Juvenile Collaborative Court Models:
Introduction

Introduction to juvenile collaborative courts and this series of briefings detailing various juvenile collaborative court models
Judicial Council of California

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Introduction
The Collaborative Justice Courts Advisory Committee of the Judicial Council of California makes recommendations to the council for developing collaborative justice courts, improving case processing, and overseeing the evaluation of these courts throughout the state. As part of the committee’s purview, it also works to provide information about collaborative courts to relevant stakeholders around the state.

This is the first of a series of briefings providing an overview of juvenile collaborative courts, including what types of courts exist, how they work, and how they can be replicated. These briefings are not intended to be an exhaustive review of the research; rather, they are meant to be an overview. Like their adult counterparts, juvenile collaborative courts are geared toward high-risk, high-needs individuals whose offenses stem from an underlying, treatable cause. Juvenile collaborative courts take into account adolescent brain development, unique ways that substance abuse and mental health issues manifest in youth, and other issues unique to youth, including the original rehabilitative nature of juvenile court.

Briefings in this series will cover information on juvenile drug courts, juvenile mental health courts, juvenile domestic violence courts, girls’/CSEC courts, youth courts, and dependency drug courts. The last two briefings in this series include information about starting a juvenile collaborative court model and potential impacts of new laws on juvenile collaborative courts.

What Is a Juvenile Collaborative Court?
Collaborative courts, sometimes referred to as problem-solving courts, combine judicial supervision with intensive social and treatment services to offenders in lieu of detention. Collaborative courts can be found in many court types, including adult, juvenile, and dependency. Collaborative courts have a dedicated calendar and judge for specific types of offenders (e.g., mental health courts for offenders with mental illness, drug courts for offenders with substance abuse issues). Collaborative justice principles include a multidisciplinary, nonadversarial team approach with involvement by the court, attorneys, law enforcement, and community treatment and service agencies to address offenders’ complex social and behavioral problems. Due to the unique nature of proceedings involving youth, a juvenile collaborative court team may also include schools, after-school programs, and family systems services. Attorneys, probation officers, judges, and sometimes others can refer youth from traditional juvenile court to a collaborative court at various points in the juvenile justice process. Although all collaborative courts follow a similar model based on the National Association of

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Drug Court Professionals’ *The 10 Key Components of a Drug Court*,3, 4 each court operates in a slightly different way with varying eligibility criteria, requirements, length, types of sanctions and incentives, services provided, and graduation criteria.

Once accepted into a collaborative court, youth are required to participate in appropriate treatment and services relevant to the court (e.g., substance abuse treatment for drug court, mental health treatment for mental health court). They are also closely supervised in the community by the probation department and are required to attend regular review hearings at the court. Once they successfully complete the court program, their charges are often dismissed and probation is terminated. Some courts also encourage youth to submit the required petition to seal their records when they turn 18.

Generally, high-risk juveniles have the most to gain from juvenile collaborative courts. The risk-needs-responsivity theory indicates that responses to offenders should correspond to the individual offender’s risk and needs, which are determined using appropriate assessments.5 Thus, the higher the risk level of the offender, the more intense the services and supervision response to that individual offender should be. Other research has shown that providing too much supervision for low-risk offenders can actually result in increased recidivism and poor outcomes.6, 7 Collaborative courts provide high levels of services and supervision. Other evidence-based approaches can affect how well juvenile collaborative courts work as well. In addition to serving the appropriate youth in terms of risk and needs, research has shown that the “dosage,” or amount and length of a program, can impact the program’s effectiveness.8

### Types of Juvenile Collaborative Courts

Of the more than 400 collaborative justice courts in California, more than 100 are juvenile collaborative courts. Juvenile collaborative courts are in more than 30 of California’s 58 counties and include juvenile drug court, juvenile mental health court, juvenile domestic violence/youth violence court, girls’ court, and youth court. These courts target their services to youth.

A different type of juvenile collaborative court targets its services primarily to the parents: dependency/family drug court. These courts are included in this series because of their
importance and impact on the youth involved in the families going through the dependency/family drug court.

Each of these courts is described in this series of briefings, including how they work, their prevalence, their effectiveness, and their cost benefits. One factor to note in examining how the courts work is that there are varying definitions of recidivism. Researchers may define recidivism as re-arrest, reconviction, or a probation violation, and the varying definitions can make comparing studies challenging.9, 10

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1 The Center for Families, Children & the Courts maintains a roster of all collaborative courts in California at www.courts.ca.gov/programs-collabjustice.htm. Court data are voluntarily provided, so the roster is a living document that changes regularly as the agency learns of courts opening and closing around the state.
2 The dependency drug court is the only model listed in this document that deviates from this overall description. In a dependency drug court, the treatment’s focus is on the parent, not necessarily on the juvenile.
4 In addition to The 10 Key Components of Drug Courts, the Judicial Council’s Collaborative Justice Courts Advisory Committee adopted an 11th “essential component” of collaborative justice courts in California: Emphasizing team and individual commitment to cultural competency. This component is described in Judicial Council of California, Center for Court Innovation, California’s Collaborative Justice Courts: Building a Problem-Solving Judiciary (2005). Retrieved from www.courts.ca.gov/documents/California_Story.pdf.