The Road To Success Academies model addresses the unique educational, emotional, social, and circumstantial needs of students in the juvenile justice system.
THE NEED

Students in juvenile justice systems across the country achieve at levels far below their peers. Many enter the system with histories of chronic academic failure and truancy. As a result, they tend to have low literacy skills, minimal content knowledge, and little to no credits completed toward high school graduation.

Often these students also carry the burden of personal trauma. Their unmet socio-emotional and health care needs leave them unprepared to engage in the school setting. When they exit juvenile facilities they are often far below grade level, lacking a diploma or GED, and unequipped to rejoin society.

Recognizing the need to change the status quo, Los Angeles County leadership has seized the opportunity to aggressively reform the juvenile incarceration experience. As the largest juvenile justice system in the nation, Los Angeles County has both great responsibility and great capacity for leadership and innovation.

The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) is the major partner with the Probation Department in operating schools for incarcerated youth. In 2010, LACOE launched the Road To Success Academy (RSTA) model as a fresh approach to motivating and engaging students at high risk who have not succeeded in traditional classroom settings.

THE PROGRAM

The goals of RTSA are to reduce recidivism and support students in becoming productive, contributing citizens prepared to focus on their education, finish high school, and transition to college and careers. Its primary strategy is to support students to find interest in and excitement about learning.

The RTSA model uses project-based learning to engage students and challenge them to exceed the California core curriculum standards. It employs a thematic, interdisciplinary approach, which frames essential questions within discrete learning modules, inviting students to explore content in direct and meaningful ways.

RTSA also incorporates daily supportive activities to promote character development and self-esteem, and empower young men and women to make positive choices and behavioral changes.

RTSA improves student engagement, makes instruction relevant, and holds students to high expectations. It also creates an environment in which collaboration can happen in a meaningful way.

RTSA features five key elements:
- Core Educational Program
- Thematic Interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning
- Embedded Instructional Partnerships
- Pathways to Higher Education
- Instructional and Leadership Coaching
RTSA was developed in alignment with the comprehensive, standards-based, Western Association of Schools and Colleges-accredited high school coursework provided throughout all LACOE schools. This coursework includes:

• English Language Arts
• English 9-12
• Math: Math Basics, Algebra I and II, Geometry
• History/Social Science: World History, U.S. History, Government, Economics
• Science: Earth Science, Life Science, Chemistry, Physics
• English Language Development 1-5
• Electives: e.g., Computer Literacy, Physical Education, Career Technical Education

Many students enter Juvenile Court Schools unable to read, write, or conceptually understand mathematics at their grade level. To support these students, LACOE instructors use differentiated instructional strategies in the classroom as well as research-based intervention programs designed to deliver grade-level curriculum to students in a comprehensible, meaningful way.

Co-curricular programs, such as Read 180, Math 180, and Credit Recovery, are also used to identify and address learning gaps in reading, math, or credit deficiency.

LACOE students who complete 220 credits and pass both sections of the California High School Exit Exam receive their high school diploma.

THE CURRICULUM

RTSA’s defining feature is its Thematic, Interdisciplinary, and Project-Based (TIP) curriculum. Students approach curriculum and content through a thematic lens that addresses the distinct social-emotional needs and circumstances of students in the juvenile justice system.

The TIP curriculum is engaging and has meaningful learning opportunities that are tied to the real world and connected to students’ experiences and interests. Students study subjects through related social-emotional themes with overarching essential questions and across all disciplines. The themes relate to each other and build on the previous themes.

After looking at multiple perspectives within the themes, students develop their own point of view and voice on the subject matter. The goal is for students to develop facility to discuss current issues by looking at evidence to determine a point of view.

As a result, students become active and informed citizens who can document and share their learning. Their learning is expressed in a diverse set of projects that involve writing, media, interactive science experiments, and public presentations.

Through the process of project-based learning, students investigate and respond to complex, open-ended essential questions. Students are engaged in a rigorous, extended process of inquiry, using resources and developing answers. Through this process, students build competencies that are valuable for college and career, such as critical thinking/problem solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity/innovation. Students act as professionals and confront the problems.
THE EVIDENCE

Since its launch in 2010, the RTSA model continues to yield success. RTSA uses the Northwestern Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment to measure growth in math and reading, and administers the test every 60 days. These assessments show that, on average, students are demonstrating about one year of growth in English-Language Arts and half-year of growth in math, as illustrated in the graphs below.

![Graph 1: NWEA MAP Reading Average Growth Data 2012-2014](image1)

![Graph 2: NWEA MAP Math Average Growth Data 2012-2014](image2)

THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

LACOE has developed a rigorous, three-year process to officially certify a school site as a Road To Success Academy.

A committee composed of LACOE staff from various divisions and departments visits each applicant school at the beginning of the planning year and quarterly during the implementation year. The committee uses an established rubric to review and provide support as sites plan and implement. At the end of the third year, the committee begins final certification review visits to determine if the school has successfully implemented each of the five RTSA elements.

The committee determines whether to recommend certification of the school as a Road To Success Academy.

A validation team, comprised of experts outside of LACOE, verifies and confirms findings before the school under review receives final certification. Certification is for a period of three years with a mid-point review if it is determined that the school has met the minimum standards for certification on each of RTSA's five elements.