



EQUITY DENIED

Reclaiming Safety for All in the Antelope Valley

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SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

Cancel the Contract Antelope Valley is a social justice coalition in the Antelope Valley, with community organizations and leaders demanding an end to law enforcement violence and racism.

Catalyst California advocates for racial justice by building power and transforming public systems. We partner with communities of color, conduct innovative research, develop policies for actionable change, and shift money and power back into our communities.

AUTHORS

- Diego Rubalcava-Alvarez**
Policy & Research Analyst
Catalyst California
- Chris Ringewald**
Senior Research Director
Catalyst California
- Chauncee Smith**
Associate Director, Reimagine Justice & Safety
Catalyst California
- Alicia Vo**
Research & Data Analyst
Catalyst California
- Jennifer Zhang**
Research & Data Manager
Catalyst California

Chauncee Smith
Associate Director, Reimagine Justice & Safety
Catalyst California

COMMUNICATIONS, DESIGN AND SUPPORT

- Tessie Borden**
Senior Communications Manager
Catalyst California
- Crystal Chavez**
Cancel the Contract Antelope Valley
- Deja Lynch**
Cancel the Contract Antelope Valley
- Waunette Cullors**
Cancel the Contract Antelope Valley

NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Waunette Cullors**
Executive Director
Cancel the Contract Antelope Valley
- Raquel Derfler**
Campaign Coordinator
Cancel the Contract Antelope Valley

GLOSSARY

Adultification bias: A stereotype that occurs when adults perceive youth of color more like adults than children. Adultification bias is rooted in a long-history of racism. For example, during slavery, Black youth subjected to forced labor were not treated like children. Similarly, present-day youth of color are often viewed as needing less support, protection, and comfort than their white counterparts and are often treated more like adults.

Criminal legal system: A group of institutions that enforce criminal laws, including, but not limited to, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, courts, jails, prisons, probation, and parole. These institutions, both individually and collectively, inflict devastating harm on communities of color and low-income people.

Decriminalize: To remove or reduce the criminal status of a particular act.

Discretionary funds: Public dollars that are flexible, unrestricted, and can be used for a variety of purposes.

Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994: A federal law that required public schools to expel students for at least one year for possession of a firearm at school. The Act is seen as a primary driver of the expansion of zero-tolerance policies in schools for conduct that poses far less risk to school safety than guns, such as being disruptive or cursing.

Predictive policing: The use of computerized data to decide where to deploy law enforcement. Predictive policing systems are based on racially biased crime data and produce racially biased outcomes.

Redlining: A practice through which the Federal Housing Administration designated geographic areas with higher concentrations of Black people with the color red on maps to indicate a higher risk of mortgage default. Those designations were often inaccurate and instead used for racial segregation. Banks and property developers, reliant on the FHA to insure loans and sales to prospective buyers, colluded with the federal government to deny loans to Black people based on redlining. This resulted in not only deprived opportunities to build wealth, but also economic extraction through Black people resultantly having to take on loans with higher interest rates and unfair terms.

Racial and Identity Profiling Act of 2015 (AB 953): Prohibits racial and identity profiling by all state and local law enforcement agencies in California. It also requires them to collect data on all stops of community members and submit the data to the California Attorney General. The act also established an advisory board that analyzes stop data for evidence of profiling and develops solutions to prevent it.

Restricted funds: Public dollars that can only be spent for specific purposes. State and federal funding to localities is often restricted.

School-to-prison pipeline: A process through which a wide variety of policies and practices collectively push youth of color out of schools and into the criminal legal system.

School pushout: A part of the school-to-prison pipeline where youth of color are removed from schools and denied learning opportunities through suspensions, expulsions, and other harsh discipline methods.

Social determinants of safety: The underlying social and structural conditions that drive both safety outcomes and contact with the criminal legal system. This includes factors like housing security, economic security, and access to healthy built environments.

Upstream drivers of safety: Similar to the social determinants of safety, these are structural conditions that significantly influence long-term safety outcomes.

Zero-tolerance policies: Harsh school discipline methods that punish youth for acts regardless of context or circumstances. Zero-tolerance policies arose in the mid-1990s in response to high-profile incidents of violence on school campuses, and the enactment of the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994. Rather than addressing the underlying causes, schools shifted toward zero-tolerance not only for extreme forms of violence (e.g., school shootings) but also relatively normal youth conduct traditionally resolved through less punitive solutions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All people in the Antelope Valley (AV) deserve safety. Residents should not only be free from harm but also live in conditions that create opportunities for youth and adults to thrive.

Youth in the AV should have schools that promote their academic, emotional, and social growth in an environment in which they feel safe. They should be able to interact with others and empowered to achieve their goals without fearing unfair treatment by educators or law enforcement.

Instead, this report finds that AV youth of color are often undereducated, suspended, expelled, arrested, and jailed due to racial bias by the Antelope Valley Union High School District (AVUHSD) and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD). The LASD, for example, stops Black youth in the AV at a rate nearly seven times greater than their white counterparts. And, in 2019, a deputy body-slammed a Black girl at Lancaster High School and sat on her.¹

As all young people in the AV should be able to thrive, so too should adults. This means they should have quality jobs, economic security, and access to affordable, quality housing.

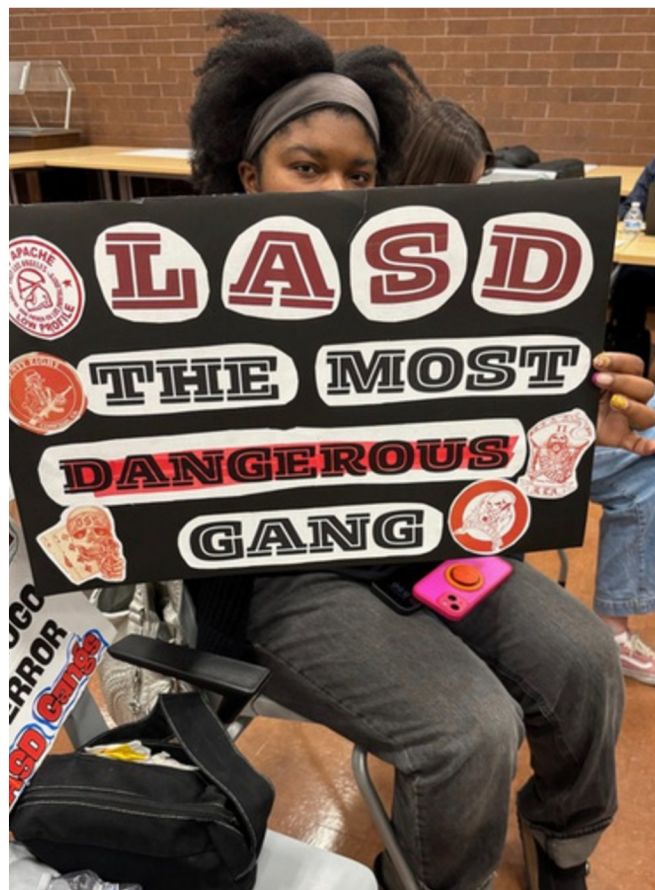


However, because of biased policies in the AV's two main cities—Palmdale and Lancaster—many Black, Latinx, and Indigenous adults struggle to make ends meet while constantly serving as targets of law enforcement stops, searches, harassment, uses of force, and dehumanization.

Together, these inequities undermine the safety and wellbeing of residents of color and push youth of color out of school and into the criminal legal system. This process, often referred to as

the school-to-prison pipeline, reaps devastating consequences. It tears families apart and negatively impacts their health, wealth, and freedom. It also undoes hard-fought struggles for racial progress.

This report provides a data-driven evaluation of the school-to-prison pipeline in the AV. It analyzes publicly available data on LASD stops and AVUHSD school discipline data which show that youth of color and youth with disabilities are disproportionately harmed.



More broadly, data also show how Palmdale and Lancaster government decision-making results in inequities across social determinants of safety, such as economic security, housing stability, and health care. These inequities undermine Black and Latinx community members' safety and wellbeing. The report also shows how public budget information reveals how investments in alternatives to policing and punishment would prevent these harms and improve safety in the AV.

Key Findings

- **School-to-Prison Pipeline:** AVUHSD and LASD disproportionately subject youth of color and youth with disabilities to suspensions, expulsions, stops, citations, and arrests. LASD stops Black students, for example, at a rate 6.8 times greater than white students. LASD also handcuffs nearly one in five Black students they stop. Most LASD stops of AV youth are for relatively minor issues that do not require law enforcement.
- **Inequitable Safety:** Black and Latinx residents experience significant inequities across social determinants of safety, including economic wellbeing, housing security, and health care. For example, Black residents are nearly two times less likely to be hired as an official or manager than white residents, and only 39% of Black residents own their homes compared to 64% of all AV residents.
- **Return on Investment:** The cities of Palmdale and Lancaster, and the AVUHSD, annually waste millions of public dollars on policies and practices that undermine community safety, especially for residents of color. This includes AVUHSD annually spending over \$2 million on contracts with LASD.

Solutions

- **End the School-to-Prison Pipeline in the AV:** Youth and parents of color want safe schools without law enforcement. They also want positive behavioral interventions and supports instead of suspensions and expulsions, and an end to racially biased criminalization. AVUHSD should cancel its contract with LASD and remove deputies from AVUHSD campuses. Age-appropriate adolescent behaviors should also be decriminalized. AVUHSD should stop suspending and expelling students for actions—such as talking out of turn or doodling on a desk—that are better addressed through support programs.
- **Justice Reinvestment:** AVUHSD, and the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster should decrease wasteful spending on school pushout and criminalization and increase investments in equity and care-centered community safety solutions like after-school programs, wellness services, and healthy built environments. AVUHSD annually wastes over \$2 million for its contract with LASD deputies. Those resources should instead be used to hire more teachers, counselors, and social workers to reduce class sizes, better mentor students, and offer activities that enrich student learning. The reinvested funds could pay for up to 17 more teachers to alleviate overcrowded classrooms. They could also be used to pay for healthier meals or art and sports programs.

BACKGROUND

The Antelope Valley (AV) is the most northern part of Los Angeles County. It sits about an hour north of the City of Los Angeles. In the AV, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people have long been devastated by racist government policies and private sector decision-making.² The LASD, AVUHSD, and cities of Palmdale and Lancaster are central drivers of these harms.

A. Community bias against the AV's Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations

Native Americans were early inhabitants of the AV. Notable tribes—including the Serrano, Kitanemuk, Kawaiisu, and Tataviam people—were displaced and killed by colonists in the 1700 and 1800s.³ Disease, forced removal, enslavement, land occupation, and genocide all contributed to the tragedy. Over time, the region came to comprise two main cities—Lancaster and Palmdale, as well as smaller unincorporated areas like Antelope Acres, Hi Vista, Lake Los Angeles, Llano, Pearblossom, Sun Village, and Valyermo.⁴

Social and economic development in the region led to significant Black and Latinx population growth and slower growth for white residents. Specifically, the development of Edwards Air Force Base between the 1930s and 1950s⁵ brought defense industry companies—such as Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and Boeing—that became prominent suppliers of jobs. In mid-1970s and 1980s, more low-cost rental properties in the AV were developed, and the federal government established Section 8 housing vouchers for low-income residents.⁶ The combination of these developments led many Black and Latinx people who were priced out of other parts of Los Angeles to move to the AV.⁷

From 1990 to 2010, Lancaster's population increased from 97,291 to 156,633. During that time, the proportion of white people decreased from 79% to 49.6%, while Black people grew from 7.4% to 20.5%.⁸ During that same period, Palmdale experienced similar trends, with a dramatic growth in Black and Latinx residents, alongside a substantial decrease in the proportion of white residents.⁹

In addition to demographic shifts, the AV has a long history of racial bias. For example, research shows that “redlining,”—a practice where mortgage lenders deny credit to people based on where they live even if they normally would qualify¹⁰—was used to segregate Black residents into Sun Village, a more rural AV town with less access to resources and basic services like electricity.¹¹

Furthermore, Neo-Nazi and white nationalist groups also have long held a significant presence in the AV and sought to push out residents of color through both overt and subtle means to maintain power.¹² White AV residents, for instance, associated Black and Latinx residents with crime, gangs, juvenile delinquency, the welfare state, and anti-social behavior.¹³ And, during a local Palmdale election in 1990, a Black woman's campaign sign was vandalized with “vote white” written in spray paint.¹⁴

In 2010, the Department of Justice found that the AV “has the highest rate of hate crimes of any region in Los Angeles County.”¹⁵ Things did not improve in the decade that followed. In 2020, a Black resident, Robert Fuller, was found hanging from a tree near Palmdale City Hall.¹⁶ Many community members associated Fuller’s death with police harassment and white supremacist activity, even though LASD declared his death a suicide. Community members disagreed and responded by protesting and holding vigils.¹⁷

B. The Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department’s racially biased policies and practices in the AV

Law enforcement’s presence in the AV—especially LASD’s footprint—has significantly increased over time. In 1937, LASD opened its first AV station in Lancaster. When that city incorporated in the late 1970s, it began contracting with LASD for law enforcement services. In 1992, LASD opened a Palmdale substation inside LASD’s AV station. In 1998, the Palmdale substation was expanded and became its own entity, separate from the AV station.¹⁸

Now, Palmdale and Lancaster both spend over \$30 million on 76 full-time LASD deputies annually.¹⁹ LA County also stations more deputies and support staff in Palmdale and Lancaster, so that LASD’s presence totals approximately 400 deputies and staff.²⁰

Furthermore, in collaboration with LASD, the City of Lancaster launched a Digital Shield Initiative in 2023 that uses surveillance technologies—such as license plate readers, drones, cameras, gunshot detectors, and artificial intelligence—for predictive policing.²¹ Research shows that predictive policing leads to people of color being disproportionately stopped and racially profiled by law enforcement based on faulty data.²²

In 2013, the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice concluded an investigation about allegations of unconstitutional conduct by LASD deputies in Lancaster and Palmdale. It found that between 2008 and 2011, LASD deputies illegally searched homes occupied by Black Section 8 voucher holders, in violation of the Fair Housing Act and Fourth Amendment.



The DOJ also found that LASD deputies disproportionately stopped, searched, and used unreasonable force on Black and Latinx residents, compared to other groups.²³ These findings led to a 2015 settlement agreement that aimed to end LASD's racially biased policies in the AV. Numerous clauses of the agreement remain unsatisfied. Specifically, a 2023 report by a court appointed monitor of the agreement found that LASD failed to adopt sufficient policies on citizen complaints, data systems, cultural reforms, and use of force by deputies.²⁴

In 2022, the LA County Office of the Inspector General (OIG) published a report on racial bias in LASD patrol activities in Lancaster high schools. The report highlights the disproportionate harm LASD inflicted on Black students.²⁵ The OIG investigation was in response to a high-profile incident in which a deputy body-slammed a Black girl at Lancaster High School. Data analysis showed Black youth accounted for 60% of stops by LASD deputies in Lancaster high schools despite only being 20% of the overall student body.²⁶ The OIG report concluded that, among other things, Lancaster station-based deputies disproportionately stopped, arrested, and inflicted harm on Black youth through back-seat detentions, searches, and pointing firearms at them.²⁷

In the summer of 2023 LASD Deputy Trevor Kirk responded to a false report of a robbery in progress at a WinCo in Lancaster. Unprovoked, he threw and pepper-sprayed an unarmed Black woman. CTC mobilized community, and in April 2025, Deputy Kirk was found guilty on a federal charge of violating the victim's civil rights. In November, the California Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission revoked Kirk's certificate, barring him from law enforcement jobs in California.

C. The Antelope Valley Union High School District's racially biased policies and practices

AVUHSD serves approximately 22,000 students in eight comprehensive schools, three alternative schools, and an early college school run in partnership with Antelope Valley Community College.²⁸ AVUHSD has a history of disproportionately harming youth of color and youth with disabilities through suspensions, expulsions, under-resourced classrooms, and criminalization.²⁹ AVUHSD also contracts with LASD to station deputies at each campus.

The 2022 OIG report also looked at AVUHSD practices and concluded that suspensions of Black students are disproportionate to their share of the student population. Specifically, Black students accounted for 54.1% of suspensions, even though they are only 17.9% of the student population.³⁰ White students were 10.8% of the student population but only accounted for 4.7% of suspensions.³¹ Moreover, Black students accounted for 46.7% of expulsions, compared to 3.3% for white.³²

Much like racial profiling in law enforcement, racial disparities in school discipline often stem from implicit or unconscious biases held by school personnel. Research shows, for example,

that Black boys are often perceived as older and less innocent than other young people. This bias, known as adultification, leads to harsher discipline for Black boys and works as a form

“It’s even harder when our Black children are bigger. My son was 6’3” in school, so he was seen as visibly different.”

— Community member

of dehumanization.³³ AVUHSD students are also often forced to complete lessons in under-resourced schools and crowded classrooms that inhibit their ability to learn.

In March 2023, Cancel the Contract Antelope Valley (CTC-AV), a coalition of community-based organizations and leaders from the AV committed to ending racially biased law enforcement, sued AVUHSD on behalf of several students of color. CTC-AV alleged that AVUHSD failed to provide a proper learning environment for Black students and students with disabilities, and as a result it disproportionately suspended and expelled them. They also alleged that AVUHSD’s practice of stationing deputies at schools exposed those students to harmful contact with LASD deputies.

CTC-AV argued that these actions violated Black students’ and students with disabilities’ constitutional rights, as well as federal and state law.³⁴ In March 2024, the Los Angeles Superior Court ordered AVUHSD to end its racially biased school discipline policies and practices.³⁵ According to parents and community members,



AVUHSD has failed to sufficiently comply with the order.

Both data and lived experiences show that residents of color in the AV endure significant inequities that undermine their safety and wellbeing. The data analysis in the next section unpacks these issues in greater detail.

BRIEF METHODOLOGY and CONTEXTUAL DATA

This report evaluates AVUHSD discipline and education outcomes data, LASD patrol data, and community safety data. AVUHSD discipline and outcomes data are compiled by the California Department of Education for 2023 to 2024. Community safety data are the most recent from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Census' American Community Survey, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, and United Ways of California.



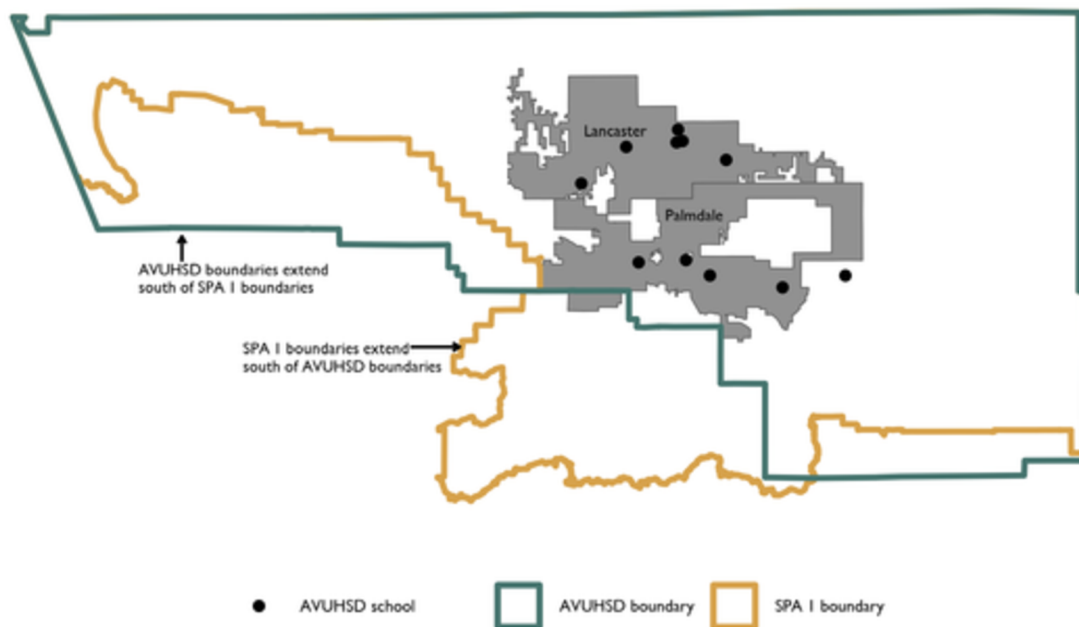
LASD patrol activities in the AV using 2018 to 2023 data are collected and reported by LASD pursuant to the Racial and Identity Profiling Act (“RIPA”) of 2015. For each law enforcement stop, RIPA data includes information that can be analyzed for evidence of profiling—including characteristics of the person stopped (e.g., race, gender, and age), as well as the location, dur-

ation, reason, and result of each stop. RIPA data is input by law enforcement and therefore subject to limitations. Demographic data about people stopped by law enforcement is subject to an officer’s perceptions, which may entail inaccuracies. However, this is the standard approach for evaluating racial and identity profiling because profiling occurs based on officers’ perceptions, regardless of accuracy.

Notably, data indicate significant under-reporting for stops of students with disabilities in AVUHSD, with only 23 stops reported between 2018 to 2023. However, AV parents and community members report that LASD disproportionately targets and harasses students with disabilities. This discrepancy between parent and community testimonials and stops data suggests that LASD officers may not be complying with RIPA’s data collection and reporting requirements, or that they often fail to recognize students with disabilities.³⁶ This gap undermines transparency and public trust in law enforcement.

Community safety data for the Antelope Valley comprise Service Planning Area (SPA) I, which is similar but distinct from AVUHSD boundaries. LA County divides its geography into eight Service Planning Areas (“SPAs”) to more effectively develop and provide public health services to residents based on local needs. This report defines the AV as SPA I after confirming that its geographic boundaries align with the AV.³⁷ Where SPA I data are not available, community safety data are estimated by aggregating census tracts to SPA I.

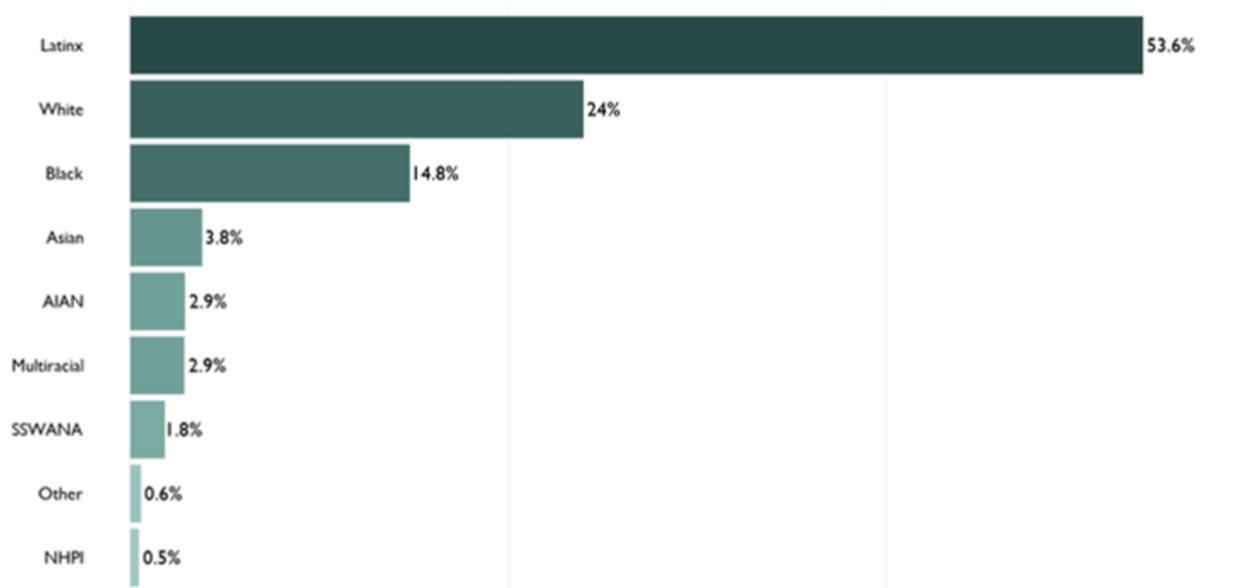
Antelope Valley Union High School District Service Planning Area 1, Cities of Lancaster and Palmdale, and Schools



Sources: AVUHSD and city boundaries from the US Census, 2023. SPA boundaries from the LA County Department of Public Health, 2022. School locations from the CA Department of Education, 2024-25.

Approximately 408,374 people live in the AV. Young people constitute 20.9% of LA County's population and almost 28%, a significant portion, of the Antelope Valley's population.

The majority of the population is Latinx, white or Black Antelope Valley population by race



Source: Catalyst California calculations of American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table DP05 data, 2019-2023. Race Note: AIAN=American Indian/Alaskan Native Alone, NHPI=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, SSWANA=South/Southwest Asian and North African.

The student population for AVUHSD, where our education analysis focuses, is 67.2% Latinx, 16.6% Black, and 8.9% white. Students with disabilities account for 17.8% of enrollment.

Latinx, Black and white students comprise the majority of students in AVUHSD

AVUHSD student population by race



Source: Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Education data, 2023-2024. Race Note: AIAN=American Indian/Alaskan Native Alone, NHPI=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

FINDINGS

Data in this section show that the structural biases discussed above push AV youth of color and youth with disabilities into the school-to-prison pipeline. Data show that biased policies and practices adopted by AVUHSD, LASD, and the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster systematically undermine the safety and wellbeing of AV residents of color.

Specifically, students of color and students with disabilities experience lower educational outcomes, higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, and criminalization through law enforcement stops and arrests. AV students of color and students with disabilities also endure punishment for relatively normal adolescent issues—such as schoolyard fights, possession of marijuana, jaywalking, and education code violations—better addressed by care-based services. More broadly, the safety of AV residents of color, especially Black residents, is undermined by inequities in housing and economic security, health care, and supports for child wellbeing.

A. The AVUHSD and LASD undermine safety in the AV by harming Black and Latinx youth, and youth with disabilities, through policies and practices that push them out of school and into the criminal legal system.

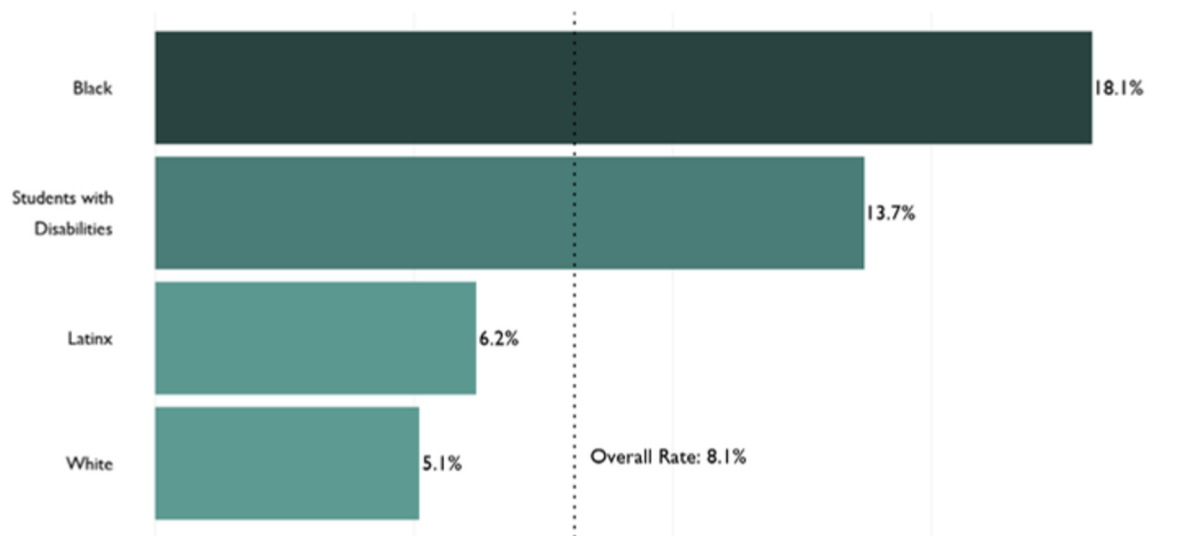
AVUHSD disproportionately pushes Black students and students with disabilities out of the classroom through suspensions and expulsions.

School suspensions and expulsions are rooted in a long history of reliance on “zero-tolerance” policies that harm students of color and undermine school safety.³⁸ In 1994, the federal Gun Free Schools Act (“GFSA”) was passed.³⁹ Its purported aim was to prevent gun violence in schools by⁴⁰ requiring states to kick students out of school for bringing guns on campus.⁴¹

Over time, the GFSA’s zero-tolerance framework expanded to include a wide range of less serious adolescent behaviors, such as schoolyard fights, acting out in class, or defying a teacher’s instructions.⁴² In AVUHSD, this expanding policy pushes Black and Latinx students, as well as those with disabilities, out of school for typical adolescent behavior. Racist stereotypes, unconscious biases, and false narratives of youth of color as inherently dangerous “super predators”⁴³ help drive the biased application of suspensions and expulsions.

AVUHSD suspends 18.1% of Black students, nearly one in five, a rate three times greater than that of white students (5.1%) and greater than any other student group. In comparison, the Los Angeles Unified School District (“LAUSD”), the country’s second largest school district, suspends only 1.2% of its Black students. AVUHSD also suspends students with disabilities at a high rate, 13.7%. In comparison, LAUSD suspends only 1% of students with disabilities.

AVUHSD suspends Black students and students with disabilities far more than white students AVUHSD student suspension rate by race



Source: Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Education data, 2023-2024.

Along the same lines, AVUHSD expels more Black students (0.6%) than any other student group. The district also expels students with disabilities (0.2%), and English learners (0.2%) at high rates. Again, LAUSD educators expel these students at far lower rates than AVUHSD educators while educating 23 times as many students.

Since at least 2023, AVUHSD has had a discipline matrix which “gives school staff complete discretion to recommend student suspensions and expulsions for any Education Code violation—including conduct as minor as profanity and as subjective as disrupting the classroom”⁴⁴ and current discipline policies use zero tolerance language and identify “severe” consequences for dress code violations.⁴⁵

Exclusionary discipline is linked to lower graduation rates. For example, AVUHSD graduates 78.5% of all its students, but only 60.4% of students with disabilities. Two in five students with disabilities leave school without a diploma. Graduation rates for Black students (72.7%) and Latinx students (79.4%) are also lower than graduation rates for white students (80.4%). In comparison, LAUSD graduates 88.5% of its students, 85.1% of its Black students, 88.3% of its Latinx students, and 74.6% of its students with disabilities. It graduates more students across cohorts even as it suspends/expels fewer of them.

AVUHSD fails to support Black students and students with disabilities in graduating **AVUHSD student graduation rate by race**



Source: Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Education data, 2023-2024.

Rather than suspending and expelling students of color and students with disabilities, AVUHSD should invest in supporting their academic success to ensure that they graduate. This would help decrease the likelihood that they end up in the school-to-prison pipeline.

Rather than focusing on quality education, AVUHSD subjects Black and Latinx AVUHSD students to LASD contacts that funnel them into the school-to-prison-pipeline

Data show that LASD deputies stop Black students 6.8 times more often than white students, an undue burden given their proportion of the student population, 16.6%. Of the 904 stops that LASD reported in AVUHSD between 2018-2023, Black students account for 53.2%.⁴⁶

In comparison, white youth, who are 8.9% of student enrollment, accounted for 7.9% of all stops.

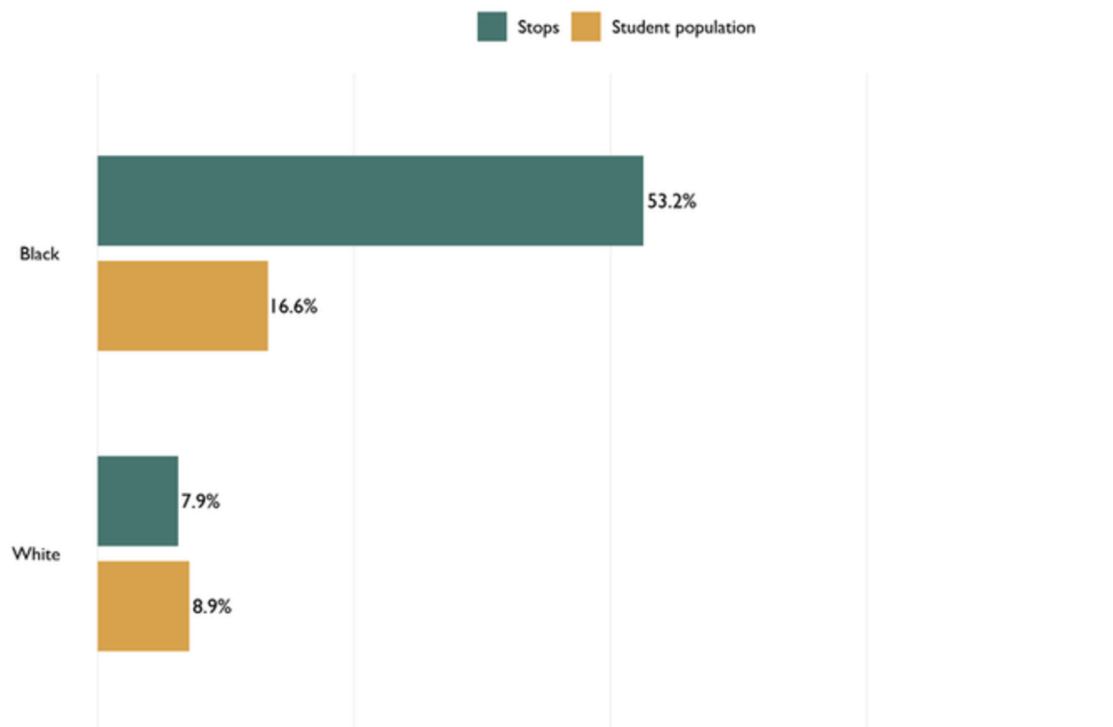
Latinx students were subject to the second highest stop rate at 38.2%, and they had the highest rate of enrollment at 67.2%. There appears to be considerable underreporting of stops of students with disabilities: only 23 were reported.

“We have one of the most intense ways of regulating our students. These [sheriffs] are the same people who work in the prisons . . . I don’t know if they can flip a switch to deal with students.”

— Community member

Sheriff’s deputies stop Black students in AVUHSD at over three times their share of the student population

AVUHSD Stops compared to student population



Source: Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Justice 2018-2023 and California Department of Education 2023-2024 data.

LASD stops students in AVUHSD for issues that would be better addressed by care- and equity-centered support programs

Stop reasons

An analysis of the reasons deputies stopped students sheds light on whether those stops advance safety in the district.

“When fights happen, they call the police. That just criminalizes kids. It doesn’t stop fights.”

— Community member

Data show that 27.4% of all student stops were for fighting or marijuana use or sale. Research shows that these issues could be better addressed through care-based programs,⁴⁷ such as

improved family and community engagement, violence intervention workers, restorative justice practices, and more culturally relevant education.⁴⁸ AVUHSD students themselves say that fights happen because some students don’t see a point to school or have trouble expressing their feelings. They offer solutions including more career-oriented programs and more counselor checkups to help students with what they are dealing with.⁴⁹

Notably, 13% of student stops were based on deputy allegations that the students matched suspect descriptions. Stops based on a description can be fraught with error because of implicit or unconscious bias.⁵⁰ This occurs because research shows that a deputy’s interactions with community members can be influenced by their views about racial groups, even when the deputy may not be aware or have good intentions.⁵¹

Data also show that deputies stopped students for other reasons, including disrupting classwork, disrupting school activities, willfully disturbing a school zone, loud noise, litter, jaywalking, bothering other children, and state Education Code violations. School personnel, rather than law enforcement, should address these issues.

Stop results

Data show that the most common result of deputy stops involves issuing a citation and releasing the student,⁵² contacting the student’s legal guardian, and referring the student to a school administrator.

Some citations may require an automatic appearance in juvenile court; others may require it if the student missed a deadline or failed to pay a fine. All citations create a record and thus constitute a first step toward the school-to-prison pipeline. Also, associated fines are particularly harmful for low-income families because they have less discretionary income to absorb such expenses.

When they stop a student, deputies may provide an offense code to accompany the paperwork that provides more detail about an in-field cite-and-release. Among students stopped in AVUHSD, 28.4% received an in-field cite-and-release for fighting or for possession of marijuana, issues that we’ve noted can be better addressed by non-law-enforcement personnel.

LASD often stops students for relatively minor issues

Stops of AVUHSD students by stop result

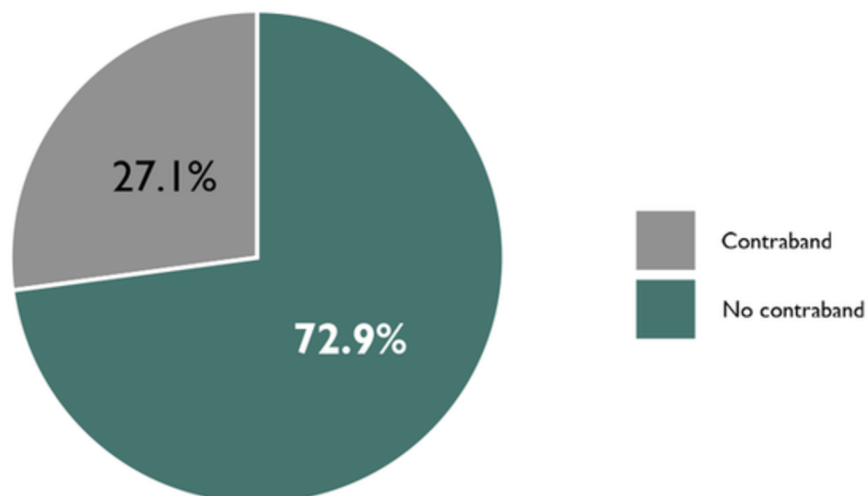
STOP RESULT	COUNT	RATE
In-Field Cite-And-Release	620	69%
Contacted Legal Guardian	304	34%
Referral To School Administrator	234	26%
Custodial Arrest Without Warrant	146	16%
Psychiatric Hold	29	3%
Warning	26	3%
Custodial Arrest Warrant	15	2%
No Action	14	2%
Referral School Staff	10	1%
Citation For Infraction	9	1%
Noncriminal Caretaking Transport	9	1%
Field Interview Card Completed	3	0%

Source: Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Justice data, 2018-2023. Note: 904 students were stopped by police in AVUHSD between 2018-2023. Rates do not add to 100% because a police officer can report more than one result for a stop of a single student. Stop results analyzed here are alone or in combination with other stop results.

The way in which deputies conduct stops in AVUHSD can often harm students. For example, deputies handcuffed nearly one of every five students (19.7%) they stopped from 2018 to 2023, a total of 178. More than half, 106, were Black.

During this same period, LASD deputies searched 19.6% of students they stopped, for a total of 177 searches. In addition, more than 53% were Black, and 38.4% were Latinx, making for nearly 9 out of 10 of all students who were searched.

The vast majority of LASD searches of AVUHSD students result in no contraband



Source: Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Justice data, 2018-2023.

Furthermore, of all the searches deputies conducted, 72.9% yielded no contraband, so the searches themselves are ineffective. Research shows that searches of youth by law enforcement can be dehumanizing and can negatively affect their mental health and wellbeing,⁵³ inflict emotional trauma,⁵⁴ and negatively impact educational outcomes, contributing to lower test scores and grades.⁵⁵

Beyond the health harms to young people, widespread, seemingly routine, and ultimately ineffective searches of students of color, such as those that occur at AVUHSD, tend to erode communities' trust in LASD.

B. Beyond the law enforcement issues at AVUHSD, inequities in economic security, housing stability, child well-being, and health care undermine safety for Black and Latinx residents of the AV.

Public health research has long established that non-medical factors such as living conditions and economic stability influence health outcomes.⁵⁶ Drawing upon this framework, the social determinants of safety are structural conditions in communities that influence long-term safety outcomes.

Research shows that when people can fulfill basic needs—such as having sufficient income, quality housing, proper health care, and a healthy built environment—community safety improves.⁵⁷ In the AV, the social determinants of safety show worse outcomes for residents of color than in the rest of LA County.

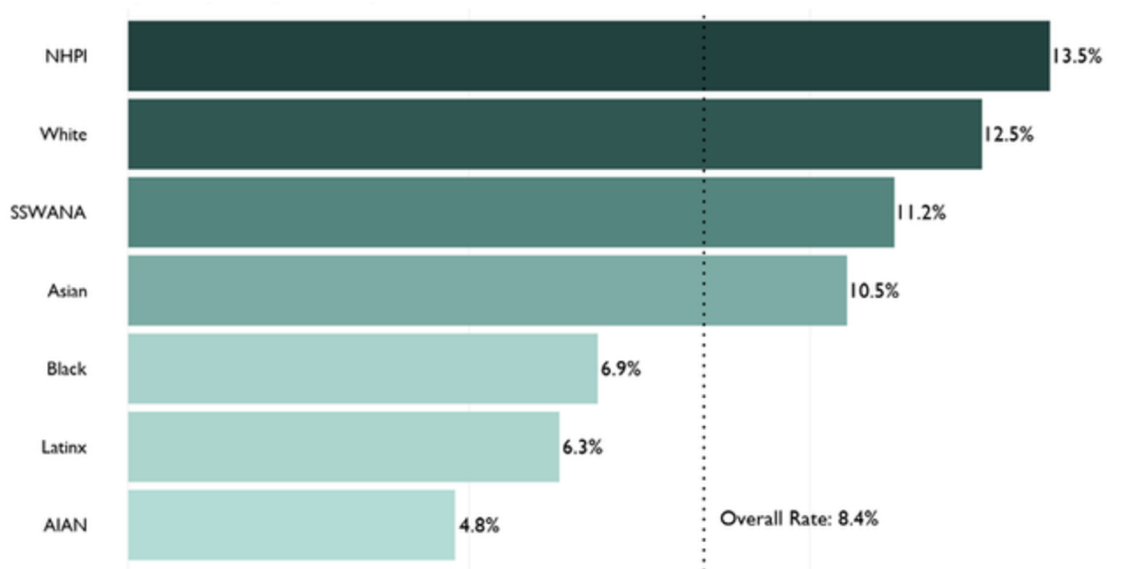
Economic security

AV community organizations say a lack of quality jobs in the region forces many residents to commute elsewhere for work.⁵⁸ This is particularly true for residents of color. For example, employers looking for people at the official or manager level hire only 6.9% of Black residents and 6.3% of Latinx residents who apply. They hire white residents at nearly double that rate, at 12.5%.

In addition, compared to the rest of Los Angeles County, AV employers are more likely to pay less than a living wage. The real cost of living accounts for the price of housing, food, health care, child care, transportation, and other basic needs. It is more accurate than the federal poverty level.⁵⁹ Approximately 41% of LA County households survive on salaries



Employers are least likely to hire Black, Latinx or AIAN residents as managers Antelope Valley manager rates by race



Source: Catalyst California calculations of American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample data, 2019-2023.
Race Note: AIAN=American Indian/Alaskan Native Alone, NHPI=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, SSWANA=South/Southwest Asian and North African.

that don't cover the real cost of living. In Lancaster and Palmdale, that rate rises to 51% and 52%, respectively.⁶⁰ In other words, more than half of Lancaster and Palmdale households do not have enough income to pay for life's necessities.

Data from the LA County Health Survey confirms this: more than one in three AV households are food insecure (34.4%), the second highest food insecurity rate in LA County. Moreover, the LA County Department of Public Health reports that AV residents have below-average access to healthy fruits and vegetables.⁶¹

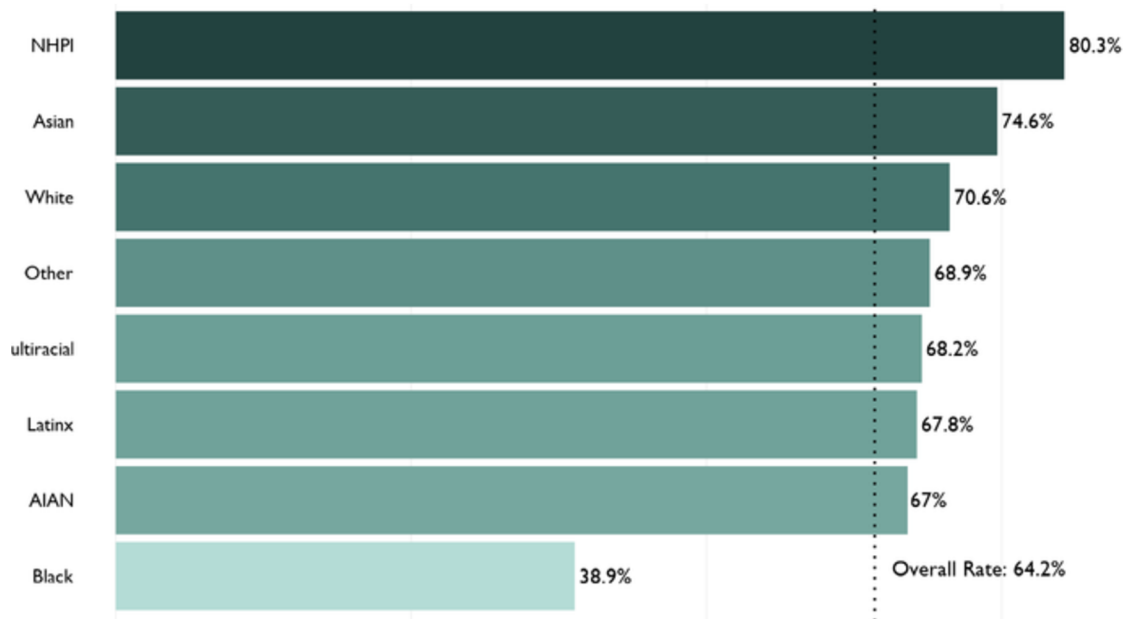
Housing stability

AV residents, especially residents of color, face significant difficulty in housing access. Even though incomes are low, AV landlords charge relatively high rents. Compared to other parts of LA County, AV households are second most likely to have trouble paying rent or a mortgage. In the past two years, more than one in five (22.6%) AV households delayed or could not pay their rent or mortgage. In addition, six out of every ten renters face rent burden: they spend 30% or more of their income on housing. American Indian and Alaskan Native ("AIAN") families hurt the most, with, 82% facing rent burden.

Because of redlining and other factors mentioned in the Background section, only 39% of Black residents own their homes, compared to 64% of all AV residents. This inequity is significant because home ownership is a common pathway for families to build generational wealth.

Black AV residents have a much lower homeownership rate compared to other groups

Antelope Valley homeownership rates by race



Source: Catalyst California calculations of American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table B25003 data, 2019-2023. Race Note: AIAN=American Indian/Alaskan Native Alone, NHPI=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Child well-being

The AV has the largest number of children in foster care in LA County.⁶² In recognition of the importance of supporting children in foster care, the California Department of Education allocates school districts specific funds for foster youth.⁶³ AVUHSD should redirect wasteful spending on law enforcement to investments in foster youth, especially those in need of behavioral health services.⁶⁴

The LA County Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) also reports higher rates of child abuse/neglect in the AV than in other parts of the county.⁶⁵ This is often due to economic insecurity, including struggles with paying for housing, food, and health care, that lead to higher stress levels among AV parents.⁶⁶



The AV provides fewer services to support children and families in the child welfare system than other parts of the county. Per capita, residents here receive half as much support in domestic violence situations as people in the rest of the county.⁶⁷ In addition, less than half

of AV parents have access to childcare, and they are least likely in LA County to report that their children ages 5 and younger receive it.⁶⁸

“A lot of feeling unsafe comes from people not having access to resources.”

— Community member

The AV has one of the highest rates of infant mortality in LA County, and Black infants die at disproportionately high rates,

higher than those of other racial and ethnic groups. At a rate of 1.32%, more than one in 100 Black infants die before their first birthday.⁶⁹

Health care

AV residents have less access to medical care than other residents in LA County.⁷⁰ For instance, the AV only has one full-service hospital in the entire region,⁷¹ and many community members have to wait hours for care or travel to other parts of LA County.

According to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, life expectancy in the AV is nearly five years less than the county average, 75.9 years compared to 80.4 years.⁷² Furthermore, the AV has a shortage of behavioral health professionals.⁷³ Families and children with behavioral health needs have few places to turn to. Schools could help meet this need if the district made greater investments in mental health, as opposed to law enforcement.

As an institution, law enforcement is neither designed nor well suited to effectively manage behavioral health issues. Trained health care professionals should deal with youth mental health issues instead.

Together, the above inequities in economic security, housing stability, child welfare, and health care undermine the safety and wellbeing of AV residents of color.

C. AVUHSD wastes public dollars on policing and school pushout instead of making smart investments that build true safety and wellbeing for all AV community members.

School districts are funded through public dollars.⁷⁴ During the 2023-24 school year, AVUHSD's received \$477 million in revenue,⁷⁵ mostly from state funding (63%), local property taxes (14%), and the federal government (13%). That amounts to approximately \$21,100 for each enrolled student annually.⁷⁶ The budget analysis in this section explains why AVUHSD should invest these resources in non-law enforcement educational strategies to improve safety outcomes.

Invest in more teachers and counselors

Past CTC-AV research⁷⁷ shows that positive academic and behavioral outcomes are associated with lower class sizes. However, AVUHSD's average class sizes for English, math, history, and science continue to grow.⁷⁸ Larger class sizes mean students receive

less personal attention, stifling youth learning, increasing their stress, and harming their behavioral health.⁷⁹

Meanwhile, AVUHSD insists on maintaining a full-time sheriff's deputy at each of eight traditional high schools, as well as Desert Winds and Rex Parris Continuation High Schools. For the 2023-24 school year, AVUHSD spent \$2 million on LASD contracts for nine full-time deputies, as well as security for miscellaneous special events.⁸⁰ The AVUHSD even paid \$33,000 for sheriffs to serve as bailiffs during mock trial events. While youth should not be encouraged to roleplay as law enforcement, it is worth noting that other districts typically fill mock trial roles through student volunteers rather than contracting with law enforcement to act out their jobs.

The money now paying for the deputies in the schools could be used to hire 17 more teachers to reduce class sizes.⁸¹ Similarly, maintaining a low student-to-counselor ratio leads to fewer disciplinary problems and better academic performance.⁸³ The American School Counselor Association recommends a student to counselor ratio of 250 to 1.⁸⁴ The average student-to-counselor ratio in AVUHSD schools is approximately 370 to 1.⁸⁵

“There’s way too many students in some of these classes You can’t have a teacher become attentive to every student if there’s so many students.”⁸²

— AVUHSD student

AVUHSD’s 2023-24 typical staffing costs



\$118,716 per Teacher



\$121,366 per Counselor



\$180,015 per Sheriff Deputy

Source: Catalyst California estimates from the 2023-24 AVTA Certified Salary Schedule, California Department of Education SACS Data Viewer 2023-24 Unaudited Actuals budget data, and 2022-23 LASD School Law Enforcement Services Agreement. Note: Salaries for new teachers and counselors are estimated as starting at step 4, column 4 of the AVTA 6 Period Work Salary Schedule and AVTA 7 Period Work Salary Schedule, respectively.

In comparison, the State of New Jersey, recognized as having some of the best public schools in the nation⁸⁶ and ranking second nationwide in school safety, has an average student-to-counselor ratio of 298 to 1.⁸⁷ To achieve parity, AVUHSD would need to hire at least 13 more counselors at a cost of approximately \$1.6 million annually⁸⁸—less than AVUHSD’s annual spending on sheriff’s deputies. Instead of wasting dollars on deputies, AVUHSD could improve school safety by hiring more social workers to help students and

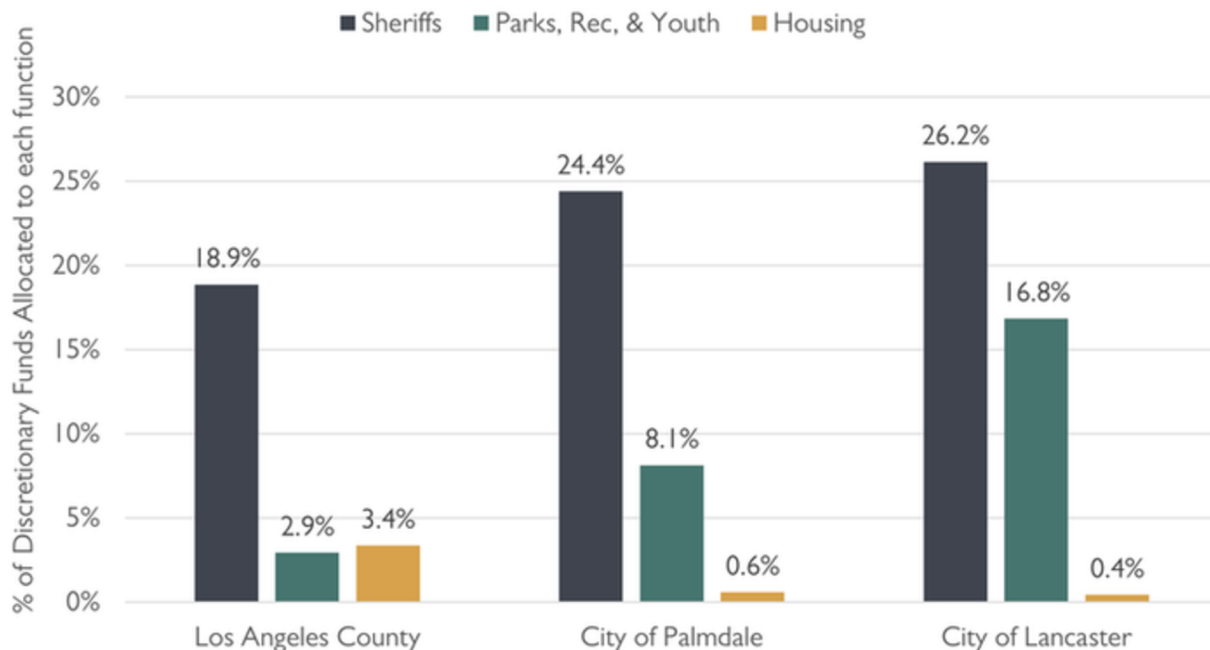
families navigate life challenges. The Hopeful Futures Campaign, an organization that advocates to improve student behavioral health, recommends a maximum student-to-social worker ratio of 250 to 1.⁸⁹ But during the 2023-24 school year, AVUHSD only employed two social workers.⁹⁰ In the 2024-25 school year, AVUHSD proposed using state funding to increase the number of social workers to six,⁹¹ but that would still result in a ratio of more than 3,700 to 1. Finally, both community members and experts report that insufficient access to after-school programs fuels youth disciplinary issues and increases their exposure to the criminal legal system.⁹²

To summarize, AVUHSD has many better options for the money it spends on deputies to improve school safety. Added teachers, counselors, social workers or after-school programs would do the job more effectively.

The cities of Palmdale and Lancaster annually waste millions of public dollars on LASD at the expense of true safety

Like other localities, the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster pay for public services like parks and paved streets through a mix of restricted and discretionary funds. Restricted funds, such as state grants or sewer fees, can only be spent on specified purposes. Discretionary funds, like property and sales taxes, can be spent on whatever the government prioritizes. Local governments in the AV tend to prioritize discretionary spending on sheriff's deputies.

LASD gets the highest proportion of municipal discretionary funds in the AV FY 2022-23 discretionary budget allocations

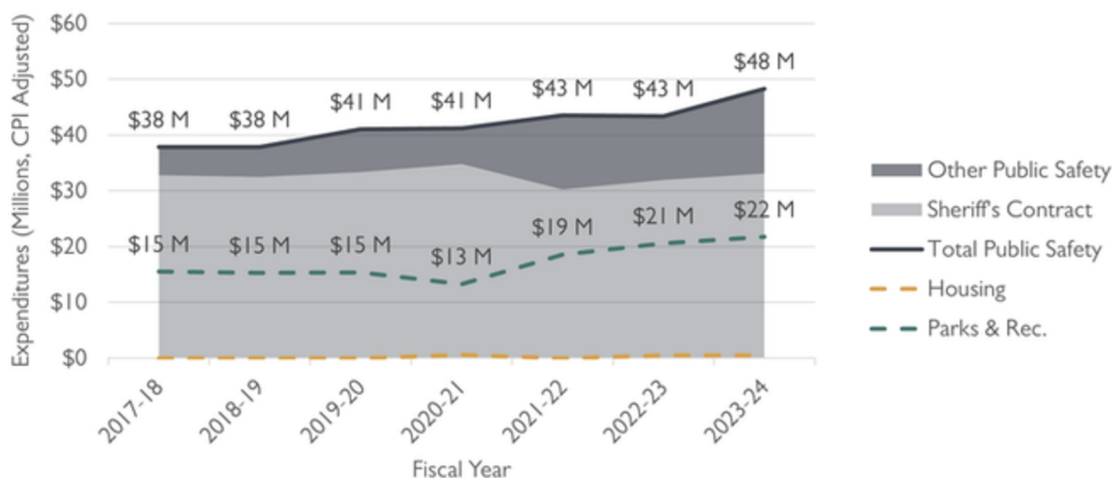


Source: Catalyst California calculation of budget data from Los Angeles County, the City of Palmdale, and the City of Lancaster. Note: For the purposes of this chart, City of Palmdale discretionary funds include General Fund and Measure AV funds.

Twenty-four percent of Palmdale’s discretionary spending goes to law enforcement contracts.⁹³ Lancaster spends slightly more at 26%.⁹⁴

In Fiscal Year 2022-23, Palmdale and Lancaster spent less than 17% of their discretionary funds on parks, recreation, and youth services, and less than 1% on affordable housing, even though residents expressed a need for these services. But Lancaster’s spending on public safety (including the LASD contract, code enforcement, and Neighborhood Watch programs) has grown almost every year since FY 2017-18.⁹⁵

Lancaster’s spending on public safety has risen consistently, spiking after creation of a police department



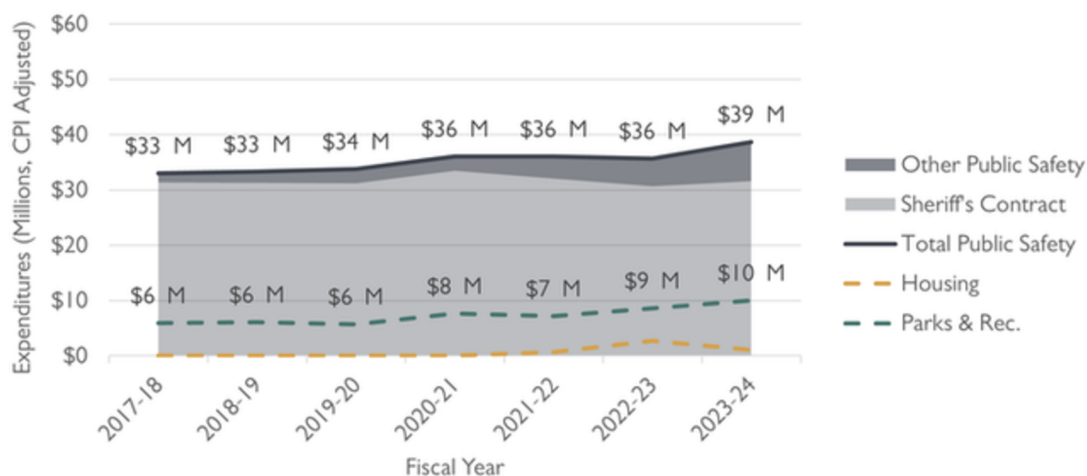
Source: Catalyst California summary of City of Lancaster budget data from FY 2017-18 through FY 2023-24, inflation adjusted to FY 2024-25 dollar values based on the Consumer Price Index for Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim Area.

Until recently, Lancaster did not have its own police department. Like AVUHSD and Palmdale, it contracted with LASD for law enforcement services. However, in 2023, Lancaster created its own police department even as it continued its contract with LASD. Lancaster’s first six police officers started in 2025,⁹⁶ but the 66 deputies assigned⁹⁷ to Lancaster have also retained jurisdiction.

Start-up costs for the new Lancaster Police Department are included in the “Other Public Safety” category in the graph above. Spending here has risen sharply since FY 2022-23. In comparison, the graph also shows general fund spending trends for parks and recreation as well as housing, key drivers of safety. Between FY 2017-18 and FY 2023-24, parks and recreation spending increased by \$6.2 million. However, during that same time, spending on public safety increased by \$10.4 million.

Palmdale’s spending trends are similar. In FY 2023-24, Palmdale spent \$31.5 million on deputies.⁹⁸ Total spending on public safety has gone up, with adjusted growth of \$5.7 million from FY 2017-18 to FY 2023-24.

Palmdale spending on public safety also rose consistently since FY 2017-18



Source: Catalyst California summary of City of Palmdale budget data from FY 2017-18 through FY 2023-24, inflation adjusted to FY 2024-25 dollar values based on the Consumer Price Index for Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim area.

Palmdale and Lancaster annually waste millions of dollars on LASD patrol and overtime

LASD's patrol division is largely responsible for the wasteful stops discussed above. During FY 2022-23, the latest fiscal year in which RIPA data was fully available at the time of this report's development, Lancaster paid \$30 million for its contract with LASD, while the county paid about \$10.9 million for patrol services in the neighboring unincorporated areas.⁹⁹ This amounts to \$40.9 million spent on patrol for the Lancaster station.

Similarly, in Palmdale, the city paid \$28.8 million for its LASD contract, while the county paid about \$10.8 million to patrol unincorporated areas, for a total of approximately \$39.5 million.

Together, Lancaster and Palmdale spent a total of \$80.4 million on LASD patrols of the AV during FY 2022-23. In addition, the county spends far too much on overtime costs for LASD.¹⁰⁰ In FY 2022-23, the county's total LASD spending was \$3.9 billion,¹⁰¹ \$397 million of which was spent on overtime. Assuming AV patrol incurred overtime at the same rate as the rest of the county, the AV spent approximately \$8.3 million on patrol overtime.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To resolve the problems discussed above, AVUHSD and LASD should end the school-to-prison pipeline and shift resources currently wasted on suspensions, expulsions, stops and searches to education and care-based programming. The district should cancel its contract with LASD, remove deputies from its campuses, and stop treating age-appropriate adolescent behavior as criminal conduct.

In addition, the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster should shift resources currently wasted on LASD to investments in the social determinants of safety—such as housing and economic security—to improve community safety in the AV overall.



A. Dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline

School safety for all

CTC-AV members want to end the school-to-prison pipeline through three primary solutions: removing LASD deputies from AVUHSD campuses, ending racially biased school discipline, and decriminalizing conduct that should be addressed through non-punitive community safety solutions.

AVUHSD should end its contract with LASD, including its practice of stationing deputies at high schools, so that teachers or administrators can stop relying on deputies to solve

problems they are not well-suited to manage.¹⁰² Instead, the district should invest in services that fulfill all students' needs, including behavioral health support, culturally relevant education, and after-school programs.

Students and parents also report that school facilities need serious repairs and maintenance is lagging: some bathroom stalls have no doors or toilet paper. These are only

some of the priorities that better meet student needs and are clearly more important than LASD's contract.

“Instead of having sheriffs in schools, we should have real mentors that reflect our students.”

— Community member

Research shows that racially biased law enforcement patrol activities inflict significant harms on communities of color, including, but not limited to, physical harm through uses of force, dehumanization, and psychological and emotional trauma.¹⁰³ It also leads to worse educational and behavioral health outcomes and, all too often, incarceration.¹⁰⁴

The cities of Palmdale and Lancaster should also end their contracts with LASD. Because both cities are part of LA County, they should receive law enforcement services as part of LASD's jurisdiction. The contracts are unnecessary and, because of existing bias, result in over-policing of community members of color.

Finally, the City of Lancaster should eliminate its new police department. For youth of color, its existence represents a third layer of law enforcement, in addition to the deputies already contracted with the city and the AVUHSD contract. Given existing racial bias in the deputies' behavior, this inflicts an unfair burden on the community's youth of color.

End racially biased suspensions and expulsions

AVUHSD should end its practice of suspending and expelling students for a wide range of activities that should instead be addressed through positive behavioral interventions and supports. Over-reliance on school discipline does not make AVUHSD safer. Rather, it

“Fifteen to 20 years ago, Latinos and African Americans were still being suspended at higher rates. The infrastructure was designed for that. If we don't dismantle the infrastructure, we're gonna have the same outcomes.”

— Community member

imposes a disproportionate burden on Black students and students with disabilities by making them far more likely to be pushed out of school and into the criminal legal system than white students.

AVUHSD's reliance on racially biased suspensions and expulsions makes its schools function more

like the criminal legal system by focusing on punishment and exclusion rather than fulfilling students' needs and providing culturally relevant education.¹⁰⁵

Decriminalize school discipline

Beyond suspensions and expulsions, youth of color in AVUHSD also have to contend with deputy stops and searches for relatively minor issues that would be better addressed through non-punishment alternatives to law enforcement.

Much like AVUHSD's over-reliance on zero-tolerance policies for age-appropriate behavior, LASD deputies treat youth of color like adults through disproportionate stops and ineffective searches. The reasons for these stops are often trivial. Talking out of turn, doodling on a desk, smoking marijuana, and school yard fights are nothing new. Yet AVUHSD uses these issues, and the deputy stops that follow, as grounds to remove Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children from school and place them in juvenile detention facilities. This wastes public resources because it fails to improve school and community safety. AVUHSD and the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster should reinvest those dollars in evidence-based solutions outlined below.

B. Justice reinvestment

AV community members want AVUHSD and the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster to decrease wasteful spending on school pushout and criminalization and increase investments in equity- and care-centered education and community safety solutions. They have expressed concerns about the quality of educational instruction as well as school infrastructure and maintenance.

Hire more teachers, counselors, and behavioral health professionals

AV community members have a strong interest in increasing the number of teachers and academic counselors because ample research shows that lower student-to-teacher and student-to-counselor ratios correlate with better educational outcomes. Reallocating policing funds to pay for culturally responsive mentors improves student safety, engagement, and outcomes.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, to address conduct concerns, AV residents believe AVUHSD should focus on behavioral health supports, such as counselors and therapists. Addressing student

mental health improves academic success, social-emotional development, and reduces pushout.¹⁰⁷ AVUHSD should also hire counselors to specifically focus on supporting foster youth. This includes annually reviewing their academic records to ensure they stay on-track to graduate and providing additional academic support for foster youth who are behind. In addition, AVUHSD should ensure that foster youth receive partial credits toward graduation and that equity and life challenges are meaningfully considered.

“We need student supports. When students are acting undesirable, there’s a root cause. We need mental health supports for the whole family.”

— Community member

Create positive school environments

AVUHSD should also expand investments in positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), a framework for supporting students' behavioral, academic, social, emotional, and mental health.¹⁰⁸ Research shows that PBIS improves student behavior, academic success, school climate, teacher health, and wellbeing.¹⁰⁹ Examples include establishing clear expectations, restorative justice processes, rewards systems, and more comfortable classroom design.¹¹⁰ AVUHSD should also establish peace-building programs at schools and integrate students' parents and relatives into school safety programs.

Provide wraparound services and support students beyond schools

Palmdale and Lancaster would benefit from building more after-school, weekend, and summer programs for young people. Compared to other regions in LA County, the AV lacks access to base-building organizations that can provide youth with chances to get in-



involved in their communities.¹¹¹ AV residents also need resources to build multi-year mentorship programs run by community-based organizations. Providing mentorship to youth is critical and an important driver of youth success.¹¹² Community members say students have insufficient access to productive activities beyond schools, such as sports, cultural or civic programs.

In addition, AV residents want more wraparound services to support youth and families with complex needs. This includes providing greater access to affordable housing, quality jobs with pay that exceeds living costs, and quality health care. Foster youth should also receive specialized support, such as ensuring they have a choice to remain at their current school when their foster placement changes, and providing foster youth with additional funding to cover school transportation costs.

CONCLUSION

All residents in the AV deserve safety. This means they should not only be free from violence by law enforcement, but also have access to upstream drivers of safety, such as economic security, housing security, and equitable education. This does not happen in the AV for youth of color and youth with disabilities. Instead, unfair treatment from deputies, unfair policies in the school district, and racial bias deprive them of the opportunity to pursue safe, prosperous lives.

Instead of quality schools, parks, and playgrounds, they often get handcuffs, detention, suspensions, and expulsions. Data show that, beyond education, AV residents of color often struggle to make ends meet and experience worse outcomes than white people in other sectors, such as housing and employment.

Collectively, inequities in education, treatment by law enforcement, and the social determinants of safety push youth of color and youth with disabilities out of schools and into the school-to-prison pipeline, reaping devastating life consequences in the form of mental, physical, and emotional trauma, as well as poverty and incarceration.

To resolve these harms, Palmdale, Lancaster, and the AVUHSD should reinvest dollars routinely wasted on policing and punishment into positive behavioral interventions and equity and care-based community safety solutions. This would go a long way to make the AV a safer, more prosperous place for all residents.



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