

Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commissions San Mateo County, California

Canyon Oaks Youth Center 2025 Educational Programs Evaluation

Date of Evaluation: September 30, 2025

Facility Name: Canyon Oaks Youth Center -
Short Term Residential Treatment Facility
(STRTP)
Address: 400 Edmonds Rd, Redwood City,
94062

Date of Last Evaluation: September 4, 2024

Commissioner(s) Conducting Evaluation:
Commissioner Karin Huber-Levy

Contact Person:
Dr. Jesús, Jiménez, Director, School Programs,
San Mateo County Office of Education
Phone Number: (760) 902-7794

Principal/Administrator:
Freedom Siyam
Principal, San Mateo County Court &
Community Schools

Executive Summary:

Number of Students on date of Site Visit: 5 (1 x 8th, 3 x 9th, 1 x 10th)

Full-time Teacher(s): Misty Seago

Academic Counselor: Dr. Lauren Sneed

Paraeducator: Jose Giacoman

Resource Specialist: Mark Squire

Background

The school at Canyon Oaks Youth Center (“Canyon Oaks School”, the “School”) educates youth who face serious emotional and behavioral challenges for which they were provided placement in this short-term residential treatment facility. The facility is operated by San Mateo Behavioral Health & Recovery Services (BHRS). The San Mateo County Office of Education (COE) provides educational programs. All students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Canyon Oaks School has operated with one full-time teacher since June 2024. At the end of the 2024-25 summer session, the School’s long-time teacher, George Rehmet, left to take on another assignment within the County special education system. At the start of this school year, Misty Seago, an experienced teacher who began her SMCOE career at Gateway Community School and who has taught at Canyon Oaks School before (2022-23) started as the full time teacher at COYC. Ms. Seago was highly recommended by Mr. Rehmet for this position.

Ms. Seago is teaching all subjects (Math, Science, Social Studies, English, Physical Education) with the support of an experienced full-time paraeducator (Jose Giacoman, who has taught at the School for many years). Mr. Giacoman interacts with students as a ‘co-educator’ with the teacher. Also, new this year, Special Education instruction is provided by Mark Squire, RSP, who provides individual instruction and co-teaches on a daily basis from 8:30am - 12:30pm.

The current staffing model at the School is intentionally designed to be flexible to respond to changes in the number of students in residence at COYC, which typically fluctuates from 6 to 12 (maximum) students. Over recent months, the School has had 5-7 students in residence. Should the student population rise above 10 students, an additional paraeducator would be brought in. For instance, earlier this year

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(Jan/Feb 2025), there were over 10 students in residence so paraeducator Peter Nibbelin was brought in to provide additional teaching capacity at the School.

Mark Squire, RSP leads the students' Individual Education Plan meetings, supported by Tina Perdices, School Psychologist, Hillcrest School as needed.

Academic and vocational counseling is provided to students by Academic Counselor, Dr. Lauren Sneed, who serves all SMCOE County Court & Community Schools. For credit recovery, a team approach is currently in development, with the objective of creating a cohesive process across all Court & Community Schools, guided by a vision for the 'arc of learning'. The team is comprised of Dr. Sneed, Principal Siyam, and Courtney Parreira (TOSA credit recovery specialist).

Currently, COYC students are free to work on credit recovery in the classroom as appropriate and outside of school hours and have been typically supported by Ms. Parreira on Friday mornings. However, given the demographics of the current student cohort (middle school and high school freshmen/sophomore), credit recovery is not a critical focus for the students at this time. To recognize the time students spend in various electives, Teacher Seago and Principal Siyam are working together to identify any academic credits which students may earn for hours spent in elective coursework.

Past and present teachers shared their view that students seem to benefit most from spending 1 - 1.5 years at COYC, and they observed declining benefits for any individual student overall after that amount of time.

During my site visit to Canyon Oaks School, I had the opportunity to speak with Principal Siyam, Dr. Jiménez, Dr. Sneed, and Teacher Misty Seago. I did not interview any students. My evaluation is based on my conversations with each of the persons I spoke with that day and follow up questions posed.

School Summary and Comments

The teacher and paraeducator maintain a school environment that serves students in a therapeutically appropriate way through strong collaboration with each other and with therapeutic staff. Teaching staff are particularly skilled in working with special needs students, and focus on interacting with sensitivity and caring. Instruction is a combination of computer-based learning, individual instruction, and group teaching.

Students arrive at COYC with a very diverse range of capabilities - some are performing below grade level upon arrival, so teaching focuses on basic skills acquisition and proficiency. Other students are academically successful, but were experiencing difficulties in their home school setting. In that case, teaching focuses on preserving academic skills while allowing students to fully benefit from the therapeutic support offered at COYC. Instruction is also guided by the teacher's awareness of what students will need in order to transition back to their home school. California's Common Core Standards guide instruction, and new curricula for Science (STEM Scopes) and Social Studies (TCI - Teachers' Curriculum Institute) were adopted earlier this year.

A trauma-informed model of teaching is applied in the classroom at Canyon Oaks School. New students are asked to fill out a survey to assist the teacher in meeting their needs. Many students have processing issues which are noted in IEPs, as well as dysgraphia, which impacts writing and communication skills.

The Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test is no longer applied or in use at the School. Student academic progress metrics are embedded in the individual course curricula and measured through teacher observation and student performance in the classroom and on tests. A new system of academic progress

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metrics for use across the San Mateo County Court & Community Schools is under development and the goal is to implement this new system by the end of Q1 2026.

Commendations: Educational Program and Staff Engagement

The approach to teaching and learning at Canyon Oaks School reflects a thoughtful, flexible, and trauma-informed understanding of the unique and often complex needs of students in residence. Instruction is highly individualized and supported by close collaboration between educational and therapeutic staff, ensuring that each student's academic progress is aligned with their emotional and behavioral readiness.

The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) administrators demonstrated a clear commitment to maintaining strong oversight and ensuring that the educational program at COYC is well resourced and responsive to the evolving needs of the youth. During my visit I was provided with generous time, transparency, and support in conducting the evaluation, which was greatly appreciated.

Teacher Seago exemplified enthusiasm and professionalism, expressing genuine energy and passion for her work and a deep commitment to the success and well-being of her students. Her comments and demeanor reflected an understanding of the challenges and potential of each student, as well as a clear dedication to fostering engagement, and academic growth.

Findings & Recommendations

1. Continue to strengthen differentiated instruction for higher-achieving students to ensure they are appropriately challenged and able to progress at their skill level, supporting a smooth transition back to their home school or postsecondary setting without academic regression.
2. Support the development and implementation of appropriate, standardized academic assessment metrics to monitor and strengthen individual student progress across grade levels and subject areas. The goal that was shared with us is to establish baseline benchmark data by the end of Q1 2026.

The *Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)* system for tracking student performance has been discontinued, so it will be important to ensure that new student performance metrics be developed and implemented as soon as possible for consistent use across all Court and Community Schools. The development of valid, differentiated assessment tools for the wide range of grade levels and learning needs represented at Hillcrest will require thoughtful design and alignment. To maximize their value, these metrics should be standardized enough to be recognized and transferrable when students transition from Court and Community Schools back to their home district or other high school, ensuring academic continuity and appropriate placement.

3. Continue to look for opportunities to offer students access to Career and Technical Education programming, and ensure students share in opportunities to participate in college information programs along with other Court & Community Schools. Please follow up on the intention to invite Canyon Oaks students to participate in the Keys to Success dual-enrollment course provided in coordination with Project Change.

Notes for Next Year's Inspection

Follow up on the implementation of new student academic performance metrics (replacing MAP) which we were informed would be implemented for consistent use across the Court & Community Schools. We

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were informed that school administrators intend to complete assessments to have benchmark data in place once Hillcrest School staffing issues have been resolved. The expressed goal is to have this in place by the end of Q1 2026.

Inspection Report:

Number of Full-Time Instructors: one (1) credentialed teacher, with Multiple Subject credentials, currently responsible for teaching Math, Social Sciences, Science, Physical Education, English, Credit Recovery and serving as teacher of record for the Art Therapist.

The teacher also teaches the 4 week Summer Session, a more flexible learning environment than during the school year. The teacher is also responsible, with the support of the academic counselor and occupational therapist, for assessing students' interests in careers, job prospects and supporting related interviewing, and resume writing skills-building.

Number of Part-Time Instructors: 1 - Mark Squire, RSP, with Special Education credentials

Number of Full-Time Instructional Aides: 1 experienced Paraeducator - Jose Giacoman

Number of Tutors (Paid? Volunteer?): 0

Frequency of Substitute Teachers: We were advised that there is currently a substitute teacher and paraeducator shortage in the county. However, there is a retired teacher with special education certification (Karen Strogstrom) who is available to substitute in case of teacher absence. If this teacher is unavailable, teacher absences are covered by an administrator or TOSA (teacher on special assignment). There are currently not enough substitute paraeducators available to provide coverage in case of paraeducator absence.

Number of youth attending School: At the time of inspection, there were 5 students in residence (1 - 8th grade; 3 HS freshmen; 1 HS sophomore). The capacity of the facility is 12 residents.

Average Classroom Size: 6

Max Classroom Size: 6

When the number of students exceeds the maximum classroom size, the need for additional teaching resources to utilize the second classroom becomes important.

School Day: M,T, Th, F - 8:30am to 12:30pm; W - 9am to 12:10pm

Number of youth on independent study: 0

Reason: There is no independent study program; students have individualized instruction built into their school day. The teacher creates individual learning opportunities with the academic resources in place.

Number of youth not attending school: All youth attend school currently, however, as a general policy, students are not forced to attend school.

Reason: COYC residents receive intense therapeutic care and on any given day may be adjusting to changes in medications, need additional sleep, or dealing with anxiety or other psychiatric symptoms. There may also be social dynamics with other students that make attending school on a given day difficult. Sometimes a student will have therapy during class time, although typically therapy takes place in the afternoons, after the school day has ended.

Describe the general atmosphere of the classrooms: There are two classrooms. Often, the teacher instructs in one classroom and the paraeducator or Resource Specialist may work with individual students

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in the other room. This two classroom setting also accommodates curricular differences between students (for example, a student working on algebra when the rest of the class is learning geometry) or interpersonal conflict that prevents certain students from being in the same classroom at once.

The teacher pays great attention to the social and emotional needs of the students in the classroom, taking into account energy levels and social situations on any given day. For example, Mondays are particularly challenging for students as they have been on home visits on the weekend. As well, there may be anxious energy in anticipating visits from family during the week.

Adequate Supplies, Books, Paper, Computer? **Acceptable** **Unacceptable**

It was noted in last year's evaluation that Social Studies and Science textbooks are over 16 years old. However, this year, new Science (STEMscopes) and Social Studies (TCI Social Studies) curricula have now been adopted and are being used in the classroom. In addition, it was explained to us that the textbooks are generally only used as a resource as needed, and the focus is on relevancy through referring to current events (using CNN 10 for news) and undertaking project work to encourage students to take more ownership of the subject matter and incorporate more creativity in the learning process.

Are youth given access to computers/internet? **Yes** **No**

Details (when, purpose, supervision):

The school typically uses a blended learning approach and students often use classroom computers as part of their education. In addition to Edgenuity, the teacher uses Khan Academy and MATHia. COE provides a list of approved sites. Security is provided by the program "Go Guardian".

Credit Recovery work is typically done on a student's own time outside of school hours; students are assigned packets to do with pencil/paper. Students do not have access to school computers outside of the school day. The credit recovery packets are no longer Starline - they are more individualized to best match students' reading levels. During the school day, students may use the Edgenuity individualized learning platform for Credit Recovery. We were informed that students with high academic abilities like to use Edgenuity for the 'test out' option, but packets work well given the shorter academic day. The current cohort at Canyon Oaks School prefers learning through direct teacher contact over working online.

Describe the relationship between school and facility staff: There is close collaboration. Typically, teachers and therapeutic staff have bi-weekly meetings to discuss each student, and therapeutic staff participate in IEP meetings and support compliance. Therapeutic staff are also accessible outside of the classroom to manage emotional issues that present themselves in the classroom. Teaching staff read students' therapeutic logs before class each day for an up to the moment understanding of the recent therapeutic status of their students.

Describe access to school, recreation, etc. for youth confined to their rooms: COYC is a residential treatment facility. Youth are not confined to their rooms. They always have access to school, recreation and counseling during the day as scheduled, as well as opportunities for field trips, local hikes, and visits home on weekends.

When is school held on the unit instead of in the classroom? Not applicable.

Academic Counselling: Dr. Lauren Sneed provides a one month check-in for students, to ensure they understand their academic status and to explain the whole process and what lies ahead for them. For the current student cohort, who are middle school and mostly HS freshmen, she is introducing the idea of college access to them as well as vocational training. She encourages them to consider all post-secondary

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options. Dr. Sneed has an “honor roll” for students who achieve a 3.0 GPA or higher, which she calls out with a mini-celebration with house staff, therapists and special treats, like Jamba Juice. Her focus is strengths-based, and viewing progress through an asset-based lens. Dr. Sneed knows most of the students from the prior academic year and so is ‘pushing in a little’ for more social-emotional support.

Post High School/GED:

Are there educational opportunities available for youth who have completed high school or have their GED? Yes No

Describe:

College Education: A student may attend college (in-person or online) while at the facility. If a child is a minor, they require permission of parent/guardian to attend college. The therapeutic staff facilitates a student’s enrollment and registration, transportation, and provides educational support. The current cohort of students is quite young, so there are no students currently contemplating enrolling in college. In the past, we were told that it is rare for students to attend college while at COYC; also, the few students that graduate while at COYC tend to be more interested in getting jobs when they graduate.

Vocational Training: The school does not offer vocational education other than California CareerZone, an interest inventory and career exploration website. However, vocational counseling is provided by Dr. Lauren Sneed, the academic counselor and also Ms Tiina Jensen, the occupational therapist on staff, who supports students with the entire job application process, including writing resumes, and preparing for job interviews.

In the past, a grant supported students participating in “WorkAbility”, a program which provided job skills training and internships with coaching. In our discussion with Principal Siyam, he expressed interest in revisiting this opportunity.

Students who are graduating may also be eligible to enroll in the Workforce Development Services program currently supported by a joint partnership between OYCR and the Department of Rehabilitation to support youth with qualifying barriers to succeed in their educational and career endeavors. Enrollment is facilitated by Jonas Barbour, Coordinator, Transition Services, SMCOE.

In the past, we noted that many of the students at Canyon Oaks school were interested in vocational opportunities for training and working, or in taking a gap year upon graduation, rather than directly enrolling in and attending college after graduation.

Are youth given info/counseling on community college & 4-year college options? Yes No

Describe: There is currently no option for 4-year college entry from COYC—when youth spend 2+ years of their high school education at COYC, they are only eligible to graduate with a COE diploma, which does not meet the UC/CSU ‘A-G’ requirements. The academic counselor visits COYC once per month for one-on-one check-ins with students to provide information about career and community college options. Also, students are offered the opportunity to participate in field trips to community colleges and high school college information events.

Are youth given information/counseling about financial aid options for college? Yes No

Describe: The school academic counselor offers this information and helps fill out financial aid applications.

Are youth given resources for college entrance exam prep when appropriate? Yes No

Describe: Materials to study for college entrance exams are available to students by special request.

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Are youth able to take courses for college credit online? **Yes** **No**

Describe: Students have access to computers, and interested students could enroll in online (through Project Change) or in-person college courses. Scheduling at COYC is flexible enough to allow them to participate, and the hope is that this will be offered in the near future.

Special Education/IEP Programs:

How many youth in the facility have an Individualized Education Program (IEP)? All students at Canyon Oaks School have an IEP.

Do credentialed special education teachers participate in lesson planning and curriculum development? **Yes** **No**

How many credentialed special education teachers are at the facility full-time? The RSP teacher is credentialed in Special Education and co-teaches daily from 8:30am to 12:30pm.

Are regular IEP meetings held? **Yes** **No**

Describe: The youth will have had an IEP meeting prior to/coincident with placement at COYC. The education plan is created in anticipation of the student's arrival at COYC unless the student is an emergency placement or if there is a delay in receiving school records. Transcripts are typically received in advance. The next IEP meeting would be held at the triennial with retesting as needed, and the final IEP meeting is held as part of the youth's transition back to their home school or next school. The county also follows-up with all IEP students 1-year post graduation if they graduated from a SMCOE school. Therapeutic staff (and probation staff if the student is also under the supervision of a probation officer) are part of the IEP meetings. Student records are accessed via the SEIS system.

Are parents notified of these meetings? **Yes** **No**

Describe: The appropriate holder of the student's educational rights attends. Parents are notified if they have these rights.

Are parents permitted to attend these meetings? **Yes** **No**

Describe: Yes, if they have educational rights.

Describe the most common obstacle to IEP compliance: IEP compliance is not an issue because IEP meetings occur as part of the placement process. IEPs are typically up-to-date and documentation is prompt.

Signature of Commissioner(s) preparing this report:



Karin Huber-Levy

Date: October 8, 2025

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Attachment 1: School Supplement

How many minutes of instruction per week do students receive? Instructional minutes are per Educational Code (240 minutes per day). Actual minutes vary by student based on their attendance. The school schedule provides ½-hour for P.E., 1-hour for Science/Math, 1-hour for English, and 40 minutes for Social Science daily. Therapeutic time is also a for-credit “class” that results in Life Skills elective units. Teacher Seago and Principal Siyam look for opportunities to provide additional credits to students for elective courses where appropriate. For instance, participating in Equine Therapy weekly may accrue enough hours to accord PE credits, and Art Therapy hours may accrue Art credits.

Do students attend school within three (3) days of placement? Does the school create a preliminary education plan for each new student before the student attends school or once the student has started? Yes, the students attend within 3 three days if the student is emotionally ready to do so. Although sometimes there is a delay in receiving IEP information, students have an educational plan upon arrival.

Are there difficulties obtaining transcripts from the student’s prior school? Are these typically received before or after the student has started attending school?

The education plan is created in anticipation of the student’s arrival unless the student is an emergency placement or if there is a delay in receiving school records. Transcripts are typically received in advance.

How are limited English-speaking students identified and served? How are these services provided once the student has been identified as non-English proficient?

There are no non-English-speaking youth at the school because a youth must speak English to benefit from the therapeutic services. At times, there are limited English speakers, and the teacher provides individualized instruction employing universal design for learning methodology (UDL).

Is credit recovery offered? Please describe. Yes, credit recovery is offered via the computer application Edgenuity, but is mostly accomplished through individually created paper packets. Students work on credit recovery at a dedicated time each day, after the academic day ends, and a credit recovery teacher works with students every Friday morning (Courtney Parreira). Currently, due to staff vacancies at Hillcrest School, Ms. Parreira is teaching at Hillcrest School. The current cohort at Canyon Oaks school is not concerned with credit recovery at this time, and Ms. Parreira will return to this role in the future. The teacher is also responsible for working with students on credit recovery and supervising student progress, and would provide feedback to the credit recovery teacher to allow her to adapt credit recovery work for each student based on their progress.

Is homework assigned? When and where do students do homework?

Canyon Oaks School does not assign homework. The after-school program is therapeutically demanding and the school does not add schoolwork to the students’ schedules. In addition, there is no formal testing per se, but rather normative assessment: the teacher assesses students’ abilities through observing their performance and activity in progressing through materials.

How is transition back to a student’s home district handled?

The goal at Canyon Oaks School is for students to transition back to their home school to graduate. Because all students have IEPs, Canyon Oaks School initiates an IEP planning meeting with the receiving school before a student returns. The teacher manages this process with the receiving school.

Student Interviews

As none of the 5 students currently in residence and attending school were at COYC as a result of placement by the SMC Superior Court, these students are not considered to be within the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Justice Commission and were not available for us to interview.