

What Are Alternative Schools and How Does the State Fund Them?



Some Schools Serve as Alternatives to Traditional Schools

- Alternative schools provide education to students who (1) could benefit from a different environment, (2) cannot stay at their traditional school because of behavioral issues, or (3) are incarcerated.
- As shown in Figure 1, school districts, county offices of education (COEs), and the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) operate alternative schools.
- District-run continuation schools are the most common type of alternative school.
- District-run alternative schools typically serve students with less severe challenges.
- COE-run alternative schools typically serve students with more severe challenges, including students who are on probation or incarcerated.
- DJJ runs three alternative school facilities and one camp. Compared to students who attend COE-run juvenile court schools, DJJ serves students incarcerated for crimes that are more serious and generally serving longer sentences.
- Almost all students enrolled in alternative schools are in grades 9 through 12.

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(Continued)

Figure 1
Overview of Alternative Schools

	District-Run		District or COE-Run	COE-Run		State (DJJ)-Run
	Continuation High School	Community Day School ^a	Opportunity School ^b	County Community School ^c	Juvenile Court School	California Education Authority
Grades served^d	10-12	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12	7-12
Enrollment (2014-15)	60,027	4,225	2,045	14,953	5,430	424
Placement criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary^e 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonmandatory expulsion • Probation referred • SARB referred • Habitually truant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary^e 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory expulsion • Probation referred • On probation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awaiting trial • Incarcerated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incarcerated

^a A small number of COEs also operate community day schools.
^b State has not authorized local education agencies to establish new opportunity schools since 2004.
^c Counties may make local arrangements with districts to serve other types of students. These students are included in enrollment count.
^d Reflects the grade span authorized in state law. Most enrollment is in grades 9-12.
^e Common reasons include nonmandatory expulsion, truancy, suspension, or credit deficiency.
 COE = county office of education; DJJ = Department of Juvenile Justice; and SARB = school attendance review board.

- In addition to the alternative schools shown in Figure 1, certain other district-run schools may apply to the California Department of Education to be classified as alternative schools. Specifically, schools may apply if at least 70 percent of their students meet certain criteria for being “high risk,” including being under disciplinary sanction or a former dropout.
- Traditionally, the state has had different ways of holding alternative schools and traditional schools accountable for student outcomes. (For more information about how the state holds alternative schools accountable, see our report: Next Steps for Improving State Accountability for Alternative Schools.)

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Funding Rates Vary by Type of Alternative School

- The state funds district-run alternative schools in the same way it funds traditional district schools under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). (For more information about the LCFF, see our brief: *An Overview of the Local Control Funding Formula.*)
 - As shown in Figure 2, LCFF provides school districts with a base funding rate for each student.
 - School districts also receive supplemental funding for English learner, low-income, and foster youth students. A student who has one or more of these characteristics generates supplemental funding equal to 20 percent of the base rate.
 - Districts with concentrations of these students exceeding 55 percent of their enrollment receive an additional 50 percent of their base rate for students above the threshold.
- The LCFF rates for COE-run alternative schools are different from the rates for district-run schools.
 - As shown in Figure 2, LCFF provides COE-run county community schools with a higher base funding rate for each student.
 - County community schools receive supplemental funds for English learner, low-income, and foster youth students equal to 35 percent of the base rate.
 - County community schools with concentrations of these students exceeding 50 percent of their enrollment receive an additional 35 percent of their base rate for students above the threshold.
- COE juvenile court schools have special LCFF funding rules.
 - LCFF provides COE-run juvenile court schools with the same higher grade-based funding rate for each student as it does for county community schools, but all students generate supplemental and concentration funding, effectively providing juvenile court schools with a per-pupil funding rate.

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- The state-run DJJ schools have their own special funding rules.
 - As shown in Figure 2, the DJJ has higher per-pupil funding than all other alternative schools.
 - The DJJ’s per-pupil funding changes from year to year based on the state’s annual appropriation.

Figure 2
Funding for Alternative Schools

2014-15

	District Programs		District or COE Programs	County Programs		State (DJJ) Programs
	Continuation High School	Community Day School	Opportunity School	County Community School	Juvenile Court School	California Education Authority
Base Grant^a	\$8,712	\$8,712	\$8,712	\$11,313	\$11,313 ^b	\$35,500 ^c
Supplemental Grant						
Rate ^d	20%	20%	20%	35%	35%	—
Amount	\$1,742	\$1,742	\$1,742	\$3,960	\$3,960	—
Concentration Grant						
Concentration threshold	55%	55%	55%	50%	—	—
Rate ^d	50%	50%	50%	35%	17.5%	—
Amount	\$4,356	\$4,356	\$4,356	\$1,980	\$1,980	—

^a Based on average daily attendance. Reflects base funding rates for students in grades 9-12.

^b Effective per-pupil funding rate is \$17,253, as every student generates a base, supplemental, and concentration grant.

^c Reflects derived rate based on annual state appropriation.

^d Reflected as a percent of base grant.

LCFF = Local Control Funding Formula; COE = county office of education; and DJJ = Department of Juvenile Justice.