



The Center for Civil Rights Remedies

at The Civil Rights Project | *Proyecto Derechos Civiles*

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Contact:
Daniel Losen
781-861-1222
losendan@gmail.com

Annette Majerowicz
847-977-4434
annette@behr-communications.com

California Students Lose 840,656 Days of Instruction Due to Suspensions

Despite Downward Trend, Experts Say Suspensions Still Vastly Overused; Disparities Contribute to State's Achievement Gap

Los Angeles--A research study released today shows that the overuse of suspensions in California schools resulted in an estimated 840,656 days of lost instruction during the 2014-2015 academic year, or approximately 13 days for every 100 students enrolled. This is the first California study to quantify days of missed instruction due to suspension, rather than suspension rates.

The report, "Lost Instruction: The Disparate Impact of the School Discipline Gap in California," estimates instructional days lost for each school district in the state and for California as a whole. Data on the number of days lost for every school district in California is available [here](#). The report was written by Daniel J. Losen, Director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA's Civil Rights Project, and Dr. Amir Whitaker, a researcher at the Center. Both Losen and Whitaker have experience as educators and civil rights lawyers.

"California students were deprived of learning opportunities a stunning 840,656 days during the 2014-2015 academic year," said Losen. "Moreover, we found that Black students are being excluded from instruction at alarming rates, and in some districts, they missed more than 100 days per 100 enrolled. This is one reason we assert that California will not close the achievement gap if they don't make greater efforts to close the discipline gap."

Researchers report that suspensions have been steadily dropping in California during the past four years. Overall, days missed due to suspension were reduced from approximately 23 per 100 students in the 2011-2012 academic year to 13 in 2014-2015. Researchers praise the overall trend, but argue that suspensions are still grossly overused.

The study criticizes persistent racial and ethnic disparities in suspension trends. In the 2014-2015 academic year, Black students lost 43 days of instruction for every 100 students enrolled, a huge gap of 32 more days than the 11 per 100 lost by White students. Native American students lost 30 days of instruction, and Latino students lost 13.

In addition to these significant racial and ethnic disparities, the study also uncovered significant differences in days of missed instruction between school districts. It reports that students in 19 percent of California school districts lost 25 or more instructional days (per 100 students enrolled) in 2014-2015, while students in 24 percent of districts lost fewer than five.

The large differences among districts were driven both by racial disparities and by different local policies and practices on the use of suspensions for “disruption/defiance,” a catchall category used to justify suspensions for minor behavioral infractions. State law prohibits disruption/defiance suspensions for K-3 students, and Los Angeles Unified, Oakland Unified, San Francisco Unified, and other school districts have extended that policy to all grade levels. However, most California districts continue to suspend students in grades 4-12 for disruption and other minor misbehavior.

In California’s 25 highest suspending districts, the disruption/defiance category was responsible for 45 percent of lost instructional days, well above the statewide average of 30 percent.

“There is no justification for the level of suspension variance that exists today between school districts,” said co-author Amir Whitaker. “The only possible explanation is that some school districts have embraced the fact that suspensions are bad for students, teachers, and administrators under the vast majority of circumstances. However, some districts insist on fighting the trend, and turning a blind eye to the research consensus. This is bad news for the students and teachers they serve.”

This study reaches California education leaders at a particularly important time. The state law prohibiting suspensions for disruption/defiance for K-3 students is scheduled to “sunset” in January 2018. Children’s advocates have encouraged the legislature to expand that prohibition when the legislature reconvenes in January.

“Depriving students of learning opportunities because of typical adolescent misbehavior impairs their ability to succeed,” said Whitaker. “Administrators, teachers, families, and students need to come together to create a more supportive environment that will lead to student success.”

[Research shows](#) that even a single suspension is associated with a two-fold increase in the risk that a student will not graduate high school and will earn lower lifetime incomes and face higher unemployment risk. A different [study](#) following every tenth-grade student in California conservatively estimated that suspensions lowered graduation rates by nearly seven percentage points. For this one cohort, the estimated long-term cost of suspensions for the state was \$2.7 billion.

Losen and Whitaker offered several policy recommendations for reducing the number of instructional days lost to suspension, including eliminating disruption suspensions at all grade levels and ending suspensions for other minor behavioral infractions. They also recommend that California provide resources and technical assistance to help teachers and school leaders improve school environments and reinforce changes to school behavior codes to focus more on prevention and less on punishment.

The full report, “Lost Instruction: The Disparate Impact of the School Discipline Gap in California,” is available online at www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu. A data supplement reporting on the lost school days

for each California school district is also available at www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu. In developing the study, the researchers estimated that the average suspension lasted for two days in duration. This estimate was based on data reported by Los Angeles Unified and Oakland Unified, as well as data from other states.

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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 UCLA Civil Rights Project /Proyecto Derechos Civiles (CRP), co-directed by Gary Orfield and [Patricia Gándara](#), researcher professors at UCLA. Founded at Harvard in 1996, 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.