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# **School Suspensions Cost California Billions**

## ***UCSB/UCLA Researchers Quantify Suspension-Related Economic Damage for All California School Districts; Statewide, Costs Reach \$2.7 Billion for One Graduating Class***

### **Researchers: More Suspensions Lead to Lower Graduation Rates, Lower Tax Revenue and Higher Taxpayer Cost for Criminal Justice, Welfare, Health Care, and More**

**LOS ANGELES**--A research study released today shows that the overuse of suspensions in California schools is harming student achievement and graduation rates, and resulting in billions of dollars in economic damage. The study is the first to quantify the financial consequences of school suspensions down to the district level, reporting both the additional costs borne by taxpayers as a result of suspensions and the economic benefit lost to the state.

[\*The Hidden Cost of California's Harsh School Discipline: And the Localized Economic Benefits From Suspending Fewer High School Students\*](#) calculates the financial consequences of suspending students in each California school district with more than 100 students, and for the state as a whole. The study was authored by Dr. Russell W. Rumberger, Director of UCSB's California Dropout Research Project, and Daniel J. Losen, Director of UCLA's Civil Rights Project at the Center for Civil Rights Remedies. The lead author, Dr. Rumberger, is a nationally acclaimed scholar and is widely considered the state's leading expert on the causes of student dropout.

"More high school suspensions mean fewer graduates. And reduced graduation rates damage California's fiscal condition and hurt our economy as a whole. It's tragic; it's bad economics; and it's entirely avoidable," said Dr. Russell W. Rumberger.

Rumberger and Losen followed a single cohort of California 10th grade students through high school for three years to develop the study. They discovered that students who were suspended had only a 60 percent graduation rate, far below the 83 percent graduation rate for non-suspended students.

Researchers then controlled for other common predictors of dropping out of high school to isolate the unique effect of school suspensions. They concluded that suspensions alone result in a 6.5 percentage point drop in graduation rates.

Next, using well-established economic models, Rumberger and Losen determined the economic consequences of increased drop out resulting from school suspensions. They calculate a total statewide economic burden of \$2.7 billion over the lifetime of the single 10<sup>th</sup> grade cohort. The \$2.7 billion total includes \$809 million in direct fiscal costs to taxpayers, such as higher criminal justice costs and reduced

revenue generated, and \$1.9 billion in social costs, such as reduced economic productivity and higher health care expenses. A single non-graduate generates \$579,820 in economic losses over his or her lifetime, on average.

"This important research shows how suspensions increase dropout and cut lifelong earnings for affected students. It combines the talents of Russell Rumberger, the nation's leading scholar on dropout issues, and Daniel Losen whose work has had an enormous impact on cutting the improper use of suspensions to produce compelling data on costs of suspensions to students and communities," said Gary Orfield, Distinguished Research Professor of Education, Law, Political Science and Urban Planning and Co-Director of the Civil Rights Project.

The economic impact of school suspension varies widely by school district, with California's largest districts incurring the greatest losses. For example, over the lifetimes of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade cohort studied, suspensions in the Los Angeles Unified School District, California's largest, are estimated to result in \$148 million in economic damage. Suspensions in Fresno Unified are estimated to cost \$56 million; San Diego Unified will cost \$38 million. Suspensions in San Francisco Unified and San Juan Unified, California's 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> largest districts respectively, are expected to cost \$13 million each.

A research supplement to *The Hidden Costs of California's Harsh School Discipline* provides similar economic estimates for all 401 California school districts enrolling more than 100 students.

Cutting suspension rates by one percent for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade cohort studied would result in economic savings of \$180 million. A one percent drop at LAUSD alone would save California \$25 million.

The study also found that persistent racial and ethnic disparities continue to plague California school discipline systems. For example, 29.2 percent of Black students in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade cohort were suspended, more than twice the statewide average of 14.9 percent. Latino students were also disproportionately affected, with suspension rates of 16.2 percent.

Despite the high cost of suspension, co-author Daniel Losen says California is on the right track. He notes that statewide suspension rates have declined during the past three years and praises the state for designating school discipline as one of seven key state accountability indicators for statewide accountability and as part of the plan to meet federal requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The researchers hope that the findings estimating how much suspensions lower graduation rates encourage other states to follow California's lead in making school discipline a school performance accountability indicator pursuant to the federal Every Students Succeeds Act.

"California is a leader in addressing suspensions," says Losen. "During the past three years, California districts have increased their commitment to evidence-based alternatives to suspensions, such as restorative justice and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, or PBIS. School district Local Control Accountability Plans have emphasized these alternative approaches. This report shows why it is critically important that districts devote their Local Control funding toward effective alternatives to disciplinary exclusion."

Despite this progress, the authors agree that suspensions are still vastly overused in California, with devastating social and economic consequences. "Our research makes a direct correlation between

suspensions and dropout. In just one graduating year, 4,621 students failed to graduate from high school because they were suspended. Suspensions are resulting in huge negative consequences for California, and it is imperative to address them,” said Dr. Rumberger.

The authors recommend that California education leaders and individual school districts continue to make reducing suspensions a priority, and focus especially on eliminating racial and ethnic disparities. Also, they recommend increasing training and support for teachers about classroom management techniques and alternatives to suspension; greater transparency and public reporting about school suspension; and eliminating the use of suspension for disruption/defiance at all grade levels. Local Control Accountability Plans and the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act provide ideal opportunities to achieve these and other goals.

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*The full report, [The Hidden Cost of California’s Harsh School Discipline: And the Localized Economic Benefits from Suspending Fewer High School Students](#), and a [data supplement reporting on the economic effect of school suspension](#) for each California school district with more than 100 students are available [here](#).*

#### **About the California Dropout Research Project**

The California Dropout Research Project (CDRP) was established in December, 2006, to produce new and useful research that informs policymakers, educators, and the general public about the nature of the dropout crisis in California and to help the state develop a meaningful policy agenda to address the problem. To date, the project has produced 20 Research Reports and Policy Briefs addressing four facets of the issue: (1) the measurement and incidence of dropping out; (2) the social and economic costs for individuals and the state; (3) the short-term and long-term causes; and (4) possible solutions. The project has produced 22 Statistical Briefs that address more specific questions about the nature of the problem; 44 City Dropout Profiles of the impact of dropouts for all major cities in the state; and three web-based interactive graphs. The project also formed a Policy Committee—composed of researchers, policymakers, and educators—that issued a report on February 27, 2008, with a series of recommendations on what schools, districts, and the state should do to improve California’s high school graduation rate. The recommendations were incorporated into six bills introduced into the California legislature, and the governor signed four of them into law. The publications produced to date have been distributed in print to all superintendents and legislators in California and have been downloaded almost 90,000 times from the project website (<http://cdrpsb.org/>). The project is directed by Russell W. Rumberger, Professor Emeritus of Education, UC Santa Barbara.

#### **About the UCLA Civil Rights Project’s Center for Civil Rights Remedies**

The UCLA Civil Rights Project’s Center for Civil Rights Remedies (CCRR) is dedicated to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for children who have been discriminated against historically due to their race or ethnicity and who are frequently subjected to exclusionary practices such as disciplinary removal, over-representation in special education and reduced access to a college-prep curriculum. CCRR has issued numerous reports about the use of disciplinary exclusion in California’s schools, including the 2015 report, "Closing the School Discipline Gap in California: Signs of Progress." CCRR is an initiative of the Civil Rights Project (CRP)/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, at UCLA. Founded in 1996 by former Harvard professors [Gary Orfield](#) and Christopher Edley, Jr. 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.