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UCLA Report Finds Two out of Three California School Districts Reduce Out-of-School Suspensions as Discipline Gap Narrows

“Disruption/Willful Defiance” Suspensions Still Account for Largest Share of the Problem

Los Angeles – Out-of-school suspensions have fallen significantly in two-thirds of all California districts, according to a first time analysis of each district’s trend data conducted by researchers at the Center for Civil Rights Remedies (CCRR) at UCLA’s Civil Rights Project. The report, *Keeping California Kids in School*, analyzes suspension trends in the 745 California school districts that reported discipline data in 2011-12 and 2012-13. The 500 districts reporting suspension decreases enroll 4.7 million students while the 245 districts with increases represent 1.2 million students. Even among improving districts, however, many districts report extraordinarily large racial gaps.

These findings come just as each California school district is finalizing its required Local Control Accountability Plan, which sets goals for improving school climate as a condition of receiving funding increases through the state’s recent reform of its school funding system, known as the Local Control Funding Formula.

CCRR’s report showed that suspension rates fell among all racial and ethnic groups in California, with the largest declines for Blacks and Latinos. The report focuses on changes in suspension rates and racial/ethnicity gaps at the local level and makes available a sortable data file, so users can easily see how their district compares to others.

“These are unquestionably positive results. District leaders are beginning to understand that extreme ‘suspension-first’ policies neither improve school climate nor boost academic achievement. However, much work remains to be done,” said Daniel J. Losen, director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies and lead author of the study. “Suspension rates still remain far too high and racial disparities far too wide. Students are sent home on a daily basis for minor infractions, like tardiness and talking out of turn. And the worst thing is that suspensions don’t improve classroom productivity, they just push students away from school and toward dropping out.”

The report recommended that all districts follow the example of the Los Angeles Unified School District and eliminate all suspensions for “Disruption/Willful Defiance,” a vague, catch-all category used to

justify more than one-third of California suspensions. Defiance offenses include talking back to a teacher or not paying attention.

The researchers looked at the districts with the largest overall suspension gaps for Blacks and Latinos and found that even though Willful Defiance is just one of 24 categories for which a student can be suspended, that minor offense category alone accounted for nearly half the racial/ethnic gap.

The UCLA report also pointed out that federal guidance to districts from the Department of Justice and the Office for Civil Rights makes clear that civil rights of children are likely violated when hard to justify discipline policies cause harm to some groups of children more than others.

“Excluding students from school for minor offenses defies what research says about sound educational practice and healthy school climates,” said Losen.

The California districts study is released on the heels of the Council of State Government’s national Consensus Report representing the views of law enforcement, school administrators, unions, researchers and advocates. The Consensus Report is filled with concrete examples of more effective alternatives to out-of-school suspensions that districts drafting their LCAP plans should find useful. The Consensus Report may be viewed online at <http://csgjusticecenter.org>.

The UCLA report recommended several concrete action steps to improve school climate and reduce racial/ethnic disparities including: using data to set goals and evaluate school climate, revising school discipline codes, investing in more effective alternatives and interventions, and training teachers and leaders so reform strategies can be implemented effectively.

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About the Civil Rights Project at UCLA

Founded in 1996 by former Harvard professors Gary Orfield and Christopher Edley, Jr., The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (CRP) is now co-directed by [Orfield](#) and [Patricia Gándara](#), professors at UCLA. Its mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the United States. It has monitored the success of American schools in equalizing opportunity and has been the authoritative source of segregation statistics. CRP has commissioned more than [400 studies](#), published more than [15 books](#) and issued numerous reports from authors at universities and research centers across the country. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its [2003 Grutter v. Bollinger](#) decision upholding affirmative action and in Justice Breyer’s dissent (joined by three other Justices) to its 2007 [Parents Involved](#) decision, cited the Civil Rights Project’s research. The CRP’s Center for Civil Rights Remedies, which conducted this research, has issued groundbreaking national reports on school discipline and will soon publish a volume of new research on remedies to the discipline gap. This work was made possible with the support of The California Endowment.