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PRES RELEASE
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**Students and County Office of Education Work Together to Reach Favorable Settlement
Regarding Independent Study Policies and Practices.**

*Independent study must, under all circumstances, be voluntary and limited to students who can
be as successful learning independently as in a classroom.*

OXNARD, CALIF. – Today, following two years of Public Records Act requests by California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA) and Youth Law Center (YLC) to the Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) regarding its independent study policies and programs, students and parents have reached a favorable settlement agreement with VCOE that will result in significant changes including additional safeguards to protect against involuntary or inappropriate referrals to independent study.

The students represented by CRLA and YLC are juvenile justice youth who had been placed on independent study involuntarily for reasons such as insufficient space at the county community school, school safety, or as a form of school discipline. These students include low-income students with disabilities and students from non/limited English speaking households.



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The independent study statute and its implementing regulations establish basic requirements for independent study programs including the requirement that independent study under all circumstances must be voluntary. County offices of education and school districts must assess the appropriateness of an independent study setting for individual students prior to approving a student's participation in independent study. Students in independent study must have the same access to all existing services and resources at school as is available to all other students at school.

CRLA and YLC are pleased that VCOE has dramatically reduced its independent study enrollment and demonstrated a commitment to protect against inappropriate referrals to independent study by, among other actions, providing ongoing training for staff and collaborating with both the Ventura County Probation and Juvenile Public Defenders' Office to develop policies and procedures addressing the transition needs of juvenile justice youth to ensure placements are made in their best educational interests.

As part of the settlement, eligible students who have participated in VCOE's independent study program over the last three school years (2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015) will qualify for supplemental education services through VCOE including supplemental CAHSEE preparation, course and credit recovery programs, and career and technical education.

"Independent study can have devastating impacts on students, especially those with high academic and behavioral needs. We have seen widespread abuses of independent study in several school districts and county offices of education across the state that have utilized independent study as a forced placement and invisible dumping ground for low-performing children. We hope that VCOE will serve as a model for others that may be in violation of independent study requirements." Franchesca Verdin, Director of CRLA's Rural Education Equity Program.

"Juvenile justice youth represent one of the most "academically at-risk" student groups enrolled in our schools. Too often, once they leave juvenile hall, they are forced to enroll in alternative programs that fail to meet their needs or are denied reenrollment altogether. Forced placement in independent study for these youth amounts to a one way ticket out of our school system. Hopefully, this settlement will result in a focused and informed process for truly addressing the transition needs of these youth." Deborah Escobedo, YLC staff attorney.

CRLA

Founded in 1966, CRLA's mission is to fight for justice and individual rights alongside the most exploited communities of our society. Through a network of regional offices and cross-cutting programs, CRLA provides legal services to over 32,000 low-income people annually. Our work



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impacts farmworkers, individuals with disabilities, immigrant populations, LGBT communities, women, children and families in rural areas. For more information on CRLA, please visit: www.crla.org.

YLC

The Youth Law Center is a public interest law firm that works to protect children in the nation's foster care and justice systems from abuse and neglect, and to ensure that they receive the necessary support and services to become healthy and productive adults. Since 1978, YLC lawyers have worked across the United States to reduce the use of out-of-home care and incarceration; ensure safe and humane conditions in out-of-home placements; keep children out of adult jails; and secure equitable treatment for children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

<http://www.ylc.org/>