Justice Engaged Youth Guidance

Background Data

Data on youth who are justice-engaged are housed in court systems, Division of Youth Services (DYS), Colorado Division of Human Services (CDHS), the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and elsewhere. There is not a single agency that analyses education and other outcomes for all youth. There are estimates of the number of justice-engaged youth within Colorado taken from different sources. For instance, the Generation Schools Network (GSN), an organization that works with school districts and directly with youth estimated that in 2024, there were 22,000 students in Colorado who were justice-engaged. And from Colorado agencies, we know the following:

- According to Colorado Crime Statistics, in 2025, there were more than 6,100 Colorado youth who were newly justice-engaged, having been arrested for the first time (Colorado Crime Statistics, 2025).
- DYS estimates that there were 2,481 students who were detained or committed during the 2024-25 fiscal year.
- CDE estimates that there were 1,281 public-school students in Colorado detention centers during the 2023-24 school year.

Interagency Workgroup

One of the tasks required by HB24-1216 was the convening of an interagency workgroup to examine what data are available and make recommendations about how data could be used for better understanding and supporting students who are involved in the justice system. The workgroup met from August to December 2024, shared information about what is currently available, and developed recommendations for how data could provide a better understanding of youth outcomes and support stronger interventions and responses.

- Final report with recommendations

CDE Data

One of the challenges identified through legislation and in the interagency workgroup is that information about youth involved in the justice system is dispersed among a variety of places. CDE and local education agencies (LEAs) have academic information but typically minimal information regarding which students are justice-engaged. While the recommendations from the interagency workgroup focused on how data compiling and reporting could be improved, there are some pieces of information currently available. CDE collects enrollment information for students who were enrolled in one of eight detention centers across the state where an LEA was providing educational services and when a student has transferred into or out of a Department of Corrections (DOC) facility. Note that this is only a small portion of the students who are included in the legislative definition of justice-engaged youth.

- Over 1,000 individual students were in a Colorado detention center in each of the past three years. The populations of detention centers on a single day varies widely throughout the year, as many students are in detention for less than one month (**Table 1**).

- Around 100 students were reported as exiting from an LEA to DOC during each of the past two years and almost 50 students entering from DOC (**Table 2**).

Table 1: Number of Public-School Students in Colorado Detention Centers

School Year	Unduplicated Student Count	Enrolled as of May 1 or Later
2021-22	1,043	106
2022-23	1,285	141
2023-24	1,320	191

Note: An unduplicated count is one in which every student is counted once regardless of how many times or for how long or how many times they were placed in a Colorado detention center.

Table 2: Number of Public-School Students Entering and Exiting DOC Facilities at the End of the School Year

School Year	Entry to PS from DOC	Exit from PS to DOC
2021-22	40	92
2022-23	46	100
2023-24	46	107

Note: PS = Public School

DYS Data

DYS publishes an annual report on the number of students who attended a detention center or received services through DYS.

DYS reported that there were 1,940 detained youth served during the 2024-25 fiscal year, with an average length of stay of 24.1 days. Additionally, there was an 8.4 percent decrease in the average daily detention population since the previous fiscal year. Lastly, there were 3,725 detention screens during the 2024-25 fiscal year, an 8 percent decrease from the previous year.

When the demographic information of students who were in detention centers is disaggregated, DYS reported that in 2024-25:

- 42.5 percent were Hispanic, 28.0 percent were White, 25.9 percent were Black, and 3.6 percent were of another race.
- 84.3 percent of students in detention centers were male and 15.7 percent were female.
- The average age when a student was detained was 16 years.

DYS also provides services to committed youth through a Continuum of Care model in which students receive services throughout the initial assessment, residential placement, transition, and parole supervision services. During the 2024 fiscal year, there were 541 youths receiving these services. The service length for these students was, on average, about 16 months and there were 178 new students receiving these services during the 2024-25 fiscal year, which is an 11 percent decrease compared to the previous year.

Regarding the demographic information of students that were committed, DYS reported that 47.0 percent were Hispanic/Latinx, 24.5 percent were Black, 24.0 percent were White, and 4.5 percent were of another race. Of these students, 88 percent were male and 12 percent were female. Additionally, 37.3 percent of youth had an individualized education program (IEP).

Newly committed students had increasing mental health and substance use treatment needs in the 2024-25 fiscal year: 84 percent of the population required services for the treatment of substance abuse, 84 percent needed formal mental health intervention services, and 72 percent had both mental health and substance abuse treatment needs.

According to the 2024-25 annual report regarding graduation and student pathways for students committed to DYS:

- 87.7 percent of eligible youth who received services through DYS earned a high school diploma or GED prior to discharge.
- 68.7 percent of students obtained a certificate or took Career and Technical Education classes during their time with DYS.
- 94 enrolled in college courses from 2019 to 2025.