

FactSheet April 2014

The Case for Reducing Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions

It is imperative that students and teachers feel safe at school, yet evidence indicates strict student discipline policies may be counterproductive.¹ Research from Russell Skiba and M. Karega Rausch questions how such policies might contribute to a negative school climate.²

School discipline policies are high stakes: the extensive use of suspension and expulsion is strongly associated with lower student achievement and engagement, greater truancy and dropout, all of which contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.³

The top three reasons for suspension⁴ | 2012-13

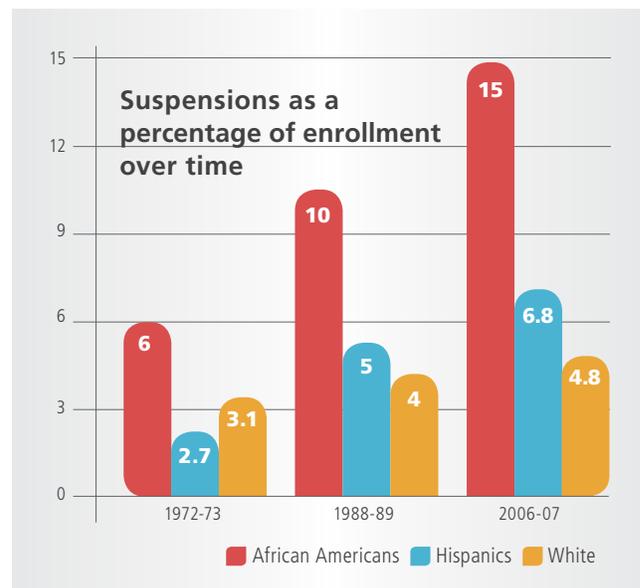
- 1** Disruption and defiance
- 2** Student fights
- 3** Abusive language and vulgar acts

The history of zero tolerance policies

Many “Zero tolerance” policies were commonly adopted during the early 1990s. These policies called for students to be excluded from school for offenses such as fighting, brandishing a weapon, or possessing drugs at school. Today zero tolerance policies are much more broadly applied. Many such policies impose school exclusion for a wide range of less serious behaviors, such as willful defiance. Significant safety violations represent less than 5% of all school disciplinary infractions and minor offenses are often met with the same consequences.⁵

Racial disparities and willful defiance

Willful defiance has become a highly subjective catchall term for minor offenses such as class disruptions, verbal threats, intimidation, and general harassment.



African American and Latino students, particularly males, are those most often suspended and expelled, and are disproportionately suspended or expelled for willful defiance.

Effects of alternative discipline policies

Research indicates zero tolerance policies have negative effects for students, teachers and schools.⁸ Districts have recently started changing their discipline practices, and data from the California Department of Education shows progress in the reduction of suspensions and expulsions statewide.⁹



Suspension rates for willful defiance is four times greater for African American students than for their white peers.⁶



of all statewide out-of-school suspensions in the 2011-12 school year were for willful defiance.⁷

Board member action items

1. Review policies and practices around school discipline.
 - › Governance teams can better understand how their discipline practices impact student engagement and achievement through reviewing district discipline policies.
 - › Reviewing policies will also inform the development of school climate and safety outcomes.
2. Review the data on suspensions and expulsions within the district by asking the questions below.
3. Become familiar with alternative discipline strategies.

CA suspensions & expulsions	2011-12	2012-13
Suspensions	709,596	609,471
<i>Unduplicated students</i>	366,629	329,142
Expulsions	9,759	8,562
<i>Unduplicated students</i>	9,553	8,264

Questions to ask

What does your discipline landscape look like?

- › What are the suspension/expulsion rates in your district, and how have they changed over time?
- › Are there differences in the suspension/expulsion rates across race, gender, income, or disability status?
- › Are there demographic differences among victims of such discipline infractions?
- › Does one school or classroom stand out? Why?
- › Are there similar districts that have the same or lower suspension/expulsion rates? Why?

What do district policies and practices look like?

- › What district policies and practices are in place regarding student discipline and suspensions/expulsions?
- › Do those policies and practices reflect the current board's beliefs and vision?

Best Practice

In 2013 the Los Angeles Unified School District adopted the School Climate Bill of Rights, prohibiting out-of-school suspensions for willful defiance, and called for a review and potentially new standards for the district's police force.¹⁰

- › Are there better strategies or approaches that reflect district beliefs that can be put into practice at the classroom, school site, and district level?
- › What professional development is provided for administrators, uncertified and certified staff?

Visit the Discipline/Suspension & Expulsion Web page at www.csba.org/discipline for more information.

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Endnotes

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2. Skiba, R.J., Rausch, M.K. (2006). (See endnote 1)
3. Gregory, A., Skiba, R.J., and Noguera, P.A. (January/February 2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin. *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 59-68. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09357621>
4. California Department of Education. (2014). Suspension and Expulsion Report For 2012-2013: Total Offenses Committed. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1h5OrA>
5. Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., Rausch, M. K., Williams, N., Kuper-Smith, D.L. Indiana University. (April 2014). Discipline disparities series: Policy. Indiana University: The Equity Project at Indiana University. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1hJwTqP>
6. California Department of Education. (2014). Suspension, expulsion, and truancy report for 2011-12: 48900(k) defiance suspension and expulsion statewide. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1h78ifu>
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8. Losen, D.J., Martinez, T., and Gillespie, J. (2012). *Suspended Education in California*. UCLA: The Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles. Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/1tVlwFc>
9. California Department of Education. (January 29, 2014). State schools chief Tom Torlakson reports California sees significant drops in student suspensions and expulsions. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1pw8lh>
10. Ferriss, S. (May 16, 2013). Los Angeles school board cracks down on suspensions for minor infractions. *Juvenile Justice*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1rxukNx>