

*Examining the
Characteristics of
Justice-Involved
Students in Los
Angeles County*

UNHIDDEN FIGURES

Los Angeles County is home to the largest probation department in the world and maintains one of the highest rates of youth incarceration in the nation.

While arrests, prosecutions, and detentions of youth have declined dramatically across California, including in Los Angeles County, spending on justice systems has remained high or increased, and there is a persistent overrepresentation of youth of color, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and/or other genders, sexes, and sexualities (LGBTQIA+), and youth who are a part of other underserved student subgroups.

This factsheet aims to illuminate the spectra of needs students involved in the juvenile justice system can possess. Justice-involved students can often have an array of identities and needs, yet are less likely than others to access a high quality education. Foundational to their success are adults committed to understanding the intersectionality of students' identities and lived experiences and how every student is unique in their learning needs.

As we seek to dismantle enduring educational barriers, we must also seek to better understand the students we educate and advocate alongside. Only then can we begin to honor the fullness of students and their triumphs.

OVERREPRESENTED & UNDERSERVED

Justice-involved students are **sharply overrepresented** as English Learners, Foster Youth, and students enrolled in Special Education. Many identify as LGBTQIA+, have experienced homelessness, are in low-income households, and have lived through multiple adverse childhood experiences.

The prevalence of certain characteristics amongst justice-involved students, as compared to their non-justice-involved peers, underscores how important it is for educators to foster learning environments that are affirmative of students' identities and cultures and for systems to integrate resources that are responsive to students' circumstances and educational needs.

Justice-involved students often encounter punitive school discipline before becoming system-involved, and most have endured high levels of instability and interruptions to instructional time. Despite this, justice-involved students remain committed to their education and aspirations, though they are oftentimes denied the supports they deserve to fully thrive.

In 2017, it was determined that even when students involved in both the Los Angeles County juvenile justice and child welfare systems had higher rates of documented education needs, **it did not lead to increased referrals or access to education services.**¹

There is an urgent need for educators to connect students with appropriate education resources and for educators to create safe, affirmative, and bias-free classroom cultures. In doing so, educators can not only mitigate the effects of system-involvement, but preempt students from juvenile justice system-involvement altogether.

This profile provides a closer look at the intersections of identities and characteristics of justice-involved youth to inform stakeholders, educators, and policy makers on how our education system can best serve justice-involved students.

Author Betty Fang
Editors Angélica Salazar
 Patricia Soung
Designers Jade Park
 19 the Agency

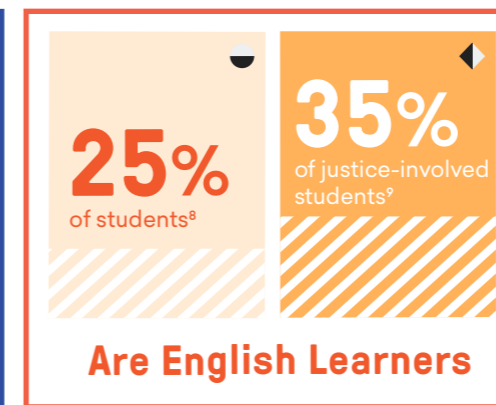
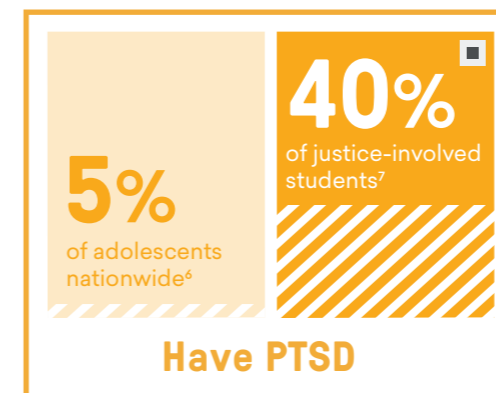
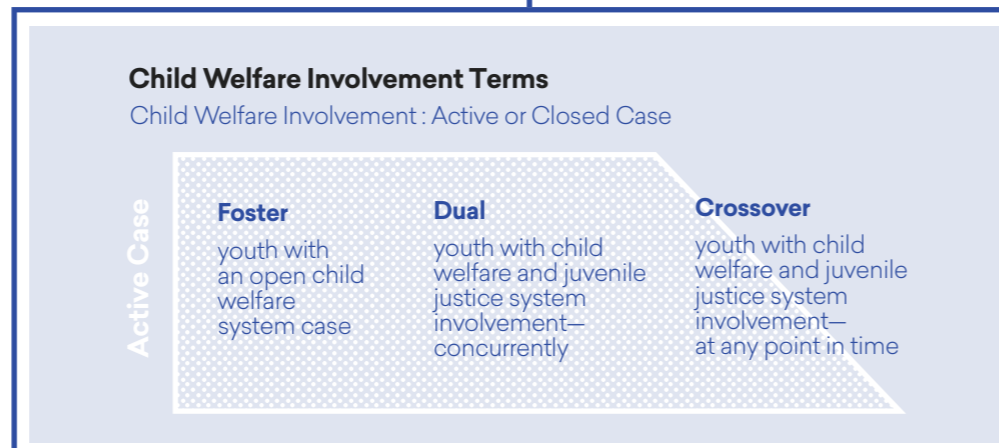
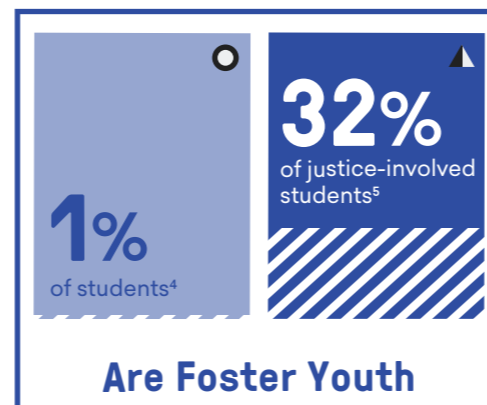
UP CLOSE

POPULATIONS REFERENCED
2016-2017

- **LA County Enrollment**
1,511,354 students
One-Day Count
 - **LAUSD Enrollment**
633,621 students
One-Day Count
- JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH**
- ▲ **LA County Youth on Probation**
9,952 youth on probation[^]
Cumulative
 - ◀ **LAUSD Title I Part D, Juvenile Detention Program***
540 students[^]
Cumulative
 - **LA County Youth in Juvenile Halls and Probation Camps**
569 youth in juvenile halls[^]
301 youth in probation camps[^]
One-Day Count
 - ▼ **LACOE Title I Part D, Juvenile Detention Program***
4,673 students[^]
Cumulative
- *The Title I Part D, Juvenile Detention Program is a component of Title I Part D, Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk.[^]
- ★ **CA Youth in County Juvenile Facilities**
23,465 youth
Cumulative[^]

Characteristics of Justice-Involved Students in Los Angeles County

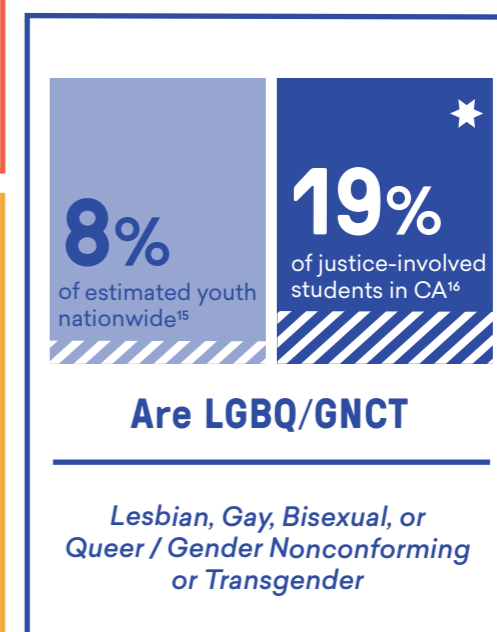
Compilation of data drawn from research specific to Los Angeles County where available or unless noted otherwise



Low-Income is defined here as a public school student's eligibility to receive free or reduced price school meals. Below are the federal income eligibility guidelines for the 2016-17 year:¹⁴

Free School Meal:
\$31,590 for a family of four

Reduced Price Meal:
\$44,955 for a family of four



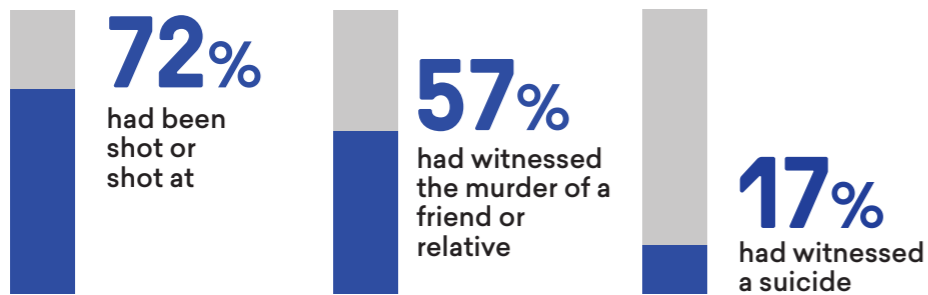
→ Of students assigned female at birth, 50% identify as LGBTQ/GNCT¹⁷

UNDERLYING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

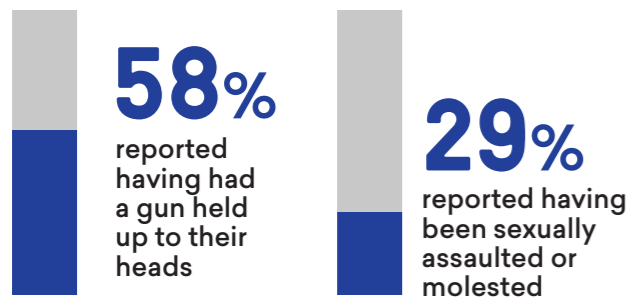
Justice-involved students face systemic barriers that interfere with their learning experiences. Barriers include histories of trauma and exposure to violence, discrimination, and education instability.

TRAUMA

A study on [violence exposure](#)¹⁸ and LA County Youth in Juvenile Halls and Probation Camps [revealed that:](#)

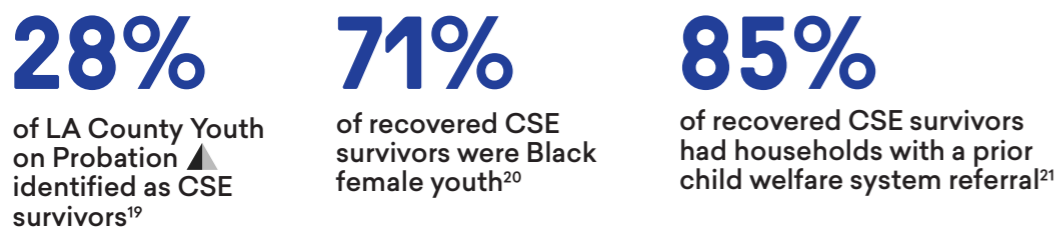


Female Youth



Female youth reported higher rates of PTSD symptomatology, and nearly all their households had received a referral to the child welfare system for abuse or neglect.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE)



EDUCATIONAL INSTABILITY

Educational instability occurs when a student's school of attendance or out-of-home placement changes.

A single school change during high school can *double a student's risk of dropping out*³⁸ and a single welfare placement change can reduce academic growth by 2.52 percentile points.³⁹

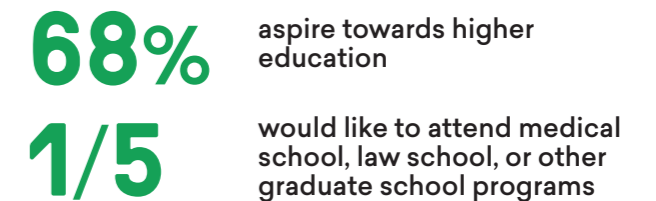
School instability and child welfare placement instability are even more disruptive when experienced together,⁴⁰ as students must navigate the challenges of adjusting to a new living situation and a new school.

SCHOOL MOBILITY & HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT⁴³

High Schools Attended	Dropout Rate
1	8%
2	19%
3	26%
4	28%
5	29%
6	100%
7	100%

While justice-involved students experience extreme rates of educational instability, they remain unrelentingly ambitious: steadfast in their long-term academic goals and committed to realizing their visions of post-secondary education success.

Amongst Justice-Involved Students⁴⁴



Youth on Probation average

8 SCHOOL CHANGES & 5 PLACEMENT CHANGES⁴¹

across their entire educational history by the time of system-contact

Less than 30% of general student youth attend more than one high school⁴²

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39. Elysia V. Clemens, Kristin Klopfenstein, Trent L. Lalonde, and Matt Tis, "The Effects of Placement and School Stability on Academic Growth Trajectories of Students in Foster Care," *Children and Youth Services Review* 87 (2018): 86-94, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.015>.

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44. Andrea J. Sedlak and Carol Bruce, "Survey of Youth in Residential Placement: Youth Characteristics and Backgrounds," *Office of Justice Programs, National Criminal Justice Reference Service* (May 2017), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/grants/250753.pdf>.

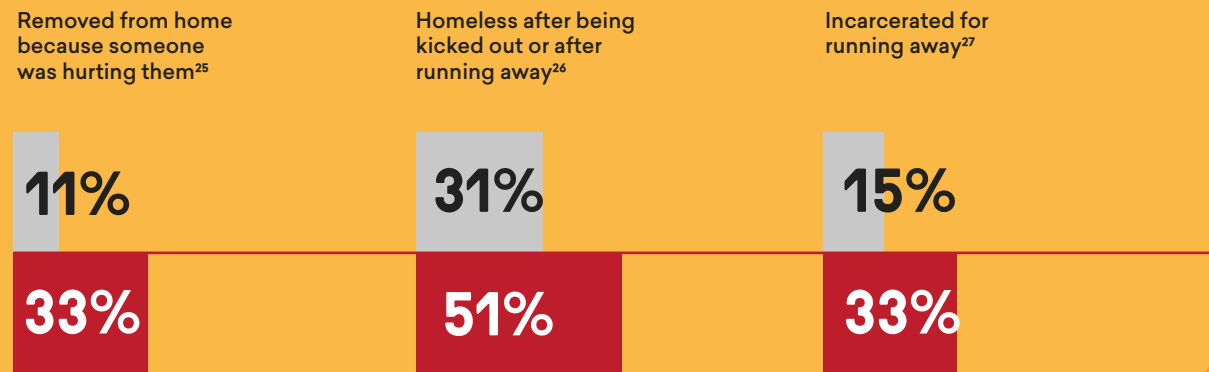
OVERCRIMINALIZATION

Youth who possess distinct and intersectional characteristics of race/ethnicity and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression are at heightened risk of being disproportionately subjected to punitive responses in all systems—education, child welfare,²² and juvenile justice²³—as compared to their white, cisgender, gender-conforming (GC), and/or heterosexual peers.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY & EXPRESSION

A combination of racialized discipline and hostility towards LGBTQIA+ youth of color pushes them out of their schools and homes, contributing to high rates of homelessness²⁴ and juvenile justice system contact.

Amongst Justice-Involved Youth Nationally



LGBTQ youth are **120%** more likely to experience homelessness than non-LGBTQ youth.²⁸

IT'S INTERSECTIONAL

92%

of incarcerated youth identified female at birth — and who are LGBQ/GNCT — have been suspended from school at least once.³²

There is an overwhelming overlap between students' experiences of school push-out and incarceration because *justice-involved students face interlocking systems of oppression that overcriminalize their behaviors on account of race, class, ability, language, and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.*

For LGBTQIA+ youth of color, school-based discipline both *mirrors and feeds into juvenile justice system responses to their survival strategies.* Youth may run away, shoplift, or engage in other activities to survive and cope with abusive home environments and homelessness, which increase their rates of justice system contact, arrest,³³ and experiences of harassment, discrimination, and abuse by law enforcement.³⁴

Racial and LGBTQIA+ disparities in the juvenile justice system do not reflect actual rates of youth misbehavior. Rather, they reflect the aggregate effects of adults' subjective decisions.

Research on the hypercriminalization of youth shows adult biases impact LGBTQIA+ students who are perceived as non-conforming. These biases also include the persistent adultification of Black female and male children.^{35 36}

When we as adults hypercriminalize LGBTQIA+ youth of color, we are responsible for their overcriminalization. On the other hand, when we are adult allies and understand who they are and what they need, that support can be life-changing.

BLACK & BROWN YOUTH

Nearly all justice-involved youth in LA County are youth of color.

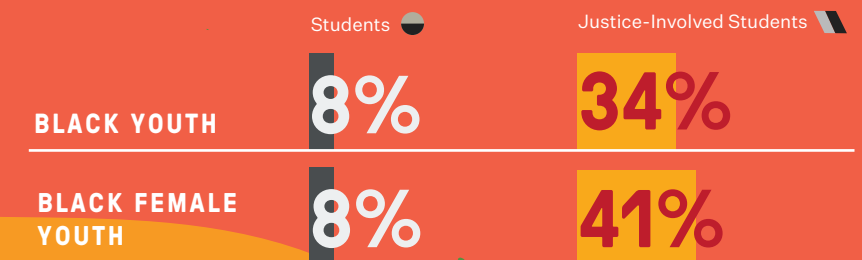
Black youth are the most disproportionately enrolled racial subgroup in LA County schools that serve students in juvenile halls and probation camps,²⁹ but research on racial disparities along every juncture in the school-to-prison pipeline reveals underlying patterns of systemic racism.

For example, Black students have been documented as being *less likely to misbehave*

at school when compared to White students, but almost *two times as likely to receive school-based discipline.*³⁰

Systemic racism impacts all students of color. Participation in extracurricular academics and sports decreases school discipline for White students, but—alarmingly—increases rates of school discipline for Black, Latino, Asian, and Multiracial students.

Black female youth are the most overrepresented racial and gender subgroup³¹



SUSPENSION RATES³⁷

2% ○ LA County Students
15% ▽ Justice-Involved Students



All youth need a culture of love and spaces in the community to play, heal, and learn.

Justice-involved students, as a result of system contact, have been denied equal access to education stability. They have also been denied the same college and career-ready opportunities and social-emotional resources afforded to non-justice-involved youth. Research shows that the mere fact of incarceration in LA County can induce trauma due to the prevalence of abuse during detention.^H

We have an unconditional obligation to respond to justice-involved students with practices and actions that center healing.

Educators—by virtue of teaching justice-involved students—are also high in need. We must continue to increase resources available in schools and we must cultivate a framework of support and accountability that is creative, proactive, and restorative—a true praxis of love that sees and embraces students as they are, right where they are: in classrooms, schools, and their own homes in the community.

Education leads to enlightenment.
Enlightenment opens the way to empathy.
Empathy foreshadows reform.

DERRICK A. BELL

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