

**Embargoed Until Contact**

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***UCLA Report: California School Suspensions Decline,***

***Driven by Fewer Punishments for Disruption/Defiance***

***Districts Making Progress toward Reducing Racial/Ethnic Suspension Disparities, though Gaps Still Remain***

**Study Shows Higher Test Scores Correlated with Lower Suspension Rates,**

**Reducing Concern that Discipline Reforms May Jeopardize Student Achievement**

**Los Angeles**—California school districts are making solid progress toward reforming discipline practices and reducing out-of-school suspensions, according to a study released today by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles.

The study, *Closing the School Discipline Gap in California: Signs of Progress,* examines suspension trends over a three-year period (2011-2014) on a statewide and individual school district basis. The report is the first to analyze the relationship between suspensions and achievement on California’s Academic Performance Index. This relationship was examined for only two academic years, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, because the API was discontinued in 2013. Researchers found that in both years and for each student subgroup, higher student achievement was related to lower suspension rates. For Black students, the correlation was the strongest.

“If we are serious about closing the achievement gap we need to make serious efforts to close the discipline gap,” said Daniel J. Losen, Director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies and lead author of the study. “Most important, the study suggests that, as discipline reform expands, there is no reason to assume achievement will suffer.”

Based on data made available by the California Department of Education (CDE), the study found that California school districts have reduced suspensions significantly over the past three years, from 709,580 suspensions in the 2011-2012 academic year to 503,101 in 2013-2014. That equates to 11.4 suspensions per 100 students in 2011-2012, compared to 8.1 suspensions per 100 in 2013-2014. Among the racial and ethnic groups tracked by CDE, each recorded a decline in suspension rates, with the biggest drop occurring among Black students, from 33 suspensions per 100 in 2011-2012 to 25.6 per 100 in 2013-2014.

The discipline gap between the suspension rates of different racial groups also narrowed. In 2011-2012, the gap between Black and White students was 24.2 per 100 students. In 2013-2014, that difference narrowed by 5 suspensions to 19.1.

Although declines were documented in the most serious offense categories, 77 percent of the decline in suspension rates statewide was the result of fewer suspensions for “disruption or willful defiance,” a catch-all category used to describe less serious and non-violent misbehavior. Los Angeles became the first school district in the nation to ban suspensions for disruption/defiance in 2013. A statewide ban on suspensions for disruption or defiance was signed into law last year for grades K-3, but the measure did not take effect during the study period. Despite this progress, the report shows that suspensions in the disruption/defiance category still contribute heavily to California’s racial discipline divide.

Many large districts achieved above-average declines in their out-of-school suspension (OSS) rates. For example West Contra Costa, Bakersfield City, Vallejo City and Central Unified each cut suspension rates by more than 10 per 100 students since 2011-12. “These findings show how major improvements are possible in a short period of time, and the biggest cuts in these districts were in the disruption/defiance category,” said Losen.

Although the study generally reported positive news, it also highlighted significant areas of concern. For example, California’s County Office of Education Schools, which include disciplinary alternative and special education schools, reported alarmingly high suspension rates. Although the state of California is failing to comply with federal requirements to report discipline data for students with disabilities, the study cites a federal source for 2012-13 that reports highly elevated rates of disciplinary removal for students with disabilities. Statewide, Black students with disabilities received nearly 40 removals per 100 students enrolled.

“Suspension rates for students of color and those with disabilities are still shocking and the disparities unacceptably large, but we are glad to see the numbers start to move in the right direction. Plus, the report shows how the highest suspending districts could make progress if they followed LAUSD, Oakland and San Francisco, and stopped suspending students in all grades for disruption/defiance,” said Lauren Brady, directing attorney of the Statewide Education Rights Project at Public Counsel.

“This report should encourage the state and districts to take bigger and bolder steps to reform their school discipline practices in ways that support teachers and expand the most effective alternatives. Research points to ways we can still hold students accountable for conduct, and improve the learning environment for all, while only denying students access to instruction as a measure of last resort.” Losen added.

The report concludes with several recommendations for school communities and policymakers across California including: providing more support and training for teachers and leaders to improve school climate; improving discipline data collection, use and reporting; and eliminating the use of out-of-school suspensions for minor offenses such as disruption/defiance for all grades.

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*A spreadsheet detailing discipline trends for every school district in California is available upon request and will be posted for downloading on the release date.*

For further questions about the report content please contact Daniel J. Losen 781-861-1222 or losendan@gmail.com.

### 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](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/about-us/staff/gary-orfield-ph.d) and [Patricia Gándara](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/about-us/staff/patricia-gandara-ph.d), 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](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research), published more than [15 books](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/publications/publications) 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](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/legal-developments/court-decisions/resources-related-to-grutter-v.-bollinger-gratz-v.-bollinger) decision upholding affirmative action and in Justice Breyer’s dissent (joined by three other Justices) to its 2007 [Parents Involved](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/legal-developments/court-decisions/resources-on-u.s.-supreme-court-voluntary-school-desegregation-rulings) 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 earlier this year published the book, "Closing the School Discipline Gap: Equitable Remedies for Excessive Exclusion" a volume of new research on remedies to the discipline gap. This report was made possible with the support of The California Endowment.