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

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**MODEL PROCEDURES  
FOR THE IDENTIFICATION, VOLUNTARY  
PLACEMENT, AND INDUCTION OF STUDENTS  
INTO CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS IN  
CALIFORNIA**

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California law requires that school districts create clear and consistent identification, placement, and intake policies for the voluntary transfer of students to the legislatively-defined continuation schools (Cal. Educ. Code §48432.3). 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 initially developed by 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, provide them with information necessary to understand the options available, and determine if the continuation school is the best option for the students.

### *Transparency*

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

### *Right of Return*

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

#### **Applicable Law:**

##### Text of California Education 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 traditional high 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 (or recover) on credits, with the intention of returning to a traditional 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 ensures informed consent, is appropriate to the student’s learning goals, and is otherwise 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 credit-deficient)?
- **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?
- **Student’s 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 has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 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 who make 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 traditional school 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 traditional 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. Aim to 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 traditional 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 (District and School Team Roles)*

Although final placement decisions do not necessarily need to be made at the district level (by a district administrator), the law does indicate that the district owns responsibility for establishing a uniform voluntary transfer policy and for assuring that placement considerations include specified procedural safeguards and are made by an official designated by the superintendent. 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 an informed placement decision in the best interest of the student. Where a 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 the student's educational 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. The applicable law provides that the timing of transfers should not disrupt the receiving school's learning environment and, to the extent possible, transfers should 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 no fewer than 10 days prior to enrollment at the continuation school. Appropriate records include transcripts, immunizations, English Learner status, 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 the 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 the induction process/schedule at the school, including information that will support ongoing parent/guardian participation, as appropriate.

### *Induction Plan*

Beyond intake procedures outlined above, the Education Code does not address student induction to continuation schools. A review of sample district practices and interviews with school leaders, however, indicates that a positive initial school induction experience can set 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 extracurricular activities.

- **Establishing an Individual Student Success Plan:** Guidance and counseling staff should meet with the student at the intake 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 ongoing 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.

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