



# Centering Students and Families: Mandated Reporting Reform in Los Angeles County Schools

October 21, 2024 | Almansor Court



Los Angeles County Office of Education | LA COUNTY MANDATED SUPPORTING INITIATIVE | GREATER LOS ANGELES EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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# Mandated Reporting Reform: The Pivotal Role of Educators

**Dr. Debra Duardo**, Los Angeles County Office of Education  
**Alicia Garoupa**, Los Angeles County Office of Education



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# Thank You



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**“There’s so much smoke,  
my people can’t see the fire.”**

**Brandon T. Nichols**

Director, Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services

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## Summit Agenda

### Welcome

- Mandated Reporting Reform: The Pivotal Role of Educators

### Understanding the Problem

- The Case for Mandated Reporting Reform
- Learnings from Mandated Reporters in Education

### Now that We Understand the Problem, What Are the Tools to Address It?

- Systems Transformation: How We Get There
- Supporting Effective Implementation

### Lunch & Keynote

### Now that We Understand the Problem, What Will We Do About It?

- Child Welfare is a Partner In Reform
- Implementing Reform within Districts and Schools

### Next Steps & Closing Remarks



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## Summit Objectives

### Build Awareness

- Build foundational awareness and a shared vision that centers students and families through mandated reporting reform.
- Establish shared understanding that **Assembly Bill 2085 (AB 2085)** is governing law that revised the definition of general neglect, while codifying the important distinction between neglect and poverty-related challenges.

### Foster Engagement

- Describe the tools and training available to equip mandated reporters in education to make more accurate decisions in reporting child abuse and neglect, as well as how strategically to implement AB 2085 training and support within districts and schools.
- Support districts and schools in both assessing readiness and implementing this transformational change.

### Inspire Action

- Inspire leaders in education on how to implement reform as transformational and strategic to meet the needs of all students and their families.

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# Understanding the Problem



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# The Case for Mandated Reporting Reform

**Alicia Garoupa**, Los Angeles County Office of Education  
**Dr. Tamara Hunter**, Los Angeles County Mandated Supporting Initiative



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# **A process for alerting DCFS of vulnerable children who may be unsafe is a necessity**

**The current model is deeply flawed, misguided, and harmful**

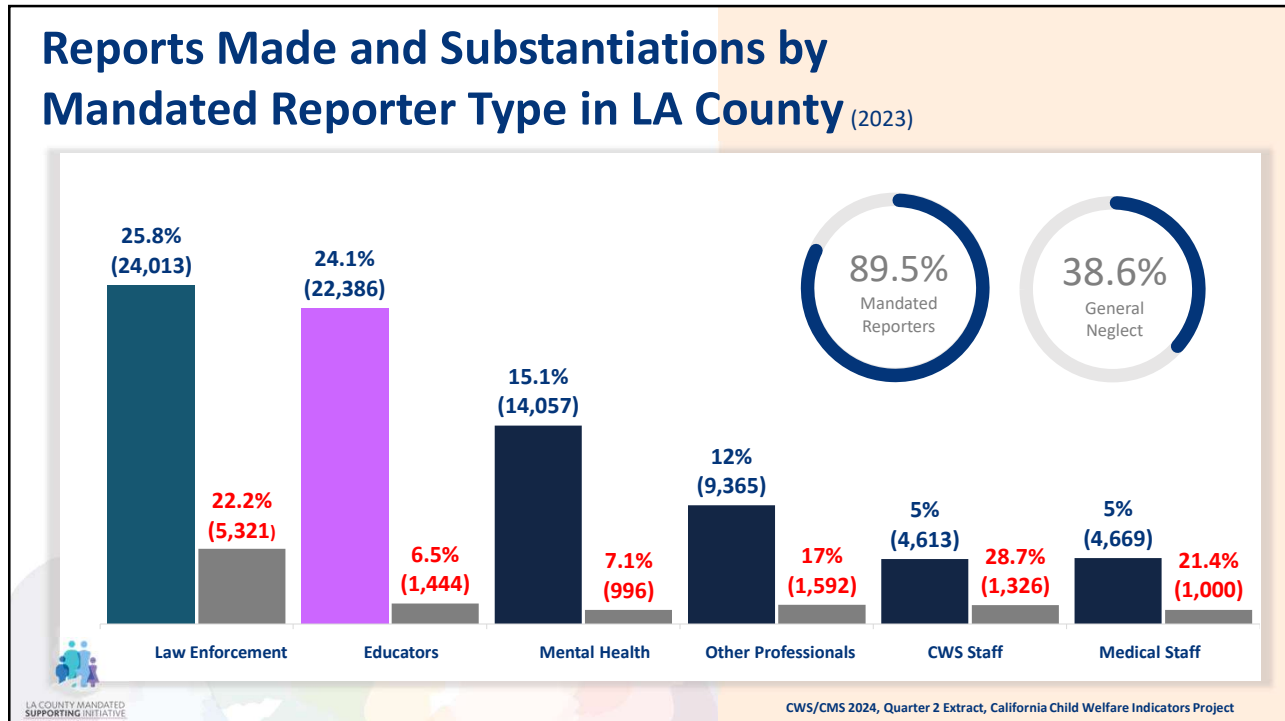


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**Most mandated reports of suspected child abuse and neglect are not substantiated**



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**Overreporting has significant consequences**

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**Criminalization of Poverty**

- More visible and vulnerable

**Fear + Trauma + Toxic Stress**




- Weaponized family separation
- Generational trauma
- Compounding effect

**Disrupted Trust**

- Chilling effect on help seeking

**Overburdening the System**

- Fewer resources for children who are truly unsafe

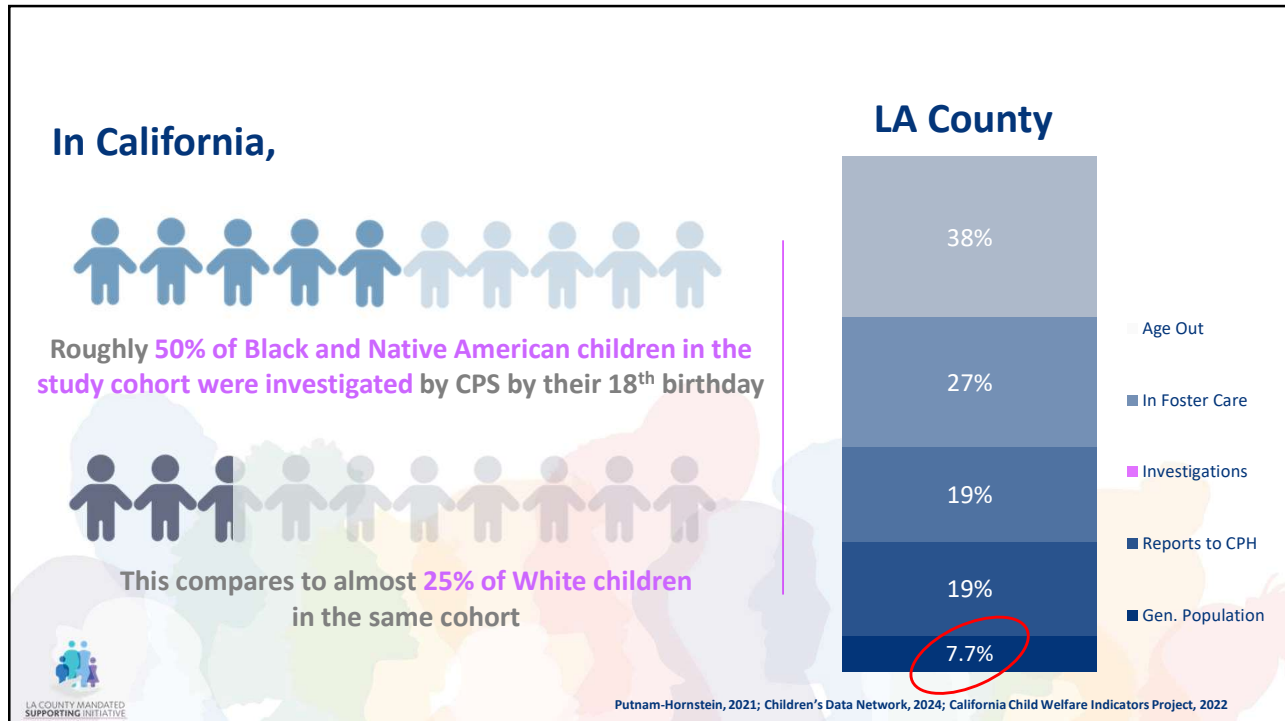
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**Mandated reporting is a driver  
of racial disproportionality in the  
child welfare system**



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**The current system of mandated reporting is not designed to prevent maltreatment by helping families who are in need**

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**No conclusive evidence that mandated reporting prevents most forms of maltreatment**

- Some evidence linking to prevention of sexual abuse





**Current system of mandated reporting is reactive**

- Designed to offer a binary choice (report/don't report), **after** maltreatment is suspected to have occurred



**Many mandated reporters make reports to DCFS just to get help for families in need**

- 65%** of LA County mandated reporters who made reports without suspecting child abuse or neglect indicated that “Making a report was the best way to connect a family to needed services”

Evident Change, 2023

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**Many mandated reporters feel, and indeed are, ill-equipped to make sound reporting decisions**

*This results in overreporting and underreporting*



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### Training is Inadequate

- Doesn't provide a basic level of competence
  - *Reasonable suspicion threshold is confusing*
- Doesn't provide concrete guidance
- Fear-based; prioritizes organizational risk aversion



### Multiple Factors Influence Reporting Decisions

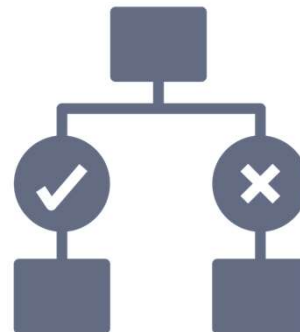
- Bias, as traditionally conceptualized, e.g., *race, class, etc.*
- Additional cognitive biases, e.g., *personal experiences with maltreatment, perception of DCFS, type and severity of suspected maltreatment, etc.*
- Fear of personal and organizational liability
- Conditioning to overreport/underreport



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### Evidence from the field of decision analysis or “decision science” has been disregarded

- Decision support processes and tools improve decision quality
- Consultation can be an effective strategy
  - Peer/colleague consultation
  - Multidisciplinary teaming models



**Few professions expect consequential decisions to be made in isolation, yet we expect this of mandated reporters**



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**We've unintentionally created a system that pits the best interests of mandated reporters and their organizations against the best interests of the families we serve**



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## **Assembly Bill (AB) 2085**



1. Child's parent/caregiver negligently failed to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision

2. No physical injury to the child has occurred

**AND**

**(3) Child is at substantial risk of suffering serious physical harm or serious illness**

**(4) Parent's economic disadvantage is NOT general neglect**



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# Legislative Intent: Assembly Bill (AB) 2085

## Legislative intent is to:

- Eliminate overreporting due to bias based on race and class
- Rectify conflation of poverty with general neglect
- Address racial disproportionality
- Decrease the strain on the child welfare system

**Is not only the law, but presents tremendous opportunity to further whole family approaches in education!**



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# Learnings from Mandated Reporters in Education

**Phil Decter**, Evident Change



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Discovery research methods

Mandated Reporter Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2,100+ responses</li> <li>• Highest representation: school personnel (37%) and mental health (18%)</li> </ul>
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eight focus groups (medical providers, Department of Children and Family Services [DCFS] staff, community providers, etc.)</li> <li>• 68 participants total</li> </ul>
Administrative Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CWS/CMS data, 2019–2023</li> </ul>
Policy and Training Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than 15 materials (Assembly Bill 2085, Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act, Los Angeles Unified School District policy, etc.)</li> </ul>
Listening Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple Listening Sessions held with over 145 members of the Inglewood and Greater Los Angeles community between May-September 2023 community to understand experiences with mandated reporting:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Castillo Consulting Partners (2023). <i>From Mandated Reporting to Mandated Supporting: A Community Vision to Get Families the Resources They Need to Thrive Together.</i></li> <li>○ Bear, L. (2023). <i>Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Educator Listening Sessions.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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IS REPORTING WORKING AS IT IS NOW?

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OVERREPORTING

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## SURVEY QUESTION TO UNDERSTAND POTENTIAL FOR OVERREPORTS TO DCFS

Have you ever made a report to the Child Protection Hotline for reasons other than concerns about potential child abuse or neglect?

Yes → Overreported

No

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## OVERREPORTING

17% of educator respondents answered that they made a report without concerns about potential child abuse or neglect



*“As mandated reporters, we are basically incentivized to report, report, report.”*

– *Listening Sessions*  
Castillo Consulting Partners (2023).

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## Liability is a key reports driver

**66%** of those educators who reported when no concerns were present about child abuse or neglect cited wanting to protect themselves or their organization from liability



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## EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS

*“I would rather help a family than report them. But if there is even a little suspicion that there is abuse or they need help and I don’t report them, my job is on the line.” – Los Angeles Mandated Reporter*

Participants in the Educator Listening Sessions had difficulty recalling the specifics of the mandated child abuse training. They conveyed that their high priority concern was to “report, not to investigate,” along with their “fear of a fine, imprisonment and/or loss of their credential or employment, if they failed to report.”

Over 50% of the mandated reporters interviewed during the listening sessions believed that the current mandated reporter training “evoked a level of fear.”

– *Educator Listening Sessions*  
Castillo Consulting Partners (2023). Bear, L. (2023).

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## REPORTING IS USED TO ACCESS SERVICES

*“Oftentimes, the only way to get in touch with the family is because a referral has been called on them. . . I worry that children will fall through the cracks if we don’t have that [report].”*

—Focus group participant

*“[The] family needed resources, and I had already exhausted all my resources.”*

—Survey respondent

**73%** of educators who made a report without having concerns said they were worried about a child or family and were not sure what else to do

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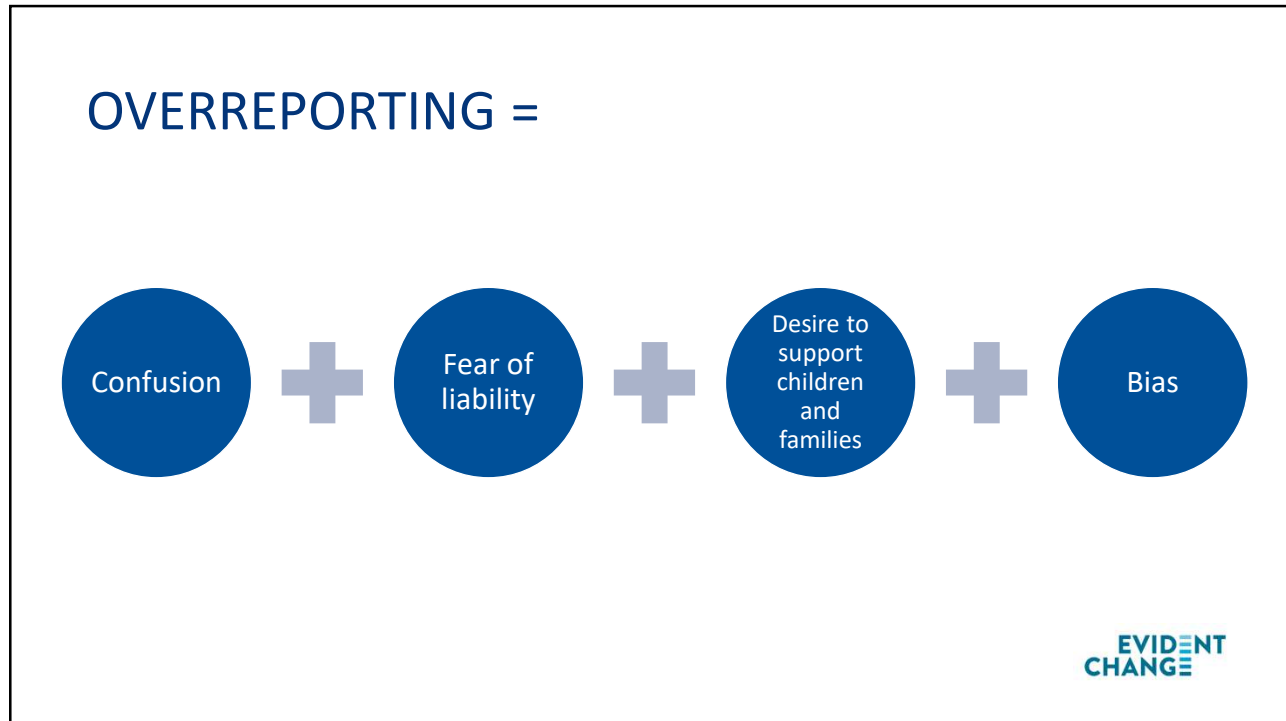
## EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS

*“Most of us have no idea what happens after we make a report. And from what I can tell, my intent to help by reporting is actually leading to harm, which is the exact opposite of why I called to report in the first place.”*

– Educator Listening Sessions  
Castillo Consulting Partners (2023).

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## SURVEY QUESTION TO UNDERSTAND POTENTIAL FOR UNDERREPORTS TO DCFS

Have you ever had a concern about potential child abuse or neglect and did not report it to the Child Protection Hotline?

Yes → Underreported

No

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## Underreporting

13% of educator respondents  
said that they did not report  
despite having concerns about  
potential child abuse or neglect



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## REPORTERS FEARED HARMING THE RELATIONSHIP THROUGH REPORTING



**39%** of reporters who did not report a concern felt reporting would have negative consequences for the child or family

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## EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS

*Several Mandated Reporters in Education described how stressful it was when the student asked about “why a report was filed” and/or shared the “disruption caused because of a report filed.” The Mandated Reporter then did not believe that reports that were filed were “appropriate.”*

– Educator Listening Sessions

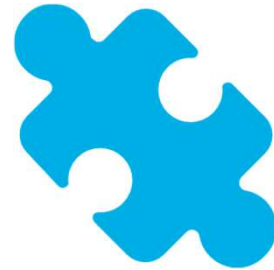
Bear, L. (2023).

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## REPORTERS STRUGGLE TO MAKE DECISIONS DUE TO A LACK OF INFORMATION

**67%** of educators who did not report when a child abuse or neglect concern was present felt they did not have sufficient information



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## UNDERREPORTING =



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## WHAT WE LEARNED



Reporting impacts a huge proportion of LA County's children



Reporting has a profound impact on the relationship between reporter and family



Reporters are struggling with how to make this decision



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## THE CURRENT SYSTEM DOES NOT WORK FOR REPORTERS OR FAMILIES

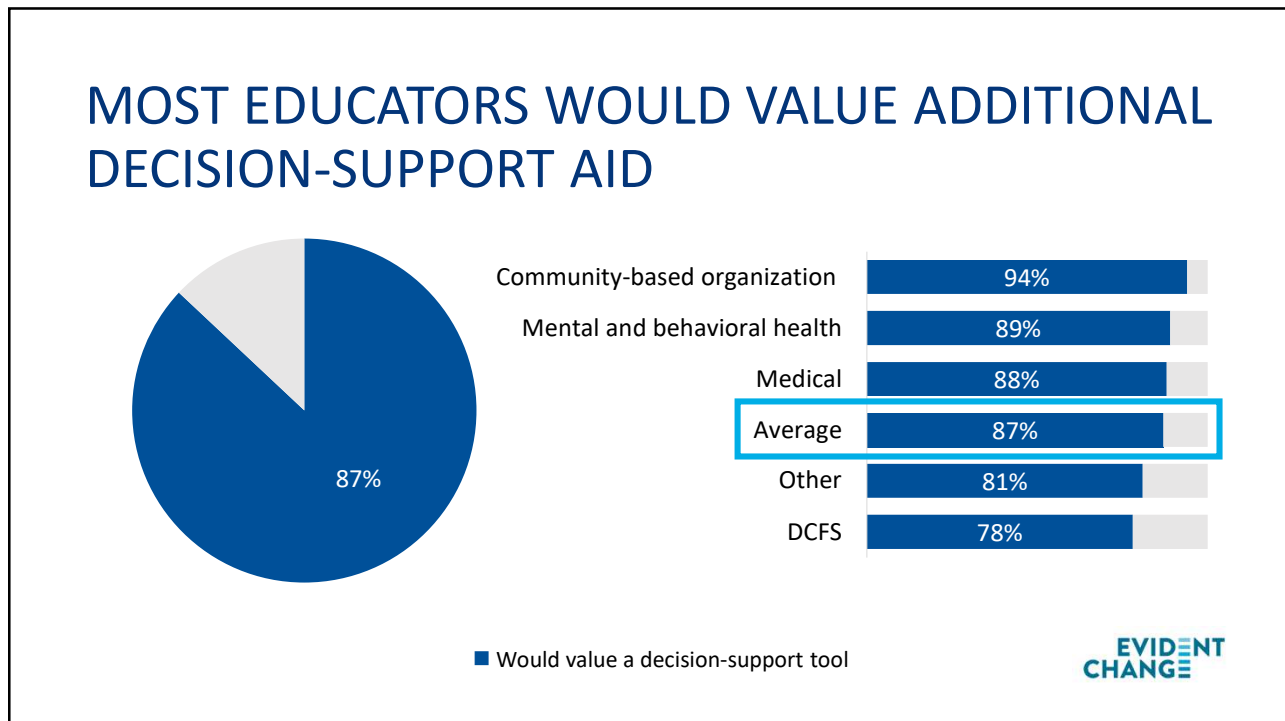


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## EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS

*Several participants in the Educator Listening Session expressed a need to receive additional guidance and/or assistance for school district to provide a “support system,” an “expert” that the staff member would be able to contact in order to further consult with, and/or provide family resources for circumstances as they pertain to suspected child abuse.”*

– Educator Listening Sessions

Bear, L. (2023).



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### Now that We Understand the Problem, What Are Tools to Address it?



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# Systems Transformation: How We Get There

**Dr. Tamara Hunter**, Los Angeles County Mandated Supporting Initiative






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## LA County Mandated Supporting Initiative (MSI)

In May 2023, the LA County Board of Supervisors passed the “Moving from Mandated Reporting to Mandated Supporting” motion, directing reform

**Broad coalition of partners working to transform to a model which:**

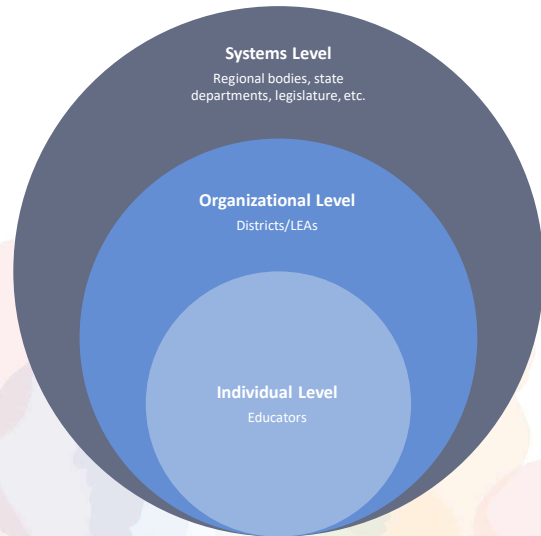
- **prevents** child harm and promotes family well-being
- provides high-quality **supportive services to families** in need to **prevent** maltreatment
- eliminates mandatory reporting as a driver of **racial disproportionality**

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# Levels of Transformation

- Problems cannot be solely attributed to individual-level reporting practices
- Transformation must occur at the individual, organizational, and systems-levels
  - Individual mandated reporters
  - Districts/LEAs and school sites
  - Regional, county, state, and national systems



**We can all effectuate change regardless of our positionality**



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# Liability



Liability is a real **and** valid concern

Notion that changing the current model = increased risk is a **fallacy**

A better trained and well-supported workforce **reduces** organizational risk



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# Supporting Effective Implementation

Justin Lee, Casey Family Programs







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## A Toolkit for Action

- 

**District Readiness Checklist**

Helps your district team identify a plan to implement AB 2085 and its assorted tools.
- 

**AB 2085 Training Supplement and Mandated Reporters in Education Module**

E-learning to train staff on AB 2085 statutory requirements and tools to support reporters and families.
- 

**AB 2085 Decision-Support Process Overview**

5-step decision-support guide designed as a desk reference for reporters to help them fulfill AB 2085 responsibilities and easily connect families to supports.
- 

**AB 2085 General Neglect Decision Support Tree for Mandated Reporters**

4-question decision support tool to provide reporters with guidance on making a reporting decision based on AB 2085 requirements.
- 

**Supporting Families Website with Family Resource Finder**

“One stop shop” for reporters and families to easily find services and supports in their neighborhoods.
- 

**LACOE.edu/Mandated Supporting**

Designed to raise awareness and connect LEA leaders and mandated reporters in education with relevant supports, materials, and resources.
- 

**Technical Assistance and Support**

Based on capacity and need, technical assistance and support may be provided to interested sites to support implementation.






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# District Readiness Checklist

**District Readiness Checklist**

Educators and Mandated Reporters in your district play a critical and unique role in supporting the safety and well-being of their students and their families. Whole child/family approaches in education enhance educational equity, and mandated reporting reform is one example of a whole family approach.

In 2023, Assembly Bill (AB) 2085 narrowed the legal definition of general neglect and codified the important distinction between neglect and poverty-related challenges. The AB 2085 Mandated Reporter Training Supplement teaches Mandated Reporters how to comply with this law. It also introduces a reformed approach to mandated reporting that continues to prioritize child safety, while promoting critical thinking, unbiased decision-making, and preventing general neglect through provision of supportive resources to families in need.

This checklist found below provides an overview of the steps that a district and/or any local educational agency (LEA) should adopt to implement the guidance provided in the AB 2085 Mandated Reporter Training Supplement and reform its approach to mandated reporting. It is intended to help districts/LEAs assess organizational readiness, identify gaps, and move forward with confidence.

**Instructions:**  
Review each section with members of your identified leadership team. Answer the questions, taking into consideration the additional guidance in blue. For those sections with answers of "in progress" and "no," list proposed action steps in the box provided to address any gaps. Consider using this tool at regular intervals with your team to track implementation progress.

READINESS QUESTIONS	YES	IN PROGRESS	NO
<b>Project Development: Establish a well-structured Core Project Team and comprehensive plan to guide mandated reporting reform from design to implementation.</b>			
<b>1. Has a diverse Core Project Team been established?</b> This team will lead planning for and implementation of the training and the new approach to mandated reporting. The team should include representatives such as a district/LEA administrator, both in areas such as student and family services, human resources, and certificated and classified staff. (See table at the end of this document.)			
<b>2. Are key stakeholders involved in the planning process?</b> The Core Project Team should regularly inform and seek input from other stakeholder groups, such as the school board, labor partners, community-based organization partners, community advisory councils, and other student and family advisory groups. (See table at the end of this document.)			
<b>3. Is there a detailed and approved implementation plan?</b> The implementation plan should outline project goals, resources, timelines, resources required, and roles and responsibilities of team members.			
<b>Action steps for Project Development:</b>			

**Stakeholder Engagement Planning Tool**

Use the following table to identify partners and stakeholders who need to be engaged in planning for implementation of the AB 2085 Mandated Reporter Training Supplement and reform of your district's/LEA's approach to mandated reporting. Individuals representing these groups may become part of the Core Project Team, be consulted for input during the implementation process, or both.

Stakeholder Group	Names and Contact	
	Core Project Team	Inform and Consult
District Administration		
School/Governing Board		
Labor Partners		
School Administration		
Human Resources		
Student Support Services		
Certificated Staff		
Classified Staff		
Community Schools Councils		
Community-Based Partners		
Families		
Business		



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# AB 2085 Training Supplement E-Learning and Training Supplement Module for Mandated Reporters in Education

**Implementing Assembly Bill (AB) 2085: Guidance for Mandated Reporters in Los Angeles County**

START

**Los Angeles County Office of Education**  
 Serving Students • Supporting Communities • Leading Educators

**AB 2085:**  
 Supplemental Training Module for Mandated Reporters in Education



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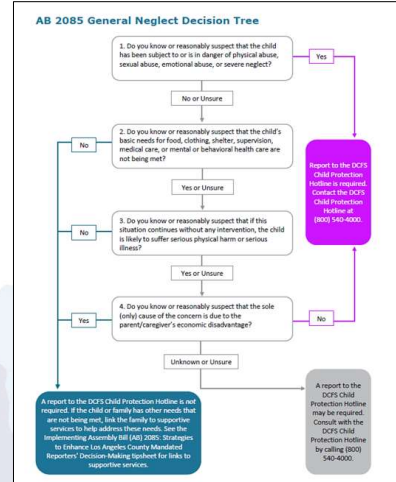
# AB 2085 Decision-Support Process Overview and AB 2085 General Neglect Decision Support Tree

## Five-step decision support process

1. Clarify
2. Consider
3. Consult
4. Complete
5. Decide

## General Neglect Decision Tree

- “Low Tech”
- Recommendations:
  1. Make a report to DCFS
  2. Consult with DCFS
  3. Link the family to supportive services if they are in need



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# Family Resource Finder SupportingFamilies.LAcounty.gov

The screenshot shows the "Family Resource Finder" website. At the top, it says "MANDATED SUPPORTING INITIATIVE (MSI)" and "Supporting Families in Los Angeles County". There are two main questions: "Are you a Mandated Reporter seeking to connect families to community-based supportive resources?" and "Are you a Parent or Caregiver seeking supportive resources for your family?". A prominent button says "Find Supportive Resources" with a "Get Started" button below it. A note at the bottom states: "Note: Your personal information will not be saved or shared without your consent." Navigation links for "Español" and "About" are in the top right corner.



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# Supporting Families: MSI and LACOE Websites

SupportingFamilies.LAcounty.gov



LACOE.edu/MandatedSupporting



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## What's next? Recommendations for Action



- ✓ Get familiar with the tools and resources available at SupportingFamilies.LAcounty.gov
- ✓ Selected staff complete the on-line AB 2085 training
- ✓ Convene a working group to complete the district readiness checklist and develop a training and support rollout plan
- ✓ Attend LACOE office hours for consultation and support



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## Stay Connected!

LA County Mandated Supporting Initiative

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**Visit:** [SupportingFamilies.LAcounty.gov](https://SupportingFamilies.LAcounty.gov)  
& [LACOE.edu/MandatedSupporting](https://LACOE.edu/MandatedSupporting)