (i.e., technology-assisted) learning opportunities, that enable them to earn as many, or more, credits per year/appropriate unit of time enrolled, to make accelerated progress toward obtaining credits needed for graduation.

➢ **How would an LEA meet the requirements of this indicator?**

1. **Course of Study Access**: The requirements of this component are met if the LEA can affirmatively certify that all of its DASS schools offer access to credit attainment opportunities in all courses required to graduate with a standards-based diploma, including applicable Williams settlement provisions.[20]

2. **Credit Recovery/Acceleration Access**: For example, in an LEA that requires students in comprehensive schools to successfully complete 240 credits for graduation—i.e., 60 credits per year/30 credits per semester/15 credits per six-week period—that LEA would meet the requirement for this element if all of its DASS schools offered the opportunity for youth to earn, on average, as many or more credits per year/semester/six-week grading period as they could in a comprehensive school.

➢ **Decision to make no recommendation regarding setting a specific credit accumulation target for youth in alternative schools.**

Given the centrality of credit-earning opportunities in alternative settings, the Task Force considered whether to move beyond a credit-earning opportunity indicator to recommend a credit-earning target (rate) for enrolled youth.  Several considerations drove these deliberations.

First, credit-earning targets were an SBE-approved measure of school quality under the prior Alternative School Accountability Model (ASAM). ASAM schools had the option of reporting the percentage of graduation credits earned by all high school "long-term students" based on the number of graduation credits attempted.[21] Alternatively, ASAM schools could report the average number of graduation credits earned by all high school long-term students per month of enrollment. In each case, the ASAM set performance standards (denoted as *Commendable, Sufficient, Growth Plan, and Immediate Action Needed).*

---

[20] The *Eliezer Williams, et al., vs. State of California, et al. (Williams)* case was filed as a class action in 2000 in San Francisco County Superior Court. The basis of the lawsuit was that the state of California and state education agencies failed to provide public school students with equal access to instructional materials, safe and decent school facilities, and qualified teachers. The case was settled in 2004, and, among other things, the state agreed to require that local school districts report annually on the overall condition of their facilities, the number of teacher misassignments and vacant teacher positions, and the availability of textbooks or instructional materials. The CDE provides guidance on the Williams settlement at: https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/ce/wc/wmslawsuit.asp

[21] A long-term student was defined as a student who was continually enrolled in a school for 90 consecutive calendar days.

As well, the Task Force considered that the California legislature recently passed (AB 1097, Holden, 2019),[22] which directs the California Department of Education to report on the status and outcomes of "credit recovery" programs, particularly in alternative schools. The legislation embodies continued interest in promoting effective second-chance pathways for youth who have fallen behind in the credits needed to meet minimum requirements for a standard high school diploma.  Arguably, an accountability indicator for DASS schools should include an appropriate measure of how they are meeting these statutory and legislative goals.

Ultimately, however, the Task Force voted to abstain from recommending credit-earning targets for enrolled youth at this time. Task Force members considered that the introduction of a one-year graduation rate standard for DASS schools already created appropriate incentives for schools to focus on credit-earning. As well, it was not clear what an optimal research-based credit-accumulation rate might be for youth who are more than one year behind in credits, given the wide variation in age and history of school disengagement across schools and DASS school program types. Some dropout recovery programs operated by charter schools focus on course completion or competency mastery, rather than unit credits. In this context, a focus on credit-earning efficiency might divert attention from credit quality and instructional innovations. Such innovations, like project-based learning, seek to balance deeper learning and academic engagement with credit-earning pacing. Furthermore, we could find no other state which set system-level credit-earning targets for alternative schools. Colorado's accountability model, for example, follows California's prior ASAM approach and makes school/system-level credit-earning progress a voluntarily reported best practice measure for alternative schools. It also allows individual alternative schools to define the performance targets, given schools' student population and program designs.[23]

Notwithstanding the Task Force decision to recommend against credit-earning targets, there was consensus among Task Force members that individual student credit monitoring is a critical best practice for schools to keep students apprised of their advancement and on-track status for graduation. Indeed, most district and school leaders on the Task Force report that their district and counties closely monitor student progress to graduation in alternative schools with a focus on on-track credit accumulation and pacing relative to individualized education plans. Finally, the setting of system performance targets may be revisited pending the results of the CDE's review of credit recovery programs as commissioned by (AB 1097, Holden, 2019).[24]

---

[22] Education Code, California, Section 1983.  This law, as amended and signed into law October 2, 2019, requires the California Department of Education, on or before July 1, 2021, to report to the Governor and the Legislature regarding the use of credit recovery programs in California public schools designed to enable pupils to recover credits not earned due to unsuccessful prior attempts. The required report must include specified information about the operation of those programs and the pupils participating in them

[23] See, e.g., http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/stateaccountabilityaecs

[24] Education Code, California, Section 1983.

## CONSIDERATIONS MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING SCHOOL CAPACITY TO ADVANCE PROMISING PRACTICES AND IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

The Task Force was convened over a 32-month period from May 2017 through January 2020. During that time, Task Force members offered their professional views—both during formal meetings and in structured interviews—about the current state of educational practice in alternative schools. A majority of Task Force members have over 20 years of experience as classroom teachers, site administrators, or as district or county leaders. Over half of Task Force members participated in formal interviews with Stanford researchers. Participants were asked to respond to questions about (1) the role of district and county leadership in promoting site-level capacity and agency for improvement; (2) staff leadership, as well as recruitment, development, and retention of school leaders and teachers, (3) instruction, and (4) student supports, including issues regarding school climate and culture supportive of student success.

### Key Takeaways

Task Force participants focused on the capacities and enabling conditions that will help educators to meet the standards of the new DASS. These observations also point to key areas that bear further inquiry by researchers and policymakers interested in supporting continuous learning and improvement in this historically neglected system of alternative pathways to high school graduation.

1.  *Alternative school administrators and leaders generally agree that the CDE and counties should take a more affirmative role in providing policy and practice guidance to districts and supporting the more than 1,000 schools in the growing alternative education sector.*

State education policy has banked heavily on improving schools through elaborating standards-based accountability rules.  Notable exceptions have been in the area of English learner policy and Special Education, both of which have received sustained attention by federal and state policymakers. More attention is needed to the role that the CDE, County Offices of Education, and policy leaders can play in building school-level capacity for improvement.  Some observations from Task Force members follow:

➢ **Clarifying mission and vision**

Alternative education school leaders report that one critical role the CDE can play is to address the question: What is the state's vision and mission for students in alternative education programs? California's statutory and school accountability systems provide contradictory, confusing, and inconsistent signals to districts and schools about expectations and academic goals for teachers and students.  This is most evident in those parts of the education code which prioritize "a program of instruction which emphasizes an occupational orientation or a work-study schedule" for continuation schools and reimburse districts for an abbreviated 15 hours of

instruction per student in a week (about a three-period day).[25] This assumes that the typical continuation student is working part-time or needs a schedule that would facilitate finding a job. Yet, more recent education reforms emphasize that all students, including those in continuation and community day programs, should be held to the same academic standards and "college and career ready" expectations as students in comprehensive high schools.

Alternative programs also operate at the intersection of multiple professional and regulatory frameworks. Students typically are involved in other state systems of regulation and oversight, including foster care, probation, child protective services, and homeless services, to name a few. Yet, county, district, and charter school leaders we interviewed reported that the various youth-serving institutions that aim to support alternative education students generally operate in isolation from one another or, worse, at cross purposes. Consequently, California's alternative education programs reflect idiosyncratic county and district priorities, and vary substantially in form, focus, and quality. These local decisions and resources largely determine not only the alternative options available to students, but also the goals of the alternative programs—e.g., to serve as a second-chance safety net for youth, or as safety valves for comprehensive schools that cannot meet their needs (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2007).

One approach the CDE might take is to convene a process like that of the California English Learner Roadmap Workgroup (2017)[26] or the Statewide Special Education Task Force (2014)[27], each of which tasked education stakeholders with taking a broad, system-wide view of issues within their policy and practice domain.

➢ **Address potential changes to existing teacher preparation and credentialing**

How do we ensure that alternative school teachers and principals are prepared and adequately supported to meet the broad array of student learning needs reflected in their schools? District administrators often remarked that they had good systems in place to ensure they could identify well-qualified candidates for positions in alternative settings, but they found that these systems were not so good at identifying applicants who were well-prepared. Strategies for finding and cultivating prepared candidates for alternative education varies widely among administrators interviewed. This policy area might benefit from a more systematic assessment by state and county system leaders in collaboration with teacher training programs in postsecondary institutions.

---

[25] See, California Education Code, Sections 46170 and 48430.  In continuation high schools and continuation education classes, a day of attendance is 180 minutes, but no pupil shall be credited with more than 15 hours of attendance per school week, proportionately reduced for those school weeks having weekday holidays on which classes are not held.

[26] See, CDE webpage for the California English Learner Roadmap, at  https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/rm/

[27] See, CDE webpage for the Statewide Special Education Task Force at https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/pn/ssetfprojectsummary.asp

➢ **Systematically re-examine how alternative education programs should be funded**

Respondents note that the various types of alternative schools, as defined by statutory and education codes, have grown over several decades and in response to different needs. This includes efforts to address the needs of over-age and credit-deficient youth, recapture dropouts, provide an education pathway for youth expelled from comprehensive schools, and, more recently, accommodate the entry of charter schools into the alternative school sector. Diverse funding mechanisms apply across these different types of schools and the rationale for those differences may still apply. Or, as in the case of the 15-hour per week reimbursement limit for continuation schools, some funding designs no longer make sense, and may exacerbate unequal access to opportunity.

➢ **Develop specific guidance to help districts and schools ensure access to, and student success in, meeting the Common Core State Standards**

Prior to 2000, there was little pressure on alternative schools to hold their students to college-ready standards for performance in the core math and language arts subject areas. In the intervening years, however, momentous changes in the education policy environment have shifted to a focus on universal college and career readiness for all youth, including those placed in alternative settings. In reflecting on these changes, school and district leaders often described a dearth of sector-specific training or guidance on how to align performance-based credit acceleration programs with ambitious state standards. School leaders are at a loss for research-based strategies for effectively organizing the day and year in alternative schools to promote effective teacher practice and student persistence in mastering common core learning objectives.

In this context, most county, district, and school leaders we interviewed focused on innovating and adapting instructional techniques developed in more traditional settings—successful charter schools or comprehensive high schools—that serve academically vulnerable youth. Most often, school leaders mentioned adapting models like Diploma Plus (performance-based mastery learning), Big Picture Learning (student-centered learning design), the AVID model (inquiry-based collaborative learning), and Linked Learning strategies (CTE pathways or sequences linked to the Common Core standards). Nevertheless, nearly all described a process of experimentation over a long period of time, guided and driven by their own instincts with no roadmap or professional training to inform their efforts to meet new standards.

➢ **Re-examine the standards for the Model Continuation High School recognition program**

The CDE has long administered a Model Continuation High School (MCHS) recognition program that identifies and recognizes outstanding continuation schools in the state. This program had been a cornerstone of the now discontinued Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) developed in 2000. Since that time, the standards for obtaining recognition under the MCHS have shifted to reflect common core curriculum expectations, and college and career readiness outcomes. Respondents to our interviews, however, shared concerns that the standards for the MCHS have not been revised to incorporate outcomes expected on the new dashboard. Most specifically, the MCHS does not focus on demonstrated school success at addressing equitable

outcomes for English learners (including RFEP students), foster youth, and other sub-groups that are often disproportionally represented in alternative schools. Others were concerned with how student support standards were applied by the program. For example, while the program review standards acknowledge that guidance, counseling, and targeted student supports "are an integral part of continuation education," the standard for this element is met if the school offers evidence that it only "strive[s] to provide" these intensive support system to students. A fresh review of these standards is warranted to articulate a clear and consistent vision for excellent programing in alternative education.

➢ **Clarify and strengthen the technical assistance process for schools identified as low-performing by the new DASS.**

One major objective of the DASS accountability program is to provide a clearer picture of alternative school performance relative to other schools that serve similar students. This process of differentiation will shed a more nuanced light on schools that perform well and those that struggle to provide effective alternative pathways for student success. What is the system for supporting those struggling schools? Local education leaders believe the CDE and county offices of education can play a critical role in elaborating this system of support, and in ensuring that it reflects expertise in how to incite continuous learning and improvement among alternative schools specifically.

*2. Alternative school leaders believe districts can advance school success, especially among continuation high schools, by more clearly defining and setting policy on how youth are identified, placed, and inducted into alternative programs across district schools.*

California law requires that school districts create clear and consistent identification, placement, and intake policies for the voluntary transfer of students to continuation schools and into other voluntary alternative programs (CA Educ Code § 48432.3 (2017). The intent of the law is to ensure fair and equitable access to an alternative path to obtaining a standards-based high school diploma. School and system leaders interviewed emphasized that districts need more guidance to design and implement good procedures.

Respondents often noted that consistent, districtwide student identification and placement policies were often major drivers of the organizational effectiveness of alternative schools and ultimately of student success. Placement policies send strong signals about the district's vision and mission for alternative schools, as well as about how school leaders should align the alternative school's design features and curricular offerings accordingly. Continuation high schools, which take most voluntary alternative placements are, by design, very diverse and intended to respond to local needs and conditions. Some are specifically designed as a final alternative placement for credit-deficient students in their third and fourth year of high school but whose needs cannot be met at a comprehensive school. Other continuation schools are designed to admit students as early as age 16 and are interim placements for students who need to catch up on credits, with the intention of returning to a comprehensive school before graduating. Still other continuation schools provide alternative instructional approaches (e.g., "blended

instruction," performance-based credit recovery, or flexible scheduling for working or parenting students), and may or may not offer services for English learners and other students with special needs. These considerations create the context for procedures to determine whether a placement is appropriate to the student's learning goals and in their best interest, as required by the law (See Appendix III).

Respondents also offered that transparent student identification and placement procedures help ensure key legislative goals:

> **Equity.** Objective identification and placement practices help to guard against disproportionality in the enrollment of students with special needs and foster youth, or based on racial, ethnic, or language minority group status. In those cases where local boards allow placement of special education students into alternative programs, strong procedural safeguards ensure that such vulnerable students are placed in the least restrictive educational programs, and have equitable access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all students.

> **Best Interests of the Student.** Students cannot be voluntarily placed in a continuation school unless both the district and their parent or legal guardian mutually agree that such a placement is in the students' best educational interest (CA Educ Code § 48432.3 (2017)). Does the intended placement offer students a standards-based curriculum that provides them with the knowledge and skills that they will need to successfully transition to college, career training, or the workforce? Does that alternative placement offer the support services the individual student will need for personal, social, and academic success? To meet these legislative standards, interviewees focused on how standard procedures can ensure that placement decisions are preceded by effective student counseling and parent involvement strategies. These procedural steps help make the placement process more transparent and provide students and parents with information they need to understand their options and to independently determine what selections are best for the student.

3. *County and district administrators report that leadership development and human capacity-building are central drivers of alternative school quality and merit greater attention by policymakers at all levels of the education system.*

How do you select and build a team of principals and teachers who are prepared to be effective with youth in alternative settings? Finding teachers and school leaders with the capacity and expertise to collectively facilitate enhanced educational outcomes is a core function in any school enterprise. But respondents to our interviews often voiced concern that policymakers need a better understanding of how this function applies specifically to staffing and professional development needs and practices in alternative schools.

➢ **Teacher and principal recruitment**

One district administrator remarked that over the last decade his district had become much better at helping him to find qualified staff for his continuation high school, but he fretted that it remained a challenge to find staff who were prepared to work there effectively.  He and other respondents offered that alternative schools tend to be relatively small. One respondent noted, for example, that her continuation high school staff was about the size of the English department at one of her comprehensive high schools. In this context, leading and teaching in a typical alternative school is necessarily characterized by high levels of collaboration and shared leadership. They must also be prepared to embrace the unique challenges that come with working with students who arrive with low levels of trust in adults, or who might exhibit low levels of agency regarding their ability to learn. Consequently, staff members in alternative schools require unique skills and abilities—not only must teachers be good at teaching the content within their disciplines, they must also have a youth development mindset.

➢ **Teacher support and professional development**

Respondents almost uniformly noted the professional isolation felt by teachers and principals in alternative schools. The vast majority of districts operate only one continuation high school. Consequently, staff and leadership in these schools have few district colleagues who understand the context in which they work and who possess the experience to help them adapt more generic secondary school professional development offerings to their unique settings. Some administrators noted the importance and value of efforts by their county offices of education to create learning communities specifically for continuation high school leaders and faculty. Efforts in Orange and Riverside Counties were singled out, as were cross-school learning communities in Oakland Unified, which operates three continuation high schools.  But these examples were not typical and underscored the unmet need for professional learning opportunities in the alternative school space across California.

➢ **School leadership**

The district and county administrators we interviewed understand that strong school leadership is at the heart of productive teaching and learning.  But they also emphasized that leading an alternative school that focused on student-centered vs content-centered learning requires a principal with specific skills. Specifically, the principal must be prepared to challenge the historical structure of existing roles and modes of organization that prevail in comprehensive high schools. Administrators cite four capacities that make for successful alternative school principals and that bear greater support from system leaders:

- *They establish a culture and climate that is supportive of learning.*  Successful alternative school principals emphasize the importance of establishing a culture of high expectations for learning at their sites.  Specifically, they focus on rebuilding trust among youth who often arrive at their sites feeling that they are not valued as learners or believing that they cannot learn. They pay a great deal of attention to the induction of new students and find ways for each student to experience success as a learner within their first three to six weeks of arriving.

- *They empower teachers.* They use professional development opportunities, coaching, and collaboration as strategies to help teachers adapt instructional practices from traditional sites and empower them to innovate in their classrooms to help students succeed.

- *They use data to drive improvement.* They build site-based teams that are encouraged to pivot away from a reflexive focus on data use for state and federal rule compliance. Instead, they help teams use student performance data to drive collaborative inquiry and to develop an improvement mindset among the faculty and student support staff. They use data as a starting point to delve deeper into the nature and causes of the challenges they face, as well as to better understand potential solutions and productive adaptations to practice.

- *They advocate for students.* They understand that the students they serve are often poorly understood by their communities and within the larger education system. One administrator described the complexities of leading an "outlier" school within a complex district system. "The district bureaucracy—IT systems, HR system, Instructional Services division, facilities—all look to serve schools within a standard approach." Successful principals are effective at advocating for their unique schools, help the district to adapt its supports, and also work to garner support from community-based organizations and from skeptical business leaders who can provide students with expanded learning and workplace learning opportunities.

<span style="color:red">*4. Respondents report that classroom teachers and school leaders are experimenting with evidence-based practices but struggle to adapt those practices in alternative schools. Consequently, instructional leaders believe that district administrators and professional associations could play a stronger role in providing guidance on how to scaffold and pace instruction in the common core and on academic engagement practices directed at over-aged and under-credited youth.*</span>

Our interviews confirm that staff in alternative schools are responding to new academic performance standards by innovating and adapting instructional techniques developed by successful charter schools and by traditional secondary schools that serve academically vulnerable youth. Some were experimenting with blended high school/postsecondary designs (e.g., dual enrollment or workplace learning opportunities) drawing from resources and expertise of community agencies, local employers, and community colleges. As noted previously, most often mentioned were adaptations of the Diploma Plus approach (performance-based mastery learning), Big Picture Learning (student-centered learning design), the AVID model (inquiry-based collaborative learning) Linked Learning strategies (CTE pathways or sequences linked to the Common Core standards) and the Summit Public School Model (mentoring and self-directed learning). One administrator explained that they are drawn to strategies that help build student agency in learning such as opportunities for choice, voice, and self-direction in deeper learning. He said, "We are…looking at …how we incorporate technology in the classroom with our students and how we blend these two together to create [personalized] opportunities … for students to really drive their own instruction."

Nevertheless, respondents generally agreed that it was a challenge to adapt these model practices to the unique facets of their work with vulnerable youth. Administrators and school

principals also commented that appropriate staff development programs targeted to the needs of educators who work with vulnerable youth are difficult to find. They struggle also with how to organize the school day and year to promote effective teacher practice and student persistence to the common core standards. In describing the process of developing a supportive, quality program at their schools, administrators and school principals emphasized that they were offered no roadmap or targeted professional training to inform their efforts. Nearly all described a process of experimental implementation guided and driven by their own instincts and experience.

*5. Respondents report that targeted student supports and out-of-school time learning opportunities are critical for student success. Districts could take a more strategic role in building school capacity and the community partnerships that bring these supports to alternative schools.*

A common denominator among youth in alternative schools is that they have reached age 16 lacking sufficient academic credits to remain on track to graduate with their age cohort. But the path into alternative schools is varied. Respondents confirm data from prior studies that reveal alternative school youth to be a highly vulnerable population characterized by multiple risk behaviors and other nonacademic learning barriers (Ruiz de Velasco, et.al, 2008). Respondents report that their students are more racially or ethnically concentrated than those in comprehensive high schools, and more likely to be English learners, highly mobile, and in foster care or living with a relative other than a parent. Their students are more likely to have been involved in physical fights at their prior schools, to be substance abusers, and are more likely to report being physically or psychologically victimized in and out of school. Not surprisingly, respondents report that the first tasks of principals and teachers in alternative schools are to regain student trust in adults, address the social and emotional barriers to learning that students experience, and build a safe and supportive environment for academic reengagement.

In this respect, alternative school leaders report that they have been aided by shifts in the larger education policy environment, cemented in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). This new policy frame recognizes that while academic mastery is important, so too are certain social and emotional dispositions and mindsets associated with learning, such as student agency, growth mindset, self-management, and empathy (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2020; Osher, Cantor, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2020). The majority of respondents in our interviews indicated that their school districts and county offices of education have created more access to teacher professional development focused on incorporating social and emotional development strategies into their teaching. Schools have also received more services from full-time academic counselors, and part-time social workers, psychologists, and community-based mentors than was evident in alternative schools five or ten years ago. The need for student support services focused on social and emotional development of youth, however, continues to outstrip their availability. Supports from social workers, psychologists, and nurses often require complex partnerships with social services agencies, and/or commitments from community-based organizations.

Likewise, site leaders say they struggle to engage community colleges and employers who bring more caring adults onto their campuses and who can make expanded learning opportunities

available to their students in and out of school. District and county administrators report that school principals too often lack the time, resources, and/or the authority to broker these services and community connections on their own. Respondents generally agreed that district and county leaders are better positioned to coordinate across public and private systems that bring together schools, communities and social programs. These systems-coordination functions can provide schools with a coherent and integrated set of student supports that remove barriers to learning and expand learning opportunities.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## REFERENCES

California Legislative Analyst's Office (2007). *Improving Alternative Education in California,* a report of the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO), February 2007, Sacramento, CA. Available at: https://lao.ca.gov/2007/alternative_educ/alt_ed_020707.pdf

California Legislative Analyst's Office (2015). *Next Steps for Improving State Accountability for Alternative Schools.* A report of the Legislative Analyst's Office*,* May 2015, Sacramento, CA. Available at:
https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2015/edu/alt-ed/improving-accountability-051615.aspx

Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science, 24*(2), 97-140.

Deeds, C., & Malter, Z. (2016). What Can States Learn about College and Career Readiness Accountability Measures from Alternative Education? Ask the CCRS Center. *College and Career Readiness and Success Center.*

Kannam, J. & Madison W. (2019). *Alternative Education in ESSA State Plans: A Review of 38 States.* Washington DC: American Youth Policy Forum.

Messner, E. (2018). *An Enrollment Snapshot of Youth in Alternative Schools in Select California Urban School Districts.* Stanford, CA: John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities.

Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2020). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development1. *Applied Developmental Science, 24*(1), 6-36.

Ruiz de Velasco, J., Austin, G., Dixon, D., Johnson, J., McLaughlin, M., & Perez, L. (2008). *Alternative Education Options: A Descriptive Study of California Continuation High Schools.* Stanford, CA: John W. Gardner Center for Youth & Their Communities. Available at: https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/alternative-education-options-descriptive-study-california-continuation-high-schools

U.S. Education Department (2017). *Every Student Succeeds Act, High School Graduation Rate, Non-Regulatory Guidance,* January 6, 2017, (USED: Washington, DC). Available at: https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essagradrateguidance.pdf

## APPENDICES

I.   Members of the California Advisory Task Force on Alternative Schools

II.  Positive Transition Rate Calculation Using CALPADS Exit Codes

III. Model Procedures for the Identification, Voluntary Placement, & Induction of Students to Continuation High Schools

## APPENDIX I: MEMBERS OF THE CALIFORNIA ADVISORY TASK FORCE ON ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

**Elisha Smith Arrillaga**
Executive Director
The Education Trust–West

**Chris Boynton**
Executive Director, Pathways to College & Career
Alameda County Office of Education

**Alysse Castro**
Executive Director, Alternative High Schools
San Francisco Unified School District

**Rudy Cuevas**
Chief Collaboration Officer & Superintendent
YouthBuild Charter School of California

**Mary Ann Dewan**
County Superintendent of Schools
Santa Clara County Office of Education

**Heather DiFede**
Executive Director
East County Special Education Local Planning Area

**Robert Eiseman**
Principal (Retired)
Los Angeles Unified School District

**Mike Ervin**
Principal
 Paradise Junior-Senior High School

**Steve Good**
Executive Director
Five Keys Charter Schools

**Diane Grotjohn**
Senior Consultant
APLUS+

**Milisav (Mike) Ilic**
Administrative Director, Instructional Support
Corona-Norco Unified School District

**Yolanda Jimenez-Ruiz**
Administrator, Alternative Education
Fresno Unified School District

**Machele Kilgore**
Principal
Pacific Coast High School

**Joel Leagans**
Principal (Former)
Santa Clara County Juvenile Court Schools

**Lynn Lorber**
Staff Director & Chief Consultant
Senate Education Committee

**Phil Matero**
Founder & CEO
YouthBuild Charter School of California

**Alaina Moonves**
Senior Staff Attorney, Education Rights
Alliance for Children's Rights

**Lucia Mortiz**
High School Network Superintendent
Oakland Unified School District

**Elsbeth Prigmore**
Principal (Retired)
Shasta Union High School District

**Maricela Ramirez**
Chief Educational Program Officer
Los Angeles County Office of Education

**Roger Rice**
Superintendent
Ventura Unified School District

**Ernie Silva**
Executive Director, Reaching At-Promise Students
Association, SiaTech Schools

**Erin Simon**
Director, Student Support Services
Long Beach Unified School District

**Diana Walsh-Reuss**
Associate Superintendent of Schools (Retired)
Riverside County Office of Education

## California Department of Education

**Cindy Kazanis**
Task Force Co-Chair
Director, Analysis, Measurement and Accountability
Reporting Division

**Syma Solovitch**
Education Research and Evaluation Consultant

**Lorraine Hope**
Education Programs Consultant,
Special Education

**Jenny Singh**
Administrator, Academic Accountability Unit

**Betty Miura**
Education Research and Evaluation Consultant

## John W. Gardner Center for Youth & Their Communities

**Jorge Ruiz de Velasco**
Deputy Director & Task Force Co-Chair

**Erica Messner**
Policy Analyst

**Francine Biscocho**
Social Science Research Assistant

**Liz Newman**
Senior Community Engagement Associate

**Jamila Henderson**
Policy Analyst (Former)

**Jeremy Nguyen**
Program Associate, Youth and Community
Partnerships

**Milbrey McLaughlin**
Founding Director & Professor Emerita,
Stanford Graduate School of Education

# APPENDIX II: POSITIVE TRANSITION RATE CALCULATION USING CALPADS EXIT CODE CATEGORIES

| Positive Transition (Include in Numerator) | Negative (Include in Denominator/Exclude from Numerator) | Exclude from BOTH Numerator & Denominator |
|---|---|---|
| 480 – Completed Highest Grade at School; Expected to Attend Another CA School | E-140 – Truant (Next school unknown) | E-100 – Graduate**<br>E-120 – Cert of Completion (SPED)<br>E-250 – Adult Education Diploma**<br>E-320 – GED**<br>E-330 – CHSPE** |
| E-125 – Special Ed Completer | E-230 – Completer –No Diploma^^ | E-130 – Death |
| T-160 – Public School | E-300 – Expelled | E-150 – Mid Year Enrollment Update |
| T-165 – Transfer for Behavior | E-360 – Aged Out; No Diploma | E-155 – Student Exited at Grade Level (excluding HS Completer). Used for students expected to return to the same school. |
| T-167 – Transfer to Independent Study/Alt.Ed. | E-400 – Expelled, No Known Enrollment | E-410 – Medical Reasons<br>T-310 – Health Facility Admission |
| T-180 – Transfer to Private School | N-240 – No Show, Same School as Last Year | N-470 – No Show |
| T-200 – Transfer out of California | T-270 – Adult Ed Dropout | |
| T-240 – Transfer out of Country | T-380 – Transfer to Institution no HS Diploma | |
| T-260 – Adult Ed –Verified Enrolled | E-170 – Student Who was Enrolled with a Secondary Enrollment Status Code (20) in any grade, exited/withdrew from school | |
| T-280 – Enrolled in College | | |
| T-370 – Military, Job Corps | | |
| T-460 – Transfer to Home School | | |
| | | |
| (Note: As apprenticeship, and pre-apprenticeship enrollments w/high school diploma pathway are added to CALPADS, these could be included here.) | ^^Note: If this exit code is accompanied by a completion code that qualifies for the one-year graduation rate, then remove from numerator and denominator. | **Note: These are included in the one-year graduation rate when the GED or Adult Ed diploma is awarded by the DASS school. |

## APPENDIX III. MODEL PROCEDURES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION, VOLUNTARY PLACEMENT, AND INDUCTION OF STUDENTS TO CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS

**DRAFT:** January 24, 2020

California law requires that school districts create clear and consistent identification, placement and intake policies for the voluntary transfer of students to continuation schools. The intent of the law is to ensure fair and equitable access to continuation school opportunities that provide an alternative path to obtaining a standards-based high school diploma. This document was developed with input from the California Advisory Task Force on Alternative Schools and provides an overview of the applicable law and model procedures for compliance.

**Policy Overview**

*District Responsibility*

The applicable law makes clear that responsibility for establishing procedures and ensuring their equitable application falls to districts, their designees and their governing boards. The policy seeks to ensure common practices across schools within districts. As well, the policy signals that procedures should support the development of alternative opportunities for youth to meet ambitious state and district learning and achievement goals.

*Equity*

Districts are required to develop procedures that guard against disproportionality in placement that is the result of unlawful discrimination or bias. In particular, the law directs attention to disproportionality in the enrollment of students with special needs, foster youth, or based on racial, ethnic, or language minority group status. There are additional safeguard provisions for students with special education, foster and homeless status (Cal. Educ. Code §§ 48450 – 48452.7). In general, district leaders must assure that such vulnerable students are placed in the least restrictive educational programs, and have equitable access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all students, including, but not limited to, interscholastic sports.

*Best Interests of the Student*

Students cannot be voluntarily placed in a continuation school unless both the district, and their parent or legal guardian mutually agree that such a placement is in the students' best educational interest. Voluntary transfers, for example, cannot be encouraged or offered in lieu of an expulsion. Transfers are also directed to be at intervals (i.e., at the beginning of a semester or grade-marking period) that will not disrupt the learning environment for youth in alternative settings.

*Parental Involvement*

School officials involved in the transfer process, including district, sending school and receiving school personnel, have an affirmative duty to engage parents or legal guardians in the decision-making process and to provide them with information necessary to understand the options available and to determine if the continuation school is the best option for the student.

*Transparency*

District policies and procedures for approving voluntary transfers to continuation schools must articulate a clear criterion for decision making, be consistently applied, must be in writing and made available to parents, students, and other stakeholders.

*Right of Return*

Students who voluntarily transferred to a continuation school have the right to return to their comprehensive high school at the beginning of the following school year and can return sooner at the discretion of the administrator designated by the superintended to approve of mid-year returns.

---

**Applicable Law:**

CA Educ Code § 48432.3 (2017)

(a) If the governing board of a school district chooses to voluntarily enroll high school pupils in a continuation school, the governing board of the school district shall establish and adopt policies and procedures governing the identification, placement, and intake procedures for these pupils. These policies and procedures shall ensure that there is a clear criterion for determining which pupils may voluntarily transfer or be recommended for a transfer to a continuation school and that this criterion is not applied arbitrarily but is consistently applied on a districtwide basis. Approval for the voluntary transfer of a pupil to a continuation school shall be based on a finding that the voluntary placement will promote the educational interests of the pupil.

(b) The policies and procedures adopted under this section shall also ensure all of the following:

   (1) That voluntary placement in a continuation school shall not be used as an alternative to expulsion unless alternative means of correction have been attempted pursuant to Section 48900.5.

   (2) Shall strive to ensure that no specific group of pupils, including a group based on race, ethnicity, language status, or special needs, is disproportionately enrolled in continuation schools within the school district.

   (3) If the governing board of a school district chooses to permit pupils to voluntarily transfer to a continuation school, a copy of the policies and procedures adopted under this section shall be provided to a pupil whose voluntary transfer to a continuation school is under consideration, and to the parent or legal guardian of that pupil.

   (4) That the transfer is voluntary, and the pupil has a right to return to his or her previous school. [A pupil who has voluntarily transferred to a continuation school shall have the right to return to the regular high school at the beginning of the following school year and with the consent of a designee of the district superintendent, may return at any time. EC § 48432.5]

   (5) Upon a parent or legal guardian's request and before a pupil is transferred, the parent or legal guardian may meet with a counselor, principal, or administrator from both the transferor school and the continuation school to determine if transferring is the best option for the pupil.

   (6) To the extent possible, voluntary transfer to a continuation school occurs within the first four weeks of each semester.

---

**A Note on Continuation High School Design**

Model or "ideal" student identification and placement into a school of choice necessarily follows an understanding of the receiving school's design features, curricular offerings, and the mission and vision established by school educators. Continuation schools in California are, by design, very diverse and intended to respond to local needs and conditions. Most notably, some continuation schools are specifically designed as a final alternative placement for credit-deficient students in their third and fourth year of high school whose needs cannot be met at a comprehensive school. Other continuation schools are designed to admit students as early as age 16 and are interim placements for students who need an alternative path to catch up, with the intention of returning to a comprehensive school before graduating. Still other continuation schools provide alternative instructional approaches (e.g., "blended instruction," performance-based credit recovery, or flexible scheduling for working or parenting students), and may or may not offer services for EL students and others with special needs. These considerations create the context for procedures to determine whether a placement is appropriate to the student's learning goals and in their best interest, as required by the law.

**Model Procedures**

*Identification*

Establish clear criteria (student profile) for which students will be recommended for transfer to a continuation school that are based on the best educational interests of the student and the options and opportunities offered at the district's continuation school(s).

Key considerations might include:

- **Early Warning Systems:** Does the district have a system for identifying students who are falling off track for on-time graduation (e.g., 8th grade Ds and Fs, 9th grade off-track)?

- **Academics:** What opportunities, programs or interventions are in place at the continuation school that will benefit a student who is struggling with academics, or who has special education needs?

- **Behavior:** If behavior is a concern, what behavioral or mental health supports are available at the continuation school?

- **Future Plans:** What does the student want to do after graduation? How would a school transfer facilitate those plans?

- **Review the Student's Cumulative File:** Of particular importance are special education services as mandated by an IEP, EL status, foster or homeless status, credit status, behavior, and attendance.

- **Special Education Status:** If a student is in special education, convene an IEP committee meeting and obtain their recommendation prior to initiating the alternative placement process.

Also, establish clear criteria for how a student may transfer back to a comprehensive school, and at what timepoints, consistent with the applicable law.

*Student Counseling*

The sending school counselor (and any other school-based members of the team that makes placement recommendations) should review interventions previously offered and attempted by the student. If the identified interventions were attempted and the student continues to struggle on a comprehensive campus, meet face-to-face with the student to discuss the student's goals and to consider how a revised plan, including placement at a continuation high school, might advance those plans.

*Parent Guardian Participation*

Hold a meeting with the student, parent or guardian, a representative from both the comprehensive and continuation school, an academic counselor, and any other key individuals working with the student inside or outside the school (e.g., social worker, probation officer, therapist) to review any prior interventions, discuss whether enough time has passed to allow the prior interventions to be successful, or if new interventions need to be attempted at the comprehensive school to meet student goals, including being on-track for graduation.

- If the school-based team, (including the parent/guardian and student) agrees that appropriate prior interventions have been attempted for an appropriate length of time, determine whether the student now meets the criteria for placement in a continuation school.

- If the student or parent/guardian has initiated the request for transfer, explore the reasons for the request. Explain the range of options and the suitability for that particular student. Reach consensus. Work to ascertain that both the student and parent/guardian have agreed to the appropriateness of the transfer—doing what the parent/guardian wants without buy-in from the student often doesn't work in the long run, and *vice versa*.

- Explain applicable rights:  Voluntarily placed students have a right to return to a comprehensive high school at the beginning of the following school year, or may return at any time with district designee consent. In some districts, the Principal of the continuation school is the Superintendent's designee for approving mid-year transfers back to comprehensive sites. Both students and parents/guardians have the right to review the district's written policies and procedures and to participate in the decision-making process of voluntary placement.

*Transfer Team Decision*

The school-based team involved in decision-making should document results of the transcript review, student counseling, prior interventions, and parent/guardian conferences, including as much detailed information as possible to allow a final informed placement decision. Although the final decision does not necessarily need to be made at the district level (by a district administrator), the law does indicate that the district owns responsibility for voluntary transfers and that a final placement decision must be made by an official designated by the Superintendent. Where the parent withholds consent, a recommendation by the school-based team to transfer the student must be denied or mandatory procedures for an involuntary placement must be initiated.

*Placement Transfer Plan*

Once the school-based team, parent/guardian, and district designee conclude that the student's education interests are best served in a continuation school, set a clear plan and criteria for effecting the transfer.

➢ **Sending School**

- Engage the receiving school in placement planning. Of particular concern in the policy is that the timing of transfers should not disrupt the learning environment at the receiving school, favoring transfers to occur at the beginning of instructional cycles or grade marking periods established by the continuation school (e.g., a semester or six-week cycle).

- Prepare and transfer student records prior to enrollment at the continuation school (but no less than 10 days after the transfer date). Appropriate records include transcripts, immunizations, birth certificates, behavior records, on-track status for graduation, attendance records, IEPs, psychological reports, SARB notices/contracts, and parent/guardian and emergency contact information.

➢ **Receiving School**

- Document and obtain any relevant pupil records that are missing, including transcripts from previous schools.

- Provide relevant information to the incoming student and parent/guardian that will smooth transition, particularly regarding access/matriculation procedures at the school on the first day and bell/master schedule, student manuals, etc. Also provide information to students and parents/guardians regarding induction process scheduling at the school, including information that will support on-going parent/guardian participation, as appropriate.

*Induction Plan*

Beyond intake procedures outlined above, the Education Code does not address student induction to continuation schools. A cursory review of model practices and interviews with school leaders, however, indicates that initial school induction sets the stage for student success in alternative settings. Continuation school leaders often recommend developing and implementing a robust induction plan to smooth school transitions (both voluntary and involuntary) and as part of the development of a student-centered culture that supports academic and family engagement at the school.

An induction plan might include:

- **An Orientation Process**: This could be led by the principal or other school leader and involve an orientation of students and parent/guardian stakeholders in understanding the school's mission and vision, curriculum, available pupil services, school calendar and schedule, expectations (rules and discipline policies), school-community partnerships (including

partnerships with employers, post-secondary institutions, and ROP) school facilities, and the availability of student led or other extra-curricular activities.

- **Establishing an Individual Student Success Plan**:  Guidance and counseling staff should meet with the student at the induction point to develop a student success plan, including a plan for meeting graduation requirements or for making a successful transition to post-secondary education opportunities or back to a comprehensive school

- **A Plan for On-going Parent Involvement – Capacity Building**:  Involving parents in an induction process can set the stage for on-going and effective communication with families. School leaders can impart information about how they plan to facilitate parent-teacher conferences as needed throughout the year. They can facilitate reasonable access to school staff by appointment, phone, and email, issue frequent reports on student progress, and provide opportunities for parents to volunteer, participate, and observe classroom activities. Family induction can also be a venue for building the capacity of parents/guardians to promote student success. For example, families can gain understanding of the state's academic and student achievement standards and requirements for family involvement. Parents and guardians can receive information about how to monitor their child's progress, and how to work with educators to improve the achievement of their children.

*Student Progress Monitoring*

Finally, placement procedures provide an opportunity for district administrators to provide guidance to school leaders and information to students and families about how student academic progress to graduation (in accord with the student success plan and with district learning goals) will be monitored and communicated at regular intervals.