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**STUDY FINDS MANY CHARTER SCHOOLS**

**FEEDING “SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE”**

***First-Ever Analysis of Discipline Data from Every Charter School Shows***

***“Shocking” Suspension Rates and Disparities, But Also Indicators of Promise***

LOS ANGELES – March 16, 2016 – A first-ever analysis of school discipline records for the nation’s more than 5,250 charter schools shows a disturbing number are suspending big percentages of their black students and students with disabilities at highly disproportionate rates compared to white and non-disabled students.

The new report reviews the out-of-school suspension rates for every charter school during the 2011-12 academic year, the first time since the growth in charters that all the nation’s charter schools were required to report school discipline data to the federal government. All told, 95,000 public schools of all types had to provide discipline statistics for 2011-12.

The comprehensive analysis by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies of The Civil Rights Project at UCLA identified 374 charter schools across the country that had suspended 25% or more of their entire student body during the course of the 2011-12 academic year. The comprehensive review also revealed:

* Nearly half of all black secondary charter school students attended one of the 270 charter schools that was hyper-segregated (80% black) and where the aggregate black suspension rate was 25%.
* More than 500 charter schools suspended black charter students at a rate that was at least 10 percentage points higher than that of white charter students.
* Even more disconcerting, 1,093 charter schools suspended students with disabilities at a rate that was 10 or more percentage points higher than that of students without disabilities.
* Perhaps most alarming, 235 charter schools suspended more than 50% of their enrolled students with disabilities.\*

“It’s disturbing to see so many of these schools still reporting such high suspension rates because that indicates charter leaders continue to pursue ‘broken windows,’ ‘no excuses’ and other forms of ‘zero tolerance’ discipline,” said Daniel Losen, the Center’s director and the study’s lead author. “And we know from decades of research that frequently suspending children from school is counter-productive.”

While it would seem self-evident that kids don’t learn if they’re not in school, extensive research has demonstrated that frequently suspending students for even minor infractions predicts lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates and too many kids being pushed onto a pathway to prison. Discipline data reported to the U.S. Department of Education by non-charter schools also has consistently shown that students of color and those with disabilities are suspended at much higher rates than white students.

As is the case with non-charter schools, the new study makes clear that only a portion of the nation’s charter schools are enforcing harsh discipline policies. “In fact,” the analysis concludes, “more elementary charter schools met our definition of a ‘lower-suspending’ school than a ‘high-suspending’ school . . .”

For each racial group, the charter analysis highlights the schools with the highest rates and greatest disparities. It includes a companion spreadsheet that enables users to find and rank the suspension rates of charters in a particular state or across the nation.

The report describes in great detail the wide variations in suspension rates among charter schools as well as between charters and non-charters. Although most of the differences with non-charters are not large, especially disconcerting is that charter schools at every grade configuration suspend students with disabilities at higher rates even though they enroll a lower percentage of such students.

The report is particularly timely as the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) calls upon states to take steps to improve learning conditions, including preventing the overuse of suspension. States laws that govern charter schools can exempt them from oversight. Therefore, a core recommendation is that state policymakers do not exempt charter schools when it comes to oversight or state laws designed to limit excessive use of suspensions.

In passing ESSA, Congress also gave each state more freedom to design their own school and district accountability system. These accountability plans must still be submitted by every state for review by U.S. Education Secretary John King this coming fall. While a state could choose to monitor suspension rates, it also could choose to do the minimum about discipline, including exempt charter schools. A related concern is that some of the highest suspending charters schools may be overlooked simply because they have a reputation as “high-performing schools.”

“The high-suspending charters need not look very far to find much lower suspending charter schools,” Losen added. “So these findings elevate the need for oversight of charter schools and a continuing review for possible civil rights violations. There should be no excuses for charter schools that fail to comply with civil rights laws.”

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*The UCLA Civil Rights Project’s Center for Civil Rights Remedies 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.*

* This count includes schools with at least 50 students enrolled and excludes alternative schools, schools identified as part of the juvenile justice system, virtual schools and schools that enrolled fewer than 10 students with disabilities. Any school where rounding of the data or another error produced a suspension rate of more than 100% for a subgroup also was excluded.