



2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



SANTA CRUZ
COUNTY OFFICE OF
EDUCATION

DR. FARIS SABBAH • SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS



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SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE



It is with deep appreciation that we present the Santa Cruz County Office of Education's 2024-25 Annual Report to the Community. This year's work reflects the strength of our school community and our shared commitment to creating places where every learner is safe and supported to learn, achieve, and thrive.

Student and school community safety was a central focus for our office throughout the 2024-25 school year. We expanded coordinated approaches to student well-being through the launch of major initiatives such as Project ASCEND, which offers a restorative, community-based diversion program for youth (p. 11). Amid a climate of fear and concern for immigrant families, we worked to ensure schools remain places of belonging for all learners – collaborating with a coalition of local partners to provide consistent protocols, training, and resources (p. 14).

Student voices reached new heights, and student leaders made an impact both locally and statewide. The Youth Led Leadership Alliance had a truly standout year, engaging students in projects that ranged from a countywide waste audit to organizing Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day events, advancing advocacy in Sacramento, and earning major recognitions including a CSBA Golden Bell Award (p. 19).

Supporting educators continued to be a major focus. From our countywide math initiative and TK collaborative to new professional learning networks in science, sustainability, and instructional practice, we helped teachers deepen skills and strengthen classroom experiences for students (p. 20).

This year also marked the launch of our new five-year Strategic Plan, Building Bridges in Education (p. 7). The plan outlines our shared priorities for 2025-2029 and affirms the values at the heart of our work, expressed through the BRIDGES acronym: Belonging, Relationships, Innovation, Data-Informed Decision-Making, Growth Mindset, Excellence, and Sustainability.

None of this progress would be possible without the dedication of our educators, the resilience of our students, and the partnership of families, districts, and community organizations across Santa Cruz County. Thank you for everything you contribute to the well-being and success of our learners.

Yours in education and equity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Faris Sabbah". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Faris" on the top line and "Sabbah" on the bottom line.

Dr. Faris Sabbah
Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools

About Our Office

The Santa Cruz County Office of Education (Santa Cruz COE) is a public agency dedicated to supporting an equitable and innovative education system for all students in Santa Cruz County.

We provide services and programs that strengthen the work of 10 public school districts, directly support learners from preschool through adult education, and expand opportunities for the more than 37,000 students who call Santa Cruz County home.

Our work centers on the belief that every student deserves the chance to thrive—academically, socially, and emotionally. We uphold the values of equity and excellence as we assess and support practices and policies that ensure all learners have the opportunities and supports they need to succeed.

A Statewide System

California's public education system operates across three levels:

State: Establishes policy, funding, and standards.

County: Provides oversight, fiscal and instructional support, and direct services.

Local: School districts oversee day-to-day operations and classroom instruction.

The Santa Cruz COE is one of 58 county offices of education in California, serving as a bridge between state policy and local implementation—helping districts, educators, and communities work together to achieve student success.

Our Programs & Services

The Santa Cruz COE comprises six divisions that work together to support schools, educators, and students county-wide.



A group of Santa Cruz COE staff at the 2025 Picnic.

Business Services

Provides fiscal oversight, payroll, retirement, and operations support to school districts, ensuring financial stability and transparency.

Educational Services

Leads curriculum and instruction, educator professional development, outdoor education, and child development initiatives to strengthen teaching and learning.

Human Resources

Manages credentialing, fingerprinting, and educator pathway programs that recruit, develop, and retain a strong, diverse education workforce.

Technology & Innovation

Oversees data systems, media and educational technology, and IT infrastructure, helping schools leverage technology to enhance learning and efficiency.

Student Services

Delivers direct student programs including Alternative Education, Special Education, Career and Adult Learning, and support for student well-being and inclusion.

Superintendent's Office

Provides organizational leadership and oversees countywide initiatives in communications, student leadership, family engagement, and safety, while advancing equity and community partnerships.



Learn more about the
[Santa Cruz COE.](http://sccoe.link/aboutus)
sccoe.link/aboutus



1,599

Students
enrolled in
our programs



359

Staff on
the COE
team



43

Sites providing
educational
services

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Meet the Trustees

The Santa Cruz County Board of Education provides leadership, oversight, and community voice for the county's schools. The Board is made up of seven elected trustees, each representing a geographic area of Santa Cruz County, and two student trustees – one representing students countywide, and one representing the interests of Alternative Education students in particular.

Together with the County Superintendent of Schools, the Board sets policy direction, ensures accountability, and promotes equitable educational opportunities for all students in Santa Cruz County.



Sue Roth
Trustee, Area 1



Bruce Van Allen
Trustee, Area 2



Greg Larson
Trustee, Area 3



Edward Estrada
Trustee, Area 4



Rachel Williams
Trustee, Area 5



Ed Acosta
Trustee, Area 6



Abel Sanchez
Trustee, Area 7



Faris Sabbah
Secretary to
the Board



Natalie Hofkins
Student Trustee

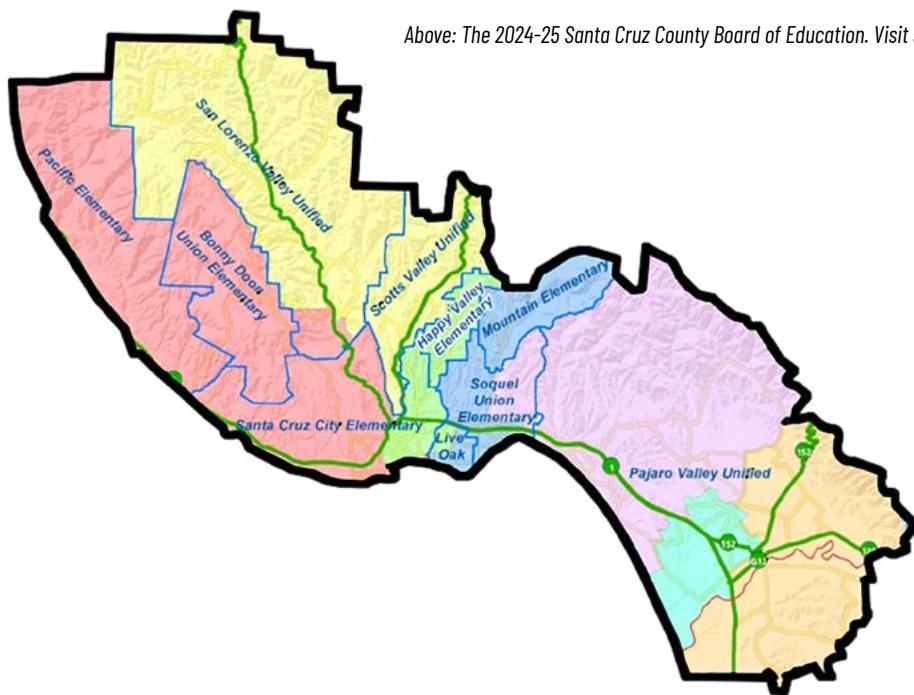


Reuben Marcus
Student Trustee

About the Board

The Santa Cruz County Board of Education is elected by the public to serve four-year terms on a staggered election schedule, ensuring continuity and representation for all seven trustee areas.

Board meetings are open to the public and provide opportunities for community input, policy discussion, and recognition of student and educator achievements.



Above: The 2024-25 Santa Cruz County Board of Education. Visit santacruzcoe.org/board-of-education for current trustee information.

TRUSTEE AREA 1

TRUSTEE AREA 2

TRUSTEE AREA 3

TRUSTEE AREA 4

TRUSTEE AREA 5

TRUSTEE AREA 6

TRUSTEE AREA 7



Explore Board meetings,
policies & more.
sccoe.link/board

SERVING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Our Strategic Plan

In 2024-25, the Santa Cruz County Office of Education undertook a comprehensive effort to update its five-year Strategic Plan, culminating in the release of Building Bridges in Education: Strategic Plan 2025-2029. This process involved extensive engagement with educators, students, families, and community partners to reflect on the lessons of the past five years and chart a shared vision for the future.

The updated plan renews the COE's commitment to belonging and equity, ensuring that every learner—regardless of background—has access to the relationships, resources, and opportunities needed to thrive.

Our Mission

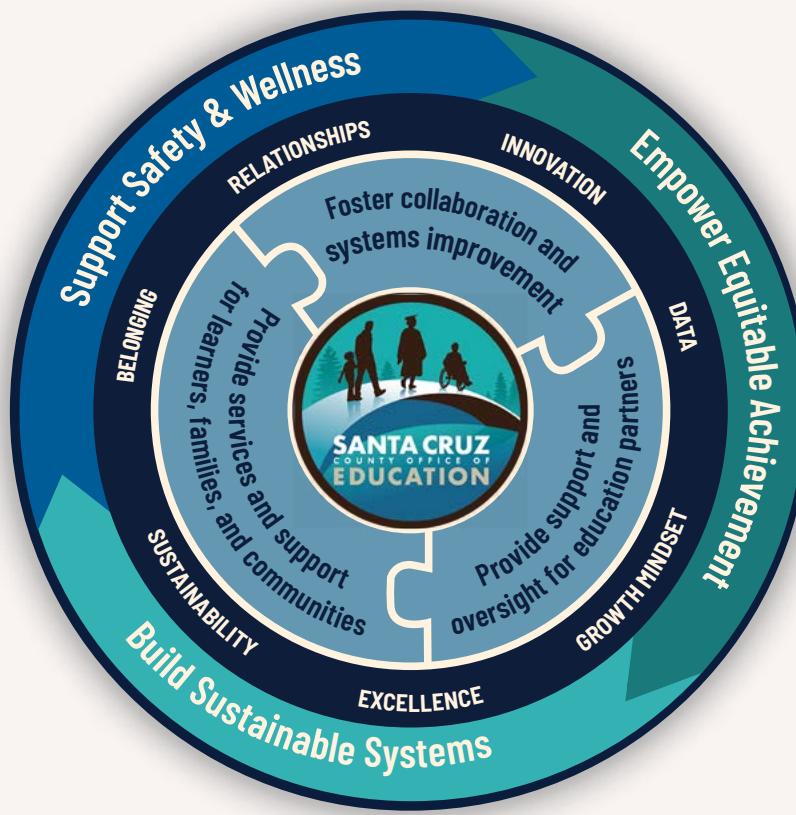
To create an equitable educational system that fosters growth, opportunities, and well-being for all.

Our Vision

An impactful educational community where everyone feels they belong and have the resources, relationships, and skills to thrive.

Our Values

Belonging, Relationships, Innovation, Data, Growth Mindset, Excellence, Sustainability.



Our Priorities

1. Support Safety & Wellness

Goal: Create the conditions that foster safety, inclusion, belonging, joy, and well-being for all learners and the communities that support them.

2. Empower Equitable Achievement

Goal: Ensure all learners have the opportunities, skills, and supports they need to be engaged and successful in their education, careers, and their communities.

3. Build Sustainable Systems

Goal: Co-create and sustain an educational system in Santa Cruz County that is cohesive, effective, and equitable.



Learn more about our
[Strategic Plan](http://sccoe.link/strategic-plan)
sccoe.link/strategic-plan

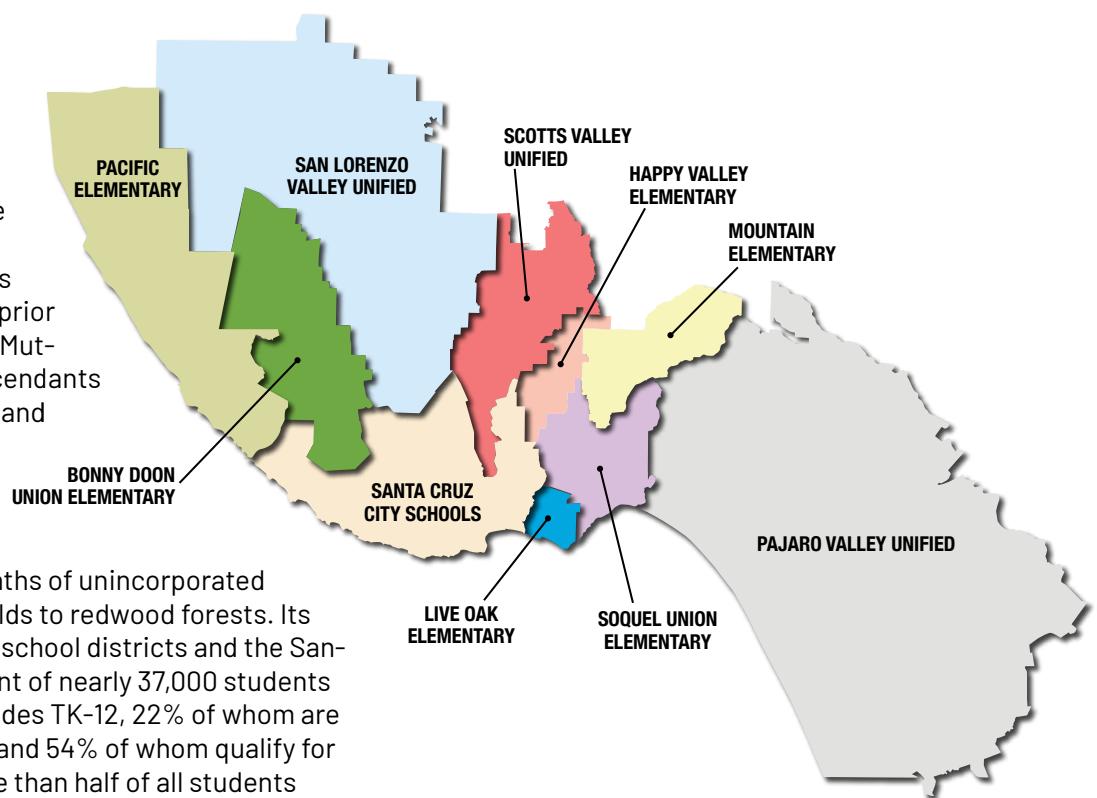
SERVING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY

County Snapshot

Located on the California Central Coast, Santa Cruz County is the second-smallest county in the state by land size and is home to about 262,000 residents. First incorporated in 1850, the land was inhabited for thousands of years prior by the Indigenous Awaswas- and Mut-sun-speaking people whose descendants continue to actively steward the land with traditional practices today.

Santa Cruz County encompasses the four cities of Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Capitola, and

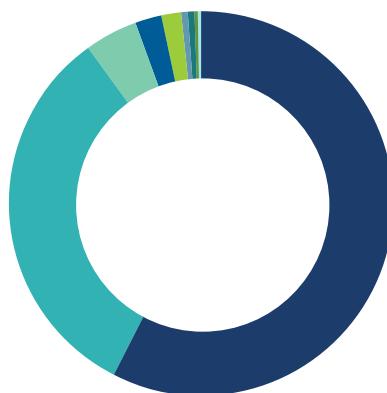
Scotts Valley, as well as large swaths of unincorporated land ranging from agricultural fields to redwood forests. Its residents are served by 10 public school districts and the Santa Cruz COE with a total enrollment of nearly 37,000 students in the public school system in grades TK-12, 22% of whom are categorized as English Learners and 54% of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. More than half of all students identify as Hispanic or Latine.



2024-25 ENROLLMENT

| DISTRICT | STUDENTS |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Pajaro Valley Unified | 17,089 |
| San Lorenzo Valley Unified | 5,616 |
| Santa Cruz City High | 4,467 |
| Scotts Valley Unified | 2,566 |
| Santa Cruz City Elementary | 1,758 |
| Live Oak Elementary | 1,669 |
| Santa Cruz County Office of Education | 1,599 |
| Soquel Union Elementary | 1,520 |
| Pacific Elementary | 173 |
| Mountain Elementary | 143 |
| Happy Valley Elementary | 107 |
| Bonny Doon Union Elementary | 92 |
| Total | 37,287 |

Student Demographics



- 58.10% Hispanic or Latine
- 32.10% White
- 4.70% Two or More Races
- 2.20% Asian
- 1.40% Not Reported
- .60% Filipino
- .60% African American
- .20% Pacific Islander
- .20% American Indian or Alaska Native



Access additional data on the COE's Data Portal.
sccoe.link/data

SUPPORTING SAFETY AND WELLNESS

Our Goal: Create the conditions that foster safety, inclusion, belonging, joy, and well-being for all learners and the communities that support them.



SUPPORTING SAFETY AND WELLNESS

Overview

The Santa Cruz County Office of Education (Santa Cruz COE) is committed to creating the conditions for all students, families, and educators to feel a sense of safety, belonging, and well-being. Working in partnership with districts, health agencies, and community organizations, we strengthen the systems that support both physical safety and mental wellness across schools countywide.

From emergency preparedness and threat assessment to substance-use prevention and mental health supports, the COE provides countywide coordination, training, and direct services that ensure schools are ready to respond and students have access to caring adults and safe learning environments.

Through initiatives such as the Standard Command Response for Schools,



A teacher takes attendance during an evacuation drill at a local school.

the Incident Command Academy, and Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) training, educators and first responders are equipped with shared protocols to protect students in any emergency. Our Tobacco Use Prevention and Education (TUPE) program, fentanyl and opioid awareness campaigns, and school-based wellness initiatives continue to promote student health and reduce risk through education, prevention, and early intervention.

We also prioritize social-emotional wellness through Youth Mental Health First Aid certification, school-based wellness centers, and targeted programs for foster youth, students in transition, and others facing barriers to success. These supports are complemented by our growing focus on student leadership in wellness advocacy, empowering young people to take active roles in shaping supportive, inclusive school cultures.

These efforts advance our countywide goal: ensuring every learner in Santa Cruz County is safe, connected, and cared for—so they can thrive both in school and in life.



Learn more about school safety programs.
sccoe.link/safety

School Safety & Emergency Preparedness

Standard Command Response for Schools

The Santa Cruz County Standard Command Response for Schools (SCRS) serves as the countywide framework for school emergency preparedness and response. Adopted by most Santa Cruz County school districts, fire departments, and law enforcement agencies starting in 2023, SCRS ensures that educators and first responders share consistent language and protocols during any emergency.

Throughout 2024-25, the Santa Cruz COE worked with partners to refresh SCRS training materials, provide presentations and video demonstrations for staff and students, and distribute updated response posters across campuses. The initiative is a model of interagency collaboration, with ongoing training to maintain alignment and readiness across schools and first responder agencies.

Emergency Response

Know these four emergency commands to ensure you are ready to understand and respond.

Evacuation



MOVE OUT and away from a threat inside

Reverse Evacuation



MOVE IN from a threat outside

Hall Check



DETECT, PROTECT and continue instruction

Lockdown



SECURE SPACE against threat of imminent violence

Designed to meet the specific needs of schools, SCRS includes four emergency responses that school staff, students, and first responders are trained to understand and implement.

SUPPORTING SAFETY AND WELLNESS

Project ASCEND: Transforming Youth Justice Through Partnership



After a year of planning and partnership building, 2024-25 marked the launch of Project ASCEND (Achieving Success through Community, Education, and Nurturing Development)—a collaborative, countywide initiative transforming youth justice through diversion, tailored intervention, and rehabilitation.

Developed by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and a network of education, law enforcement, and community partners, Project ASCEND provides restorative, trauma-informed alternatives to incarceration for justice-involved youth. The model focuses on accountability, competency building, and community safety to ensure that youth are supported in healing and reintegrating into their schools and communities.

Modeled after the successful Caminos Hacia el Éxito program in Watsonville—which has served more than 700 youth with a 91% success rate since 2012—Project ASCEND expands access to diversion opportunities countywide. Youth ages 12-17 who are referred by law enforcement for non-violent misdemeanor offenses are matched with a Youth Specialist within 48 hours to assess needs, connect to counseling, and coordinate community service and restorative justice participation. Upon completion, no further legal action is taken.

“Project ASCEND allows us to step in early, connect youth with meaningful services, and build long-term public safety through compassion and accountability.

— Santa Cruz County Sheriff Chris Clark

“By shifting from punishment to restoration and rehabilitation, we're building a system that recognizes the potential in every youth and invests in their futures through compassion, accountability, and community support.

— Dr. Faris Sabbah, County Superintendent of Schools



Project ASCEND partners include representatives from education, law enforcement and nonprofit organizations spanning Santa Cruz County.

By the Numbers

80% of eligible youth to be diverted into services rather than detention

50% targeted reduction in juvenile recidivism by 2028

12-17 Ages served

10 partners across law enforcement, education, and community agencies

Partners: Santa Cruz County Office of Education
Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office • Santa Cruz Police Department • Watsonville Police Department • Scotts Valley Police Department
Capitola Police Department • Santa Cruz County District Attorney • Office of the Public Defender
Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance
Conflict Resolution Center of Santa Cruz County
Encompass Community Services



Learn more about Project ASCEND.
sccoe.link/ascend

SUPPORTING SAFETY AND WELLNESS

Comprehensive Wellness Centers Open Doors

In 2024-25, Santa Cruz County celebrated a major milestone in youth mental health support with the opening of the first three comprehensive high school Wellness Centers at Scotts Valley High School, Harbor High School, and Soquel High School. These centers mark the launch of a countywide effort—known as the Centering Wellness Initiative—to establish universal, coordinated, and easily accessible mental health and wellness supports on every public high school campus.

A Countywide Vision

Three years ago, the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (COE) embarked on a mission to reimagine how schools address student well-being. Guided by community input and a growing body of research on integrated school-based wellness models, the Centering Wellness Initiative set out to create welcoming, student-centered spaces that connect prevention, early intervention, and ongoing care.

Each Wellness Center is built on a three-tiered model of support designed to serve all students:

Tier 1 – Universal access to wellness activities, education, and stigma reduction.

Tier 2 – Targeted small-group and short-term counseling services.

Tier 3 – Coordinated referrals and partnerships for students with higher or ongoing needs.

This model ensures that every student—regardless of circumstance—has a clear and compassionate path to support, while also reducing the number of students requiring intensive, Tier 3 services.

Opening Doors

The first center to open under the initiative was the Scotts Valley High School Wellness Center, which held its grand opening in January 2025. The center reflects more than a year of collaboration between the Santa Cruz COE, Scotts Valley Unified School District, school staff, and students themselves—who helped design the inviting, youth-friendly space and shape outreach through classes and campus



The Scotts Valley High School Wellness Center opened its doors in 2024-25, providing an on-campus support hub to meet any level of student need.

events.

Planning began after Congressman Jimmy Panetta secured \$1 million in federal funding in late 2022 to launch the first two comprehensive high school wellness centers. Since then, the COE has provided technical assistance, training, and interagency coordination, supporting districts in developing sustainable wellness systems that align with countywide behavioral health resources.

The model draws inspiration from more than 80 successful wellness centers statewide, incorporating lessons learned through Schools Well (SWELL) and site visits across California.

A Growing Network

The COE's long-term vision is to ensure that every public high school in Santa Cruz County has a comprehensive wellness center operating as part of a coordinated, countywide network. These centers are designed not only to respond to the mental health crisis facing youth nationwide, but also to normalize care-seeking and strengthen the safety net that supports students' overall well-being.

As more centers open, the initiative will continue to evolve—guided by data, community feedback, and a commitment to ensuring that every young person in Santa Cruz County has access to safe, supportive, and stigma-free spaces for wellness and connection.



Read the Roadmap to
Wellness.
sccoe.link/centerwellness

SUPPORTING SAFETY AND WELLNESS

Behavioral Health & Student Support Services

The Santa Cruz COE continued to expand access to school-based behavioral health services through the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) and related statewide investments. These efforts are part of California's \$4.7 billion plan to redesign mental health systems to meet student needs where they are—at school.

In 2024-25, the COE launched implementation of the School-Linked Multi-Payer Fee Schedule, enabling districts to receive direct reimbursement

for eligible behavioral health services provided on campuses—ensuring no cost to students or families. This new structure allows licensed clinicians, nurses, PPS-credentialed staff, and upcoming Certified Wellness Coaches to offer counseling, psychoeducation, crisis response, and case management through sustainable funding models.

Through partnerships with local districts and behavioral health providers, the COE is also building a countywide Wellness Coach workforce, with 32 po-

sitions funded to serve schools across Santa Cruz County. These professionals will play a key role in prevention, wellness education, and early intervention, bridging the gap between community-based health care and school systems.

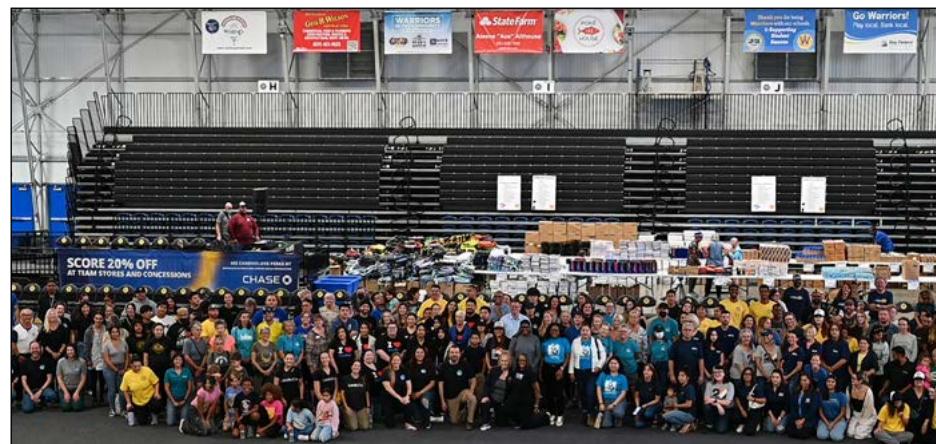
These initiatives establish a school-based behavioral health system of care designed for long-term sustainability: improving access, coordination, and outcomes for students while reducing stigma and barriers to support.

Tobacco Use Prevention and Education (TUPE)

Through the Tobacco Use Prevention and Education (TUPE) program, the COE continues to equip educators and youth leaders to address nicotine, vaping, and substance use on campus. TUPE integrates prevention education with peer-led outreach, ensuring messages resonate with students countywide.

In 2024-25, TUPE collaborated closely with student advocates from the Youth Mental Health Leadership Council—a group within the Youth Led Leadership Alliance—to elevate youth perspectives on prevention strategies. Student leader Natalie Stott served as a countywide spokesperson, sharing her experience at the Calciano Memorial Youth Symposium and supporting outreach events for peers.

The COE also continued its partnership with public health agencies to expand access to resources and training for schools, incorporating vaping prevention, fentanyl awareness, and harm-reduction messaging across middle and high school programs.



More than 100 volunteers packed 2,500 backpacks as part of the 2024 Stuff the Bus school supply drive.

Students in Transition Program

Through the Students in Transition (SIT) program, the COE supported 41 students and 30 families experiencing homelessness during the 2024-25 school year. SIT staff provided assistance with enrollment, transportation, and basic needs—distributing shoes, gift cards, and farm bags to families. The program also referred 17 McKinney-Vento students to FosterEd for enhanced educational case management.

In partnership with community organizations, SIT continued to link students with housing and health resources while supporting educational stability. The program's coordination with the Stuff the Bus campaign helped provide over 2,500 backpacks and school supplies to local students in need.

Foster Youth Services (FosterEd)

The FosterEd program provides academic and wellness support for students in foster care, ensuring stability and connection in school. In 2024-25, the program received 155 referrals, serving 135 foster youth through case management, educational advocacy, and cross-agency collaboration.

FosterEd liaisons worked with districts and community agencies to address barriers to attendance, credit accrual, and mental health care. The COE hosted the Central Coast Foster & Homeless Education Summit at Cabrillo College in spring 2025—bringing together over 130 participants from Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito counties. The event emphasized trauma-informed practices, empathy, and equity for at-promise youth.



Learn more about Student Support Services.
sccoe.link/studentsupport

SUPPORTING SAFETY AND WELLNESS

Support for Immigrant Families

All children have a right to access a public education in the United States, regardless of immigration status. In 2024-25, Santa Cruz County school districts and the COE took a unified stand to protect the rights of immigrant students and families. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education (COE) worked alongside all districts, charter schools, and Cabrillo College to ensure coordinated support, clear policies, and a welcoming school environment for every member of our immigrant community. In response to the potential for increased federal immigration enforcement, the COE advanced a proactive, countywide approach rooted in California laws that safeguard student privacy and restrict school cooperation with immigration authorities.

Training and Protocols

Drawing on guidance from the California Attorney General and California Department of Education, the COE created a comprehensive Immigrant Community Support Plan outlining countywide expectations for protecting student information, responding to immigration enforcement attempts, and maintaining safe campuses. The COE provided materials and guidance to school leaders across all districts and charters, including clear instructions on verifying judicial warrants, handling inquiries from immigration officers, and protecting student records under AB 699, SB 54, FERPA, and other applicable local policies and law.

In partnership with nonprofits and the Santa Cruz County Immigration Coalition, the COE facilitated Know Your Rights trainings for school staff and families, ensuring that educators and support personnel understood the legal landscape and the social-emotional realities facing students from mixed-status families. These sessions also equipped staff with trauma-informed strategies, culturally responsive practices, and clear pathways for referring families to trusted community resources.

Family Resources

To strengthen direct support for families, the COE and its partners launched [SusDerechos.info](https://susderechos.info), a multilingual resource portal developed with Watsonville Law Center, Community Action Board, and Community Bridges. The Spanish-first site provides accessible legal information, rights education, and emergency-preparedness materials tailored for immigrant families.



Working with local partners, the Santa Cruz COE developed protocols, training and resources to support immigrant families – including the online Sus Derechos portal.

Schools countywide also distributed and promoted Childcare Safety Plans, helping parents identify a trusted caregiver who can care for their child in the event of detention or family separation. Districts shared these materials through school websites, newsletters, family meetings, and community events, ensuring families understood their options and felt supported.

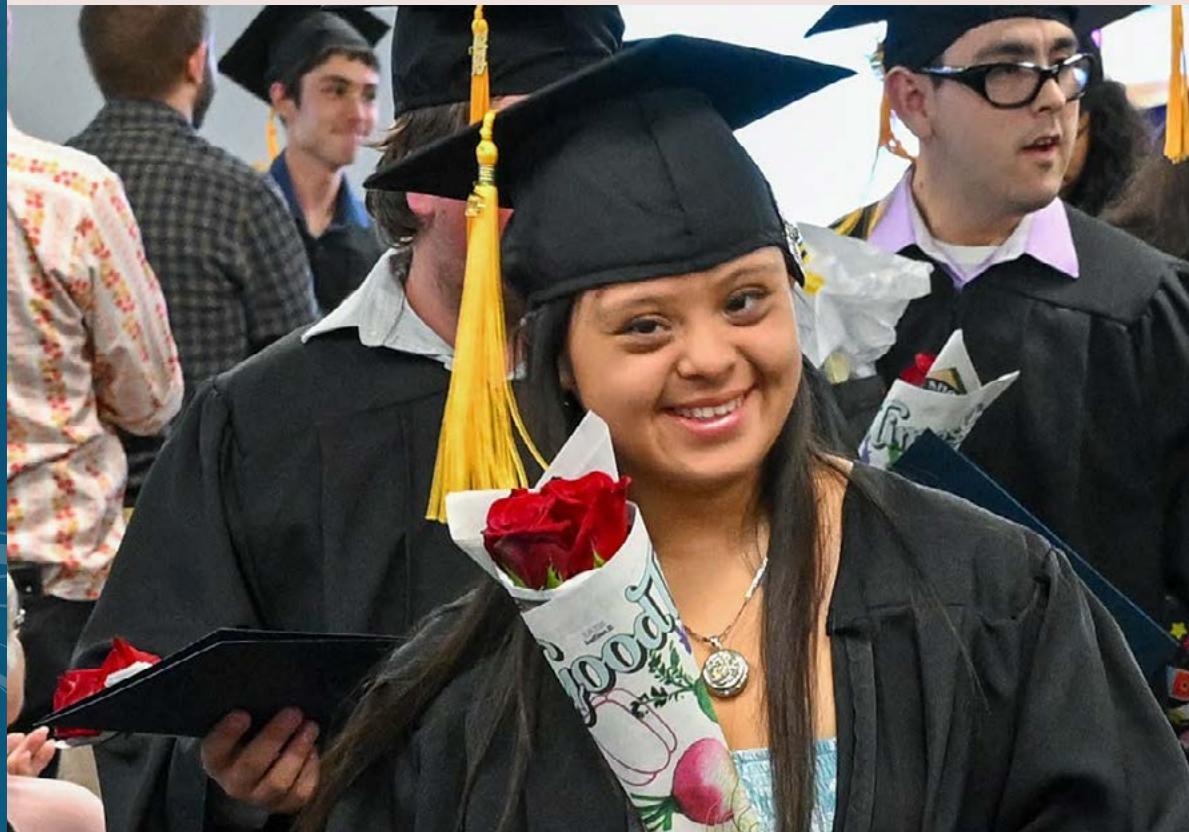
Through these coordinated efforts, the COE and districts strengthened the safety net for immigrant and mixed-status families and reinforced that every school in Santa Cruz County is a place of safety and belonging for all.



Access resources for
immigrant families.
susderechos.info

EMPOWERING EQUITABLE ACHIEVEMENT

Our Goal: Ensure all learners have the opportunities, skills, and supports they need to be engaged and successful in their education, careers, and their communities.



EMPOWERING EQUITABLE ACHIEVEMENT

Serving Learners of All Ages

The Santa Cruz County Office of Education supports learners of all ages through a diverse range of educational programs that span early childhood through adulthood. Our work centers on expanding access, addressing disparities, and strengthening pathways so that every learner has the opportunity

to build the knowledge and skills that match their goals. This includes direct services for infants and young children, specialized supports for students with disabilities, alternative learning environments, career preparation, and adult education programs connected to local workforce needs.

From birth-to-three services and specialized instruction to college and career pathways and adult learning, these programs ensure students have the academic and non-academic supports that help them succeed in school and in their communities.

Alternative Education

The Santa Cruz COE's Alternative Education programs provide individualized school options for students who benefit from a smaller learning environment. In 2024-25, more than 958 students were served across 24 small school programs located throughout the county. Each site is designed to reflect the community it serves and offers a supportive setting where students receive individual and small group instruction focused on academic progress, well-being, and long-term planning.

Our mission is to create safe, community-based environments where students grow academically, socially, and emotionally so they can take an active role in shaping their futures. Programs emphasize curiosity, conscientiousness, and confidence, helping students build the skills and self-assurance needed to thrive in school and in the world beyond it.

Teachers work closely with students to provide instruction aligned with state standards, graduation requirements, and college and career readiness. Courses may be delivered through project-based learning, integrated thematic units, hands-on activities, and multimedia tools. The flexible design allows staff to adapt instruction to individual learning styles and strengths. Students also have opportunities to earn credit through work experience, physical education activities, and community service.



A student attends her graduation from El Nido in Spring 2025. El Nido is one of 24 small school programs operated by the Alternative Education Department.

Alternative Education supports a wide range of goals, from credit recovery for students returning to their district schools to graduation and transition to college, training programs, or employment. Staff also work with local partners to connect students with counseling, wellness programs, youth development and other opportunities that support their success.

Students enrolled in these programs are referred through their school dis-

trict or by partners such as the School Attendance Review Board, Social Services, or Probation. All programs maintain a strong focus on relationships, collaboration with families, and inclusive practices that help students feel valued and capable in their learning environment.



Dive deeper into Alternative Education programs.
sccoe.link/alted

Special Education

Special Education services provided by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education include a broad continuum of classes and services available to meet the needs of our students, with 105 students served in 2024-25. Referral and enrollment of students in Santa Cruz COE special education services is a coordinated, collaborative effort between local district representatives, parents and Santa Cruz COE staff. The educational needs and services for students referred to Santa Cruz COE are identified through the collaborative Individual Education Program (IEP) Process.

The Early Start Program serves infants and toddlers with developmental needs through home-based visits, family education, and coordinated services with regional partners. The focus is on strengthening communication, motor development, and early social engagement during the most important years of growth.

Chrysalis Autism Program

Chrysalis provides a structured, relationship-centered learning environment for students with autism. Instruction emphasizes functional communication, social learning, and the development of skills that build independence at school and at home.

Extensive Support Needs Programs

ESN classrooms serve students with significant cognitive, medical, or adaptive needs. Students learn functional academics, communication skills, daily living routines, and participate in inclusive activities whenever possible. Staff collaborate with families and districts to align services, supports, and long-term goals.



Students, families and educators celebrated year of support and growth at the Special Education Department's 2025 Fun Day.

Post-Senior Program

Our post-senior program for young adults with disabilities, ages 18-22, focuses on community-based instruction, vocational experiences, independent living skills, and building confidence in navigating public spaces. Students participate in job training, volunteer sites, and social learning experiences that prepare them for adulthood.



Learn more about our
Special Education programs
sccoe.link/special-education

Early Childhood Education



The Early Childhood Department strengthens early learning programs countywide.

The Santa Cruz COE's Early Childhood Department leads countywide efforts to strengthen early learning from birth through transitional kindergarten.

In 2024-25, several existing programs were reorganized into a unified department to reflect the growing importance of serving young learners. The department now oversees early care and education initiatives, professional learning and coaching, child care

resource and referral, and coordination across local partners. This work is carried out through the Child Development Resource Center (CDRC), the Childhood Advisory Council (CAC), and the Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Support Team.

This year also marked the launch of the TK Collaborative, a countywide partnership of district and school leaders focused on supporting successful TK implementation.

EMPOWERING EQUITABLE ACHIEVEMENT

Child Development Resource Center (CDRC)

The Child Development Resource Center is the county's childcare resource and referral hub. The center connects families with licensed child care, subsidy information, and developmental resources, while also offering coaching, training, and technical assistance for providers.

In 2024-25, CDRC services reached families and providers throughout the county. The team managed multiple

Early Childhood grants, handled nearly 3,000 family and provider contacts, led 167 coaching sessions, and offered 40 professional trainings with embedded materials and supplies for more than 1,000 participants.



Find child care options and resources for families.
childcare.santacruzcoe.org

By the Numbers

2,921 family and provider contacts through CDRC

1,026 participants in CDRC training sessions

167 provider coaching sessions

Childhood Advisory Council (CAC)

The Childhood Advisory Council serves as the county's primary coordinating body for early learning systems. The council brings together district leaders, child care providers, agencies, and community partners to address shared needs, align programs, and strengthen early learning access across Santa Cruz County.

In 2024-25, the CAC team continued to support system-wide collaboration by managing key grants and

facilitating three monthly workgroups: the Child Care Briefing Leadership Team, the IEEEP Leadership Team, and the UPK Mixed Delivery Leadership Team. The team delivered a full year of professional learning, supported stipends for qualifying educators, and hosted a TK Community Forum for more than 150 Early Childhood professionals featuring keynote speaker Deborah Stipek of the Stanford Graduate School of Education.

Career & Adult Learning

Career and Adult Learning Services provides academic and workforce pathways through the Career Advancement Charter (CAC), Career Technical Education (CTE), Sueños youth workforce program, adult career training programs such as Dental Assisting, Medical Assisting, the Building Trades Pre-Apprenticeship (BTPA), and the new Wildland Fire Academy.



A 2024-25 cohort of the Wildland Fire Academy.

In 2024-25, CAC and CTE completed a Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) review and received full six-year accreditation, reflecting strong instruction and continuous improvement. CAC also continued to grow at its North County and South County campuses, expanding access for adult learners working toward a high school diploma.

CTE introduced a new Ro-

botics course that provides hands-on experience with advanced technology and engineering concepts, and piloted a Student Showcase where students presented projects to industry professionals in an interview-style setting. All CTE magnet classes received UC A-G honors approval, affirming the academic rigor of these career-focused pathways.

Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Support Team

The TK Support Team provides dedicated professional learning, coaching, and coordination for Transitional Kindergarten teachers and administrators. The team focuses on developmentally appropriate instruction, learning environments, and consistent practices as TK expands countywide.

In 2024-25, the team offered Saturday TK Support Sessions, facilitated four TK Collaborative meetings, and provided 50 individualized coaching sessions for TK teachers. These supports helped districts align curriculum, strengthen early learning practices, and improve readiness for a full TK rollout in coming years.

College and Career Readiness

College and career readiness efforts countywide are driven by coordinated work through the Santa Cruz County College and Career Collaborative (S5C). The collaborative brings districts, colleges, and community partners together to expand access to college exploration, early college credit, and career-connected learning. This includes a yearlong School Counselor Network focused on academic, social-emotional, and postsecondary advising, with a particular focus this year on strengthening supports for multilingual learners. The Grading for Equity

project also continued, with district teams meeting monthly with a coach and engaging in countywide sessions that showcased practical models from educators across the state.

Central Coast K-16 Collaborative

The Santa Cruz COE also plays a key leadership role in the regional K-16 Collaborative, which works to improve outcomes and expand opportunities for students in engineering, computer science, and health pathways. In 2024-25, the collaborative allocated \$9.8 million to regional partners to advance pathway development and strengthen

connections among K-12 districts, colleges, universities, and employers. This investment supported expanded dual enrollment, new guaranteed admission agreements, and more paid internships and work-based learning for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Nearly 100 internship and career exploration experiences were created across the Central Coast this year. The collaborative has also approved a \$1 million initiative to help 64 teachers earn master's degrees required to teach dual enrollment courses, with cohorts launching in 2026.

Youth Led Leadership Alliance

The Youth Led Leadership Alliance (YLLA) is the COE's countywide network of student-led groups that build leadership, advocacy, and community engagement skills. In 2024-25, YLLA included seven topically focused groups with 55 members from all eight comprehensive high schools and other local schools.

Reflecting the program's growing impact, YLLA was honored with two major recognitions in 2024-25:

- **Golden Bell Award**, California School Boards Association, for Student Engagement and Empowerment
- **United Way Partner of the Year**, recognizing YLLA's role in the Youth Participatory Action Project and expanding partnership through the integration of United Way's Jóvenes Sanos beginning in 2025-26 school year.

Countywide Black Student Union (BSU)

Strengthened campus BSUs and supported new club development. Students organized Ruby Bridges Walk to School events across three campuses, attended the Oakland Black College Expo, and co-hosted the 2025 Black Graduation. Students also appeared on Inside Education Radio to discuss local BSU

efforts.

Multilingual Youth Taking Action

Led multilingual advocacy work, including events and projects that uplifted student voice and cultural representation, and hosted the World Languages Showcase featuring multilingual poetry recitation and student projects.

Queer Student Union (QSU)

Supported student-led LGBTQ+ advocacy, including participation in state-wide youth leadership forums and local visibility events.

Youth Artists Taking Action (YATA)

Collaborated on arts-based civic engagement projects, including a county-wide mural initiative.

Youth Empowerment through Technology & Innovation (YETI)

Explored creative applications of emerging technologies, including AI tools for student-led storytelling and



Members of the 2024-25 Youth Led Leadership Alliance.

design.

Youth for Environmental Action (YEA)

Collaborated with countywide environmental partners and contributed to the Trash Pact Project and district-level waste audits.

Youth Mental Health Leadership Council (YMHLC)

Led outreach and education activities focused on student well-being and mental health awareness.



Explore student leadership opportunities.
sccoe.link/leadership

EMPOWERING EQUITABLE ACHIEVEMENT

Student Trustee Academy

The Student Trustee Academy returned for its fourth year in the Summer of 2025, continuing its mission to prepare high school students for leadership roles on local school boards and as advocates for their peers.

Over six sessions, students from across Santa Cruz County explored the inner workings of school boards and the important role student trustees play in shaping educational experiences. Participants gained insight into local education governance and developed key skills in leadership, public speaking, and policy.

The Academy was co-facilitated by Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Faris Sabbah; Andres Ortiz, Student Leadership and Engagement Coordinator at the Santa Cruz County Office of Education; and former Pajaro Valley Uni-



The 2025 Student Trustee Academy.

fied School District student trustee Daniel Esqueda. Guest speakers brought expertise in education law, fiscal policy, and board governance.

Educator Training and Support

Santa Cruz County Math Initiative

The Santa Cruz County Math Initiative completed its first year of a three-year effort to strengthen math teaching and learning across the county. Led by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education's Curriculum and Instruction Department, the initiative brings together mathematics leadership teams from districts and charters to develop shared strategies that improve math achievement for all learners.

More than 140 math education leaders from 14 districts and charters, representing over 16,000 students, participated throughout the year. Teams met



More than 140 educators joined the Math Initiative in 2024-25.

regularly to analyze countywide and district-level data, study the new 2023 Math Framework, and identify ways to build positive math identity and growth

mindset among students and educators.

Teams applied new data protocols, strengthened collaborative planning structures, and developed district-specific strategic plans tailored to local strengths and needs. This coordinated effort has established a countywide network of math leaders and set the foundation for ongoing improvement efforts that will continue into the next two years of the initiative.



Access services and support for educators
sccoe.link/edservices

Science Educators' Network

At the close of the 2024-25 year, 40 teachers and administrators came to the Santa Cruz COE's two-day Science as Thinking Institute. The institute marked the launch of the Santa Cruz County Science Educators' Network. The network brings together teachers and administrators

from across the county to focus on improving science teaching and learning. It is part of the broader California Math, Science and Computer Science Initiative to increase student participation and success in these subjects. Santa Cruz COE was awarded \$317,190 over 3 years to develop the community of practice of educators.

Santa Cruz County's Network

chose to focus on grades 3-8 science in an effort to improve science instruction in these key elementary to middle school grades. The Science as Thinking Institute included educators from 16 districts, charter schools and private schools examining the essential question: How can we teach science for understanding? Over two days on Cabrillo College's

campus educators leveraged one another's expertise as they experienced science as students and then designed their own lessons using the Next Generation Science Standards. As students, they designed bridges with the greatest span that can support a cup of water and later tried to determine how to predict the timing of a pendulum's swing.

EMPOWERING EQUITABLE ACHIEVEMENT

Engaging with the Arts

Arts education continues to thrive in Santa Cruz County, especially with the passage of Proposition 28—California’s Arts and Music in Schools Funding Guarantee and Accountability Act. This influx of funding has helped stabilize visual arts, music, and theater programs, and has reintroduced dance into many of our schools.

One exciting outcome was our first County College Dance Day, hosted in partnership with Cabrillo College. Approximately 120 dance students gathered to take masterclasses as well as showcase their work on stage in hip hop, contemporary and ballet folklorico.

The visual arts also saw remarkable growth. A record 500 student artworks were submitted to this year’s Youth Art Exhibit, drawing over 300 visitors to the opening reception. Teachers also supported student participation in FashionTeens, a dynamic program that fuses creativity with environmental and social activism. This year’s sold-out show featured wearable art made from recycled materials like books, soda cans, game pieces, and various forms of plastic —



FashionTeens combines sustainability with design.

plastic bottles, plastic tarps, plastic lids, plastic buttons!

Music and performance had a standout year as well. In a new collaboration, Esperanza del Valle and Nematatlin de Universidad Veracruzana performed composer Joxyer Zamudio’s original arrangement of La Bruja—a premiere event at the Mello Center and Civic Auditorium. More than 5,000 students attended the Youth Concerts, with a sold-out Youth & Family Concert capping off the week. Students engaged deeply—singing, playing instruments, and performing body percussion to selections like La Bruja, Anvil Chorus, and I’ve Got Rhythm.

Expanding Pathways to Arts Education Careers

To meet the rising demand for qualified arts educators under Prop 28, we’ve launched a new partnership with Cabrillo College, CSUMB, and the Santa Cruz and San Benito County Arts Councils. Together, we are creating clear career pathways for both students and current educators—offering support in education, training, and certification across disciplines such as music, dance, theater, visual and media arts.

This work is already showing results. This summer, Cabrillo College hosted the Summer Arts Education Institute, a professional development opportunity that brought together 42 students and teachers. The focus was on arts integration—using the arts to deepen understanding in core subjects like math, science, and language arts.



Engage with arts programs and opportunities.
sccoe.link/arts-ed

Advancing Technology and Innovation

The Santa Cruz COE Tech+ Division continued to strengthen support for technology, including by serving as Internet Service Provider for all 10 local districts through the CALREN backbone. Staff training expanded this year with a focus on productivity tools, cloud-based collaboration, and systems that increase efficiency across payroll, HR, budgeting, and student data. These efforts helped both the COE and districts streamline daily operations and adopt consistent practices for data privacy and responsible use.

AI literacy grew as a countywide priority, supported by more than 600 educators and staff who participated in AI Think Tanks, Reboot 2024 sessions, and hands-on workshops from the YETI and AI Explorers programs. The COE continued statewide leadership by helping develop organizational guidelines, collaborating with partners at Stanford, and representing Santa Cruz County at major AI education convenings.

The popular Computer Science Play-

grounds returned for a third year, engaging families in drone arenas, coding activities, robotics, and AI-powered challenges that made computer science approachable for all ages.

Hands-on learning expanded through the new Makerspace and Design Leadership Team. Educators from multiple schools designed maker projects, tested tools at Idea Fab Labs, and began planning new makerspaces that promote creativity, engineering, and student agency.

EMPOWERING EQUITABLE ACHIEVEMENT

College Savings Access: CalKIDS and Semillitas

In 2024-25, the Santa Cruz COE worked to expand access to college and career training funds for local students through the state-funded CalKIDS program and the local Semillitas initiative. This effort more than doubled the share of eligible Santa Cruz County students who successfully claimed designated funds, rising from 6% to 14% in one year.

A total of 1,834 students claimed their

CalKIDS accounts, unlocking more than \$917,000 in higher education and career training funds.

To support families, the COE trained over 100 educators, counselors, and community leaders, provided hands-on assistance at seven school sites, and partnered with districts and community organizations to reach families through ELAC meetings, financial aid work-

shops, and outreach events. A major highlight was a large-scale activation event co-hosted with CalKIDS, Semillitas, and PVUSD, where in a single evening 140 families secured more than \$46,000 in college savings.



Check CALKids eligibility for your family.
sccoe.link/calkids

Family Engagement Collaborative

The Family Engagement Collaborative is a countywide professional learning community that supports school and district staff responsible for family engagement. The collaborative is grounded in research-based practices from Dr. Karen Mapp and national frameworks that highlight the importance of partnership between families, educators, and communities.

In 2024-25, participants deepened

their expertise on topics such as digital inclusion, effective outreach strategies, ELAC leadership, supporting mixed-status families, and youth mental health. Staff engaged with experts, observed model programs, and shared tools to strengthen engagement across school sites.

Survey results showed 100% of participants reported increased confidence, deeper knowledge, and stronger peer connections.

This is truly a priceless opportunity to grow into a stronger family engagement leader.

- Family Engagement Collaborative participant

STEAM Expo Explores Science and Innovation



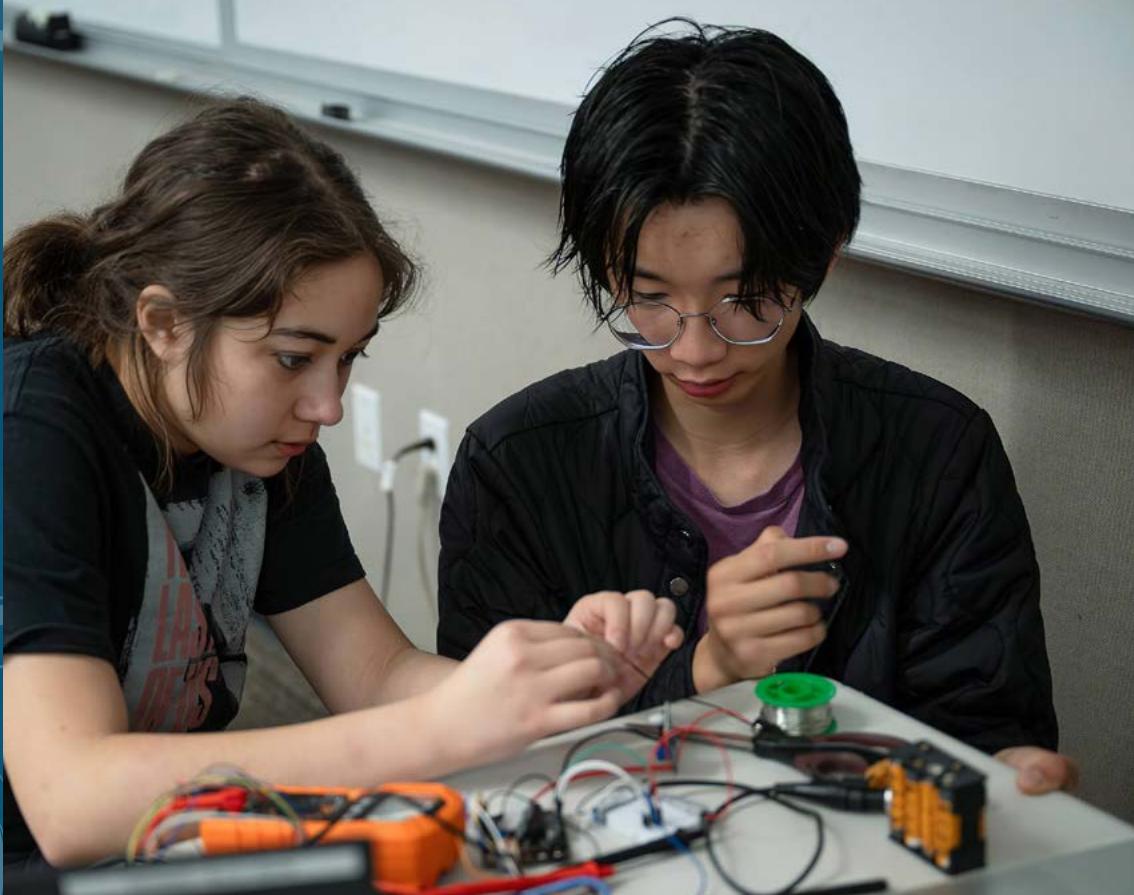
The 2025 STEAM Expo engaged hundreds of students.

The 2025 Santa Cruz County STEAM Expo brought hundreds of students to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds to showcase science, engineering, art, and technology projects. Organized by the Santa Cruz COE, the event combined the traditional Science and Engineering Fair with an interactive expo featuring hands-on demonstrations, student performances, and exhibitors from schools and industry. Students presented 192 projects, with top entries advancing to state and international competitions, while

community members engaged with regional partners such as X Academy, FIRST Robotics, and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center. Throughout the venue, students and families explored real-world science and engineering through activities like 3D printing, underwater robotics, chemistry demonstrations, digital design, and fabrication exhibits, which teachers and industry partners praised for creating authentic, inspiring learning experiences and stronger connections between students and local professionals.

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

Our Goal: Co-create and sustain an educational system in Santa Cruz County that is cohesive, effective, and equitable.



BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

Overview

Building sustainable systems is the Santa Cruz COE's third strategic priority, focused on creating a cohesive, effective, and equitable education ecosystem that can serve students well for years to come. In 2024-25, this work centered on strengthening educator pipelines, honoring excellence across the school community, and deepening environmental stewardship in classrooms and campuses.

Across the year, the COE expanded

pathways into teaching through the New Teacher Project and ed.PATH, supporting new educators and opening doors for classified staff, high school students, and community members who aspire to teach. The Educator of the Year program elevated staff and partners whose work reflects the values of equity, service, and innovation. Sustainability efforts, including the Teacher Leadership Institute for Sustainability, the Green Classroom

Challenge, and Youth for Environmental Action, helped students connect their learning to real-world environmental challenges.

These coordinated efforts reflect the COE's ongoing commitment to building a resilient education system in Santa Cruz County that supports today's learners while investing in the educators, partnerships, and practices that will sustain student success for decades to come.

Pathways to Education

New Teacher Project

Operated by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, the Santa Cruz/Silicon Valley New Teacher Project supports early-career educators as they complete the two-year California Induction requirement. Teachers receive intensive one-to-one mentoring, formative feedback rooted in the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, and professional learning that strengthens equita-

ble, student-centered classroom practice.

In 2024-25, the New Teacher Project partnered with 34 districts, charter schools, and private schools across the counties of Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito, Contra Costa, and San Mateo. In Santa Cruz County, it supported 115 teachers through Induction and 410 educators overall.

Teacher Surveys

95% agree their mentor helps them develop strategies that build resilience and sustain joy in the profession.

92% are satisfied with their Induction experience

95% report their teaching improved with mentor support.

ed.PATH Initiative

The ed.PATH initiative expands access to teaching careers by offering supported pathways for classified staff, substitutes, career changers, and high school students. The program centers educator well-being and continuous professional growth while helping future teachers navigate credential requirements, financial aid, and preparation programs.

This year, ed.PATH launched the first cohort of the SJSU/Santa Cruz Special Education Satellite Program,

which brings hybrid credential coursework to the COE. The initiative also expanded financial support through the Santa Cruz Classified Employee Grant, which covers tuition, books, fees, and fingerprinting for eligible candidates.

Partnerships with nine higher-education institutions broadened available credential options. Weekly office hours, information sessions, and the monthly ed.PATH newsletter provided ongoing guidance and resources for

aspiring educators.

Future Educator Summer Academy

The Future Educator Summer Academy offers high school students direct experience in COE special education classrooms through a four-week paid summer program. Participants support teachers, learn foundational instructional skills, and gain insight into working with diverse learners. The academy helps stu-

dents explore teaching as a career while developing confidence, leadership, and hands-on experience in real classrooms.

As part of the broader ed.PATH strategy, the academy strengthens early-interest pathways and helps cultivate a diverse, local educator workforce.



Find out more about pathways into a career in education.
sccoe.link/edPATH

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

Educator Recognition

The Santa Cruz COE is proud to honor the 2025 Santa Cruz County Educator of the Year recipients. These awards celebrate exceptional educators, support staff, and community partners whose dedication and service embody

the values of Santa Cruz County's school community.

Honorees were recognized by Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Faris Sabbah and the San-

ta Cruz County Board of Education at the May 15, 2025 Board meeting, with their names added to the Educator of the Year perpetual plaque displayed at the COE.

2025 Educator of the Year Award Honorees

Teacher of the Year Honorees



Minc Robinson Brooker
Education Specialist,
Pajaro Valley High
School, Pajaro Valley
Unified School District

Minc Robinson Brooker has spent more than 30 years serving students and colleagues across six districts, from paraeducator to teacher and union representative. At Pajaro Valley High, she advises the school's first Black Student Union and led its second annual Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day. Known for her creative, identity-affirming projects, Minc fosters belonging, humor, and self-advocacy in her classroom community.



John Postovit
Teacher,
Scotts Valley High
School, Scotts Valley
Unified School District

John Postovit began teaching in 1992 and has taught physics and mathematics from pre-algebra to differential equations. A Scotts Valley High faculty member since 2009, he serves as the school's IB Coordinator and WASC Accreditation Coordinator. His contributions have been recognized statewide, including honors as California League of High Schools Educator of the Year.

Classified Employee of the Year



Jessica Serna Castaneda,
Parent/Community
Support Coordinator,
Santa Cruz City Schools

A proud first-generation college graduate and former English Learner, Jessica Serna Castaneda supports bilingual and newcomer students with academic, social, and emotional care. Her work in family engagement, wellness, and culturally rooted programs exemplifies inclusive community partnership.

Counselor of the Year



Sylvia Alba, Counselor
Watsonville High School,
Pajaro Valley Unified
School District

For nearly four decades, Sylvia Alba has been an advocate for migrant students and families in PVUSD. At Watsonville High, she coordinates the Migrant Outside Work Experience Program and advises the Migrant Student Association, helping students pursue higher education and career pathways.

Administrator of the Year



Amy Hedrick-Farr
Food and Nutrition Director
Santa Cruz City Schools

With 29 years in school food service, Amy Hedrick-Farr has led three districts to thriving, financially balanced nutrition programs. She founded the Central Coast Purchasers Cooperative, which now supports 22 districts and 100,000 students daily with locally sourced, nutritious meals.

Community Partner of the Year



Founded by Tim Sylvester and Barbara Meister, X Academy provides STEAM enrichment for youth countywide. Its Santa Cruz Math Circle and robotics teams have reached 500+ students across 62 schools, with three teams qualifying for the MATE ROV World Championship—including a third-place global finish in 2024.



Learn more about our educator
recognition program
sccoe.link/recognition

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

Business Services

The Santa Cruz COE Business Services Division provides fiscal leadership for the COE and all ten districts by delivering accurate accounting, strong budget oversight, and guidance on state and federal requirements. The division managed budget development, payroll, purchasing, facilities accounting, contracts, and year-round support for district business offices.

In 2024-25, the adopted budget allocated \$58.9 million across core program areas including General Unrestricted funds, Alternative Education, Restricted Categoricals, Local Programs, and Charter Schools, along with Child Development and Adult Education. These amounts represented the financial plan for the year at the time the budget was adopted. More current results were reported through the regular state-required budget reporting cycle.

Unaudited actual revenue totaled \$72.9 million in 2023-24, with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) as the primary source. Expenditures were mostly dedicated to salaries and benefits, reflecting the people-centered nature of education, with remaining funds used for services, books and supplies, and facilities needs. These year-end figures offered a clear picture of how funds were ultimately received and spent.

Through consistent monitoring and clear communication, Business Services helped ensure that public funds were used responsibly and supported the long-term sustainability of COE programs and countywide services.



Learn more about Business Services.
sccoe.link/business

Where Funds Come From

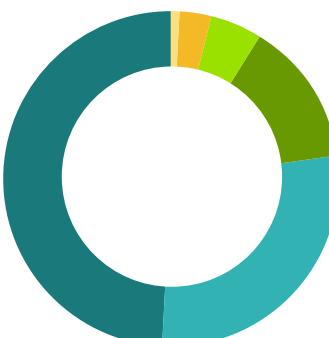
Total: \$72,900,303



- 52% LCFF Revenues
- 21% Other Local Revenues
- 18% Other State Revenues
- 9% Federal Revenues

How Funds Are Used

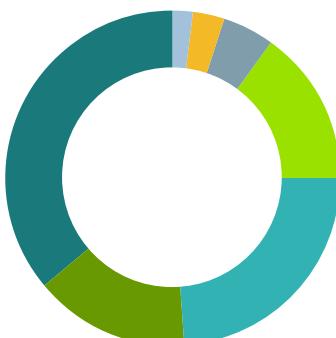
Total: \$62,824,697



- 49% Salaries
- 28% Employee Benefits
- 14% Services
- 5% Other
- 3% Books and Supplies
- 1% Capital Outlay

24-25 Proposed Expenditures by Program

Total: \$58,912,446



- 36% General Unrestricted
- 15% Local Programs
- 24% Alternative Education
- 15% Restricted Categoricals
- 5% Charter Schools
- 2% Routine Restricted Maintenance
- 3% Child Development
- 0.1% Adult Education

Sustainability in Classrooms & Environmental Literacy

Across Santa Cruz County, educators and students continued advancing environmental literacy through hands-on learning, community partnerships, and student-led action.

These efforts help schools reduce waste, strengthen stewardship, and integrate local environmental issues into daily instruction.

Teacher Leadership Institute for Sustainability

The Teacher Leadership Institute for Sustainability (TLIS) supported teachers in weaving environmental learning into the core curriculum through outdoor instruction and community-engaged projects. Forty teachers participated during the 2024-25 school year, guiding more than 2,800 students in experiences that connected academic content with local environmental challenges. Students averaged 12 hours of outdoor learning, took part in field trips, and led campus-based projects such as creating native habitat gardens, reducing food waste, improving composting systems, and raising awareness about watershed protection.

The program's network of partners—including California State Parks, the Coastal Watershed Council, Save Our Shores, and the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History—provided expertise and enriched learning opportunities. Teachers overwhelmingly reported increased confidence in integrating sustainability into any subject area, and their students' projects collectively reached thousands of peers and community members.

Green Classroom Challenge

Now in its second year, the Green Classroom Challenge encouraged students to adopt daily sustainable practices in their classrooms and school communities. Sixty classrooms, representing 2,731 students, participated in this year's challenge. Together, they logged more than 13,000 environmentally responsible actions ranging from improved waste sorting to energy-saving routines. Teachers shared that the challenge fostered a sense of agency among students and

Youth for Environmental Action

Youth for Environmental Action (YEA), part of the Youth Led Leadership Alliance, continued to expand its role as a catalyst for student-led sustainability work countywide. Building on student survey data showing concern about climate change and waste systems, YEA launched the Trash Pact Project, an initiative focused on reducing food waste and improving recycling and composting

systems in high schools. Students carried out detailed waste audits at three school sites, uncovering more than 31 pounds of edible food in trash streams and identifying areas where campus composting systems were not being used effectively.

These findings were presented at the fifth annual Youth Environmental Action Summit, where more than 200 students from nine high schools gathered to share research, propose solutions, and collaborate with local environmental organizations. Throughout the year, YEA members also presented to school boards, engaged in media outreach, and built broader awareness through a new student-run Instagram campaign.



Student leaders present the results of a waste audit at the 2025 YEA Action Summit.

helped build positive momentum around climate solutions across grade levels.



Join the Green Classroom Challenge.
sccoe.link/greenclassroom



@santacruzcoe

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