CLOSING THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE GAP IN CALIFORNIA: SIGNS OF PROGRESS

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Executive Summary

Daniel J. Losen

Consensus is growing among researchers and school administrators across America that many public schools suspend too many children. They believe the high number of suspensions is causing students to lose class time, and that alternative punishments might reduce the associated risk for dropping out and becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. On the other hand, some parents and educators have expressed concern that the educational environment will suffer if schools reduce their use of suspension. Many may not be aware of the alternative options, while others may prefer the conventional wisdom that we must "kick out the bad kids so the good kids can learn." Moreover, even when educators and community groups change codes of conduct and target resources toward new approaches and interventions, those who resist change can slow the implementation of discipline reform efforts at the district level.

Despite such concerns, California's legislators have put the state among those at the forefront of discipline reform. The local efforts of members of many school communities in districts across the state not only inspired the state to act but also contributed to the patterns this report documents. Most important, according to the most recent data available from the California Department of Education, there has been a consistent decline totaling over 200 thousand fewer suspensions in 2013-2014 than two years ago. Further, more than half of that decline happened since 2012-13! When adjusted for enrollment, the rate of suspensions per enrolled students have declined as well, specifically, from 11.4 to 8.1 per 100 students enrolled over the three year period. Moreover, 77% of this reduction in total suspensions is attributable to fewer suspensions in the category of disruption or willful defiance (disruption/defiance). The reductions also narrowed the racial discipline gap in California. However, suspension rates are still very high, and the discipline gap between Black and White students alarming, with Blacks experiencing 19 more suspensions than Whites per every 100 students enrolled.

Some readers may think curtailing suspensions would have a negative impact, but this report starts and ends with examples that counter the assumption that frequent suspensions are necessary to protect the learning environment. *Specifically, the introductory statewide analysis shows that, in California, low district suspension rates are correlated with higher district achievement.* The analysis used discipline data from every district that reported data in both 2011-12 and 2012-13. The inverse relationship between suspensions and achievement held true each year for every racial/ethnic subgroup, and especially for Black students.

We caution against overstating these findings and remind readers that the evidence is not proof of causation. The study describes the relationship between suspensions and achievement scores in

California without controlling for other factors that might affect it. On the other hand, the findings do shed doubt on the assumption that rising test scores and decreasing suspension rates are mutually exclusive. It may well be that both declining use of suspension and rising academic success are two indicators of districts with strong leadership, vision, and community involvement. Our report concludes with a brief review of discipline reform efforts at two unified school districts, Alameda and Berkeley. Although leaders from the two districts acknowledge that they have much more work to do to meet their equity goals, both districts have successfully reduced suspension rates while improving test scores. Moreover, the racial gaps in both discipline and achievement narrowed in each district. And, finally, efforts in each district to improve school climate and learning conditions included expanding the use of suspension alternatives.

Along with these signs of progress, this report highlights districts that still have suspension rates so high they are hard to believe. Large and disturbing racial and ethnic gaps, especially for Black and American Indian students remain. This report provides a comprehensive district-by-district analysis of the most current discipline rates and the three-year trends, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and by reason for suspension (i.e., the offense category). Readers can find their district's data in the companion spreadsheet and make comparisons to other districts in the state.

We believe this descriptive report demonstrates that California still has excessive and disparate suspension, while at the same time it provides sound examples of how substantial progress can be achieved at the state and district levels in just a few years' time.

Our core findings include the following:

State level. The number of suspensions declined from 709,580 total suspensions in 2011-12 to 503,101 in 2013-14. The rate of suspensions in California's public schools declined over these three years from 11.4 per 100 students enrolled in 2011-12 to 8.1 per 100 students enrolled in 2013-14. This rate reduction represents 206,479 fewer suspensions, which means that far fewer students will incur the added risk for dropping out and juvenile justice involvement associated with suspension from school.

1. Each racial/ethnic group experienced a decline in suspension rates, and the most frequently suspended group, Black students, experienced the largest decline, from 33 to 25.6 per 100 enrolled. This means that the racial discipline gap between Black and White students in California, albeit still quite large, did narrow from 24.2 to 19.1 more suspensions per 100 enrolled.

2. Reducing total suspensions for the category of disruption/defiance constituted 77% of the total decline in suspension rates statewide.

3. During this same period, the use of out-of-school suspension to address minor offenses in the category of disruption/defiance declined from 3.4 per 100 students enrolled to 1.8 per 100. Out-of-school suspensions for the most serious offenses also declined in that period, from 1.8 to 1.5 per 100 students enrolled.

4. For the most recent year, 2013-14, Black students experienced 7.2 more total suspensions per 100 students than Whites for the disruption/defiance category, but just 2.9 more for the most serious offense (i.e., less subjective) categories.

5. California collects data on students with disabilities, but the state is out of compliance with federal requirements that these numbers be reported to the public.

6. A federal data source shows that schools in California remove children with disabilities on disciplinary grounds more than any other group, and that Black students with disabilities experienced 40 disciplinary removals per 100 enrolled in 2012-13.

District level. A review of out-of-school suspension rates for each district revealed rates for some districts that were alarmingly higher than the statewide average of 6.3 suspensions per 100 students enrolled. The five highest suspending general education districts each meted out at least 30 suspensions per 100 students enrolled. They are (1) Mojave Unified, (2) Fortuna Union High, (3) Oroville Union High, (4) Sonora Union High, and (5) Oroville City Elementary. Several county education office districts were higher still.

1. Schools in the Dos Palo Oro Loma Joint Unified District had the highest suspension rate for Black students, 74 per 100 enrolled.

2. Thermalito Union Elementary had the highest suspension rate for Whites, nearly 40 per 100.

3. Sonora Union High had the highest rate for Latino students, nearly 62 suspensions per 100.

4. Oroville Union High had the highest rate for American Indian students, 56 per 100.

5. Among the districts with very high suspension rates and very large racial disparities, suspension for disruption/defiance often made up a large share of the districts' total suspensions.

6. Many of California's districts have reduced out-of-school suspensions considerably in just three years. Of the districts with at least 10,000 students, the following five topped the list of those with the largest reductions for 2013-14, each with a decline of at least 10 suspensions per 100 students since 2011-12:
    a. West Contra Costa Unified
    b. Bakersfield City
    c. Vallejo City Unified
    d. Central Unified
    e. Santa Rosa High

Recommendations. We believe that the progress being made in California should continue and can serve as an example for other states. We encourage parents and policymakers to review our detailed district-level findings on discipline and consider the following recommendations for state and district policymakers:

- Provide support for restorative practices and for teacher training focused on improving student engagement, and more support in general for teachers and leaders to improve school climate.
- Expand efforts to reduce suspensions at the state and district levels, and monitor disaggregated discipline data by race, gender, and disability status.
- Reinforce changes to school codes with resources that will provide appropriate support for educators and for implementation with integrity.
- Eliminate suspensions for minor offenses such as disruption/defiance for all grades.
- Make reducing exclusionary discipline one of the core indicators of a healthy school environment.
- Include goals for reducing disciplinary exclusion in state and local standards for accountability plans.

- Invest in research to identify more precisely what works to both lower rates and close the discipline gaps by race, disability, and gender. Include in such research an exploration of the relationship between suspension rates and the corresponding academic outcomes, such as core subject-matter proficiency and graduation rates.
- Increase the collection of discipline data and reporting by grade level and across subgroups, such as race with gender, and pilot the collection of data on LGTBQ youth.
- Comply with federal law that requires states to report to the public annually on the school discipline of students with disabilities, broken down by race and disability category.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Lower suspensions correlate with higher achievement for every racial group in California. In recent years, educational leaders and legislators in California have been moving away from a reliance on suspensions as a way to improve school climate and safety (Jones, 2013). Concern among community advocates and researchers alike that school disciplinary rates are too high and disproportionate are grounded in the core understanding that high and disparate rates are a sign of denial of educational opportunity. In light of additional research demonstrating that certain alternatives, such as specific teacher training programs and restorative justice practices (Losen, 2015), can reduce both disparities and overall suspension rates, many, including U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (Duncan, 2015), have argued that failing to change the status quo harms children and perpetuates injustice.

However, many who have expressed fears about making policy changes, such as removing "disruption or willful defiance" as a suspendable offense in grades K-3, are concerned that achievement will suffer as a result of such changes (Stavely, 2015). The underlying belief is that high suspension rates are educationally necessary. One can imagine that banning all removals, with no alternative approach and no additional training or support for teachers, might indeed degrade the learning environment, but that is not how well-intended educators who are seeking to eliminate excessive discipline actually approach the task. If the need to use frequent suspensions were supported by the evidence and if alternatives were not proving successful, one would expect higher district test scores to be consistently associated with higher district suspension rates, and lower scores to be associated with lower suspension rates.

Notably, in this first statewide analysis of the relationship between Academic Performance Index (API) scores and suspension rates, we found that just the opposite is true. There is in fact an inverse relationship in California, where higher test scores are correlated with lower rates of out-of-school suspension (OSS).

We specifically examined the relationship between API scores and OSS rates for the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, respectively, by race/ethnicity, using the data from every district in the state that had reported data for both years. For each of two consecutive years (analyzed separately), a *moderate* inverse relationship between suspension rates and API scores was found overall (-0.48 and -0.52, respectively). Notably, we found *moderate* to *strong* negative correlations for each racial/ethnic group, especially for Black students, in both 2011-12 and 2012-13 (-0.65 and -0.67, respectively). The full description of the correlational study, the methods, and the limitations are found in Appendix A.

Of course, a correlation does not prove that higher suspension rates are causing lower achievement, or vice versa. Moreover, our analysis did not consider the impact of numerous other variables that can drive test scores up or down. A more complete analysis would control for the numerous factors that one would expect to impact achievement, such as poverty, per-pupil school expenditures, and teacher experience and training.

We know that, in districts making achievement gains, the hard work of teachers and administrators to improve the quality of the curriculum and instruction should not be discounted. Therefore, we do not assert that reducing suspension rates is an automatic fix for districts struggling to improve academic outcomes. Moreover, California's recently reported scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading and math showed no significant change between 2013 and 2015 (National Assessment Governing Board, 2015). One could argue that this lack of change is another reason not to fear declining suspension rates. However, there were small declines in the average scaled scores. Although most states experienced similar declines, including those with no notable changes to discipline policy, the small decline in scores may fuel fears that discipline reform is to blame.

We do know from other research that efforts to improve achievement could be consistent with efforts to reduce suspensions**.** For example, in a randomly controlled study at the district level, a teacher training program designed to improve student engagement, and in which the central goal was improved achievement outcomes, was shown to reduce suspension rates (Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2015). Moreover, California's inverse relationship between API scores and suspension rates is consistent with findings from other more robust statewide studies that did control for many contributing factors. For example, a six-year study that tracked every middle school student in Texas and controlled for more than 80 variables found that higher suspension rates predicted no difference in achievement (Fabelo et al., 2011). Another robust study conducted in Indiana found that higher suspension rates predicted lower achievement when controlling for poverty and other factors (Skiba, 2015). Therefore, considered alongside these controlled analyses, the new findings showing that lower suspension rates correlate with higher API scores in California should encourage state policymakers to build on the progress documented in this report.

To further demonstrate what is possible, this report concludes with a descriptive analysis of two large districts in California whose concerted efforts to reduce suspension rates succeeded while their API scores rose. As proponents of discipline reform have argued, efforts to reduce suspension rates should entail replacing current practices with more effective responses that reduce the number of removals but do not reduce accountability for misbehavior. In the two districts we highlight, intentional leadership decisions and hard work by teachers and staff to reduce suspension to a measure of last resort appear to be working.[1] Although we draw attention to these schools' progress, it should be noted that the district leadership and community members in each case agreed that suspension rates need to be reduced a lot more and that racial disparities in suspension rates remain too high.

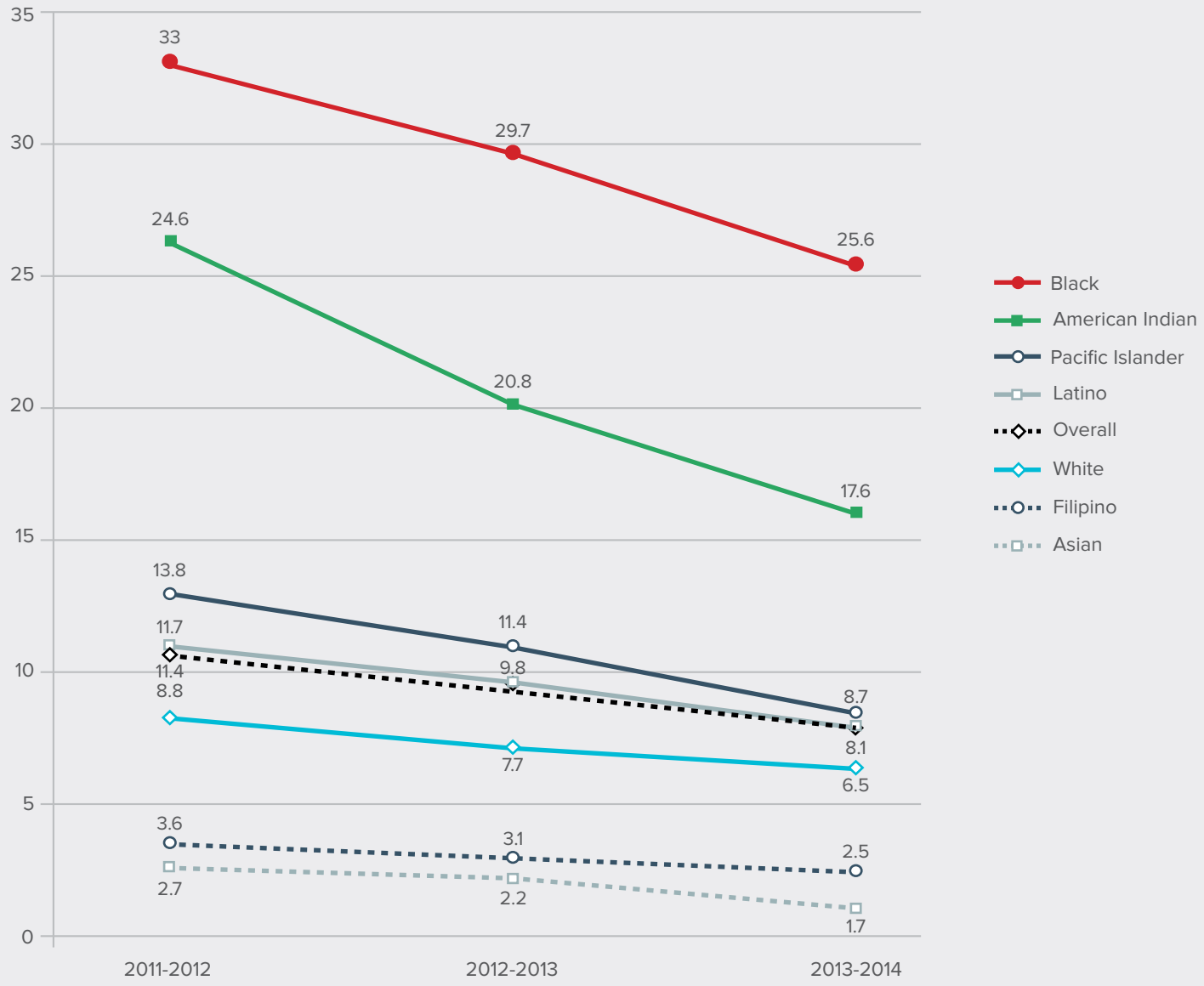
The body of this report describes the most current state and district suspension rates, and covers both trends and racial disparities in the use of suspension in California. A spreadsheet accompanying this report enables any reader to find their own district's most recent disaggregated data, as well as three-year trends for out-of-school suspensions, all of which can be compared to other districts in California. We hope that policymakers in the state and across the nation will take note of the state- and district-level progress, and of the large disparities indicating that a great deal more effort is warranted.

STATEWIDE THREE-YEAR TRENDS

Statewide Three-Year Trends

California shows a three-year downward trend in suspension rates. Our report issued in July 2014, titled *Keeping California's Kids in School: Fewer Students of Color Missing School for Minor Behavior,* looked at out-of-school suspension trends through 2012-13, which showed a small decline. This report brings more good news: total suspension rates in 2013-14 were lower than they were the previous year, and lower still than they were in 2011-12. The overall decline since 2011-12 was 3.3 fewer total suspensions per 100 students enrolled (from 11.4 to 8.1). Total suspension rates combine in-school (ISS) and OSS per 100 enrolled. Moreover, as depicted in Figure 1, the trends are consistent for every racial/ethnic group.

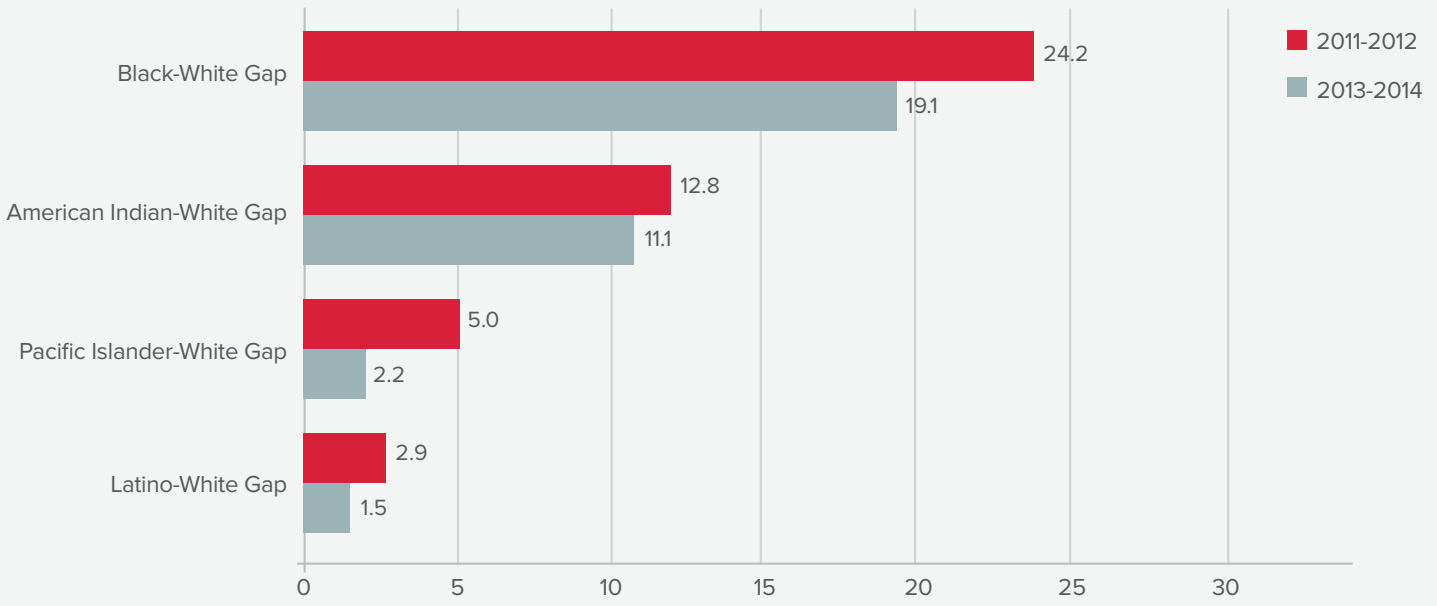
Figure 1: Three-Year Trend in Rates of Total Suspensions per 100 Students in California



Note: Students may be duplicated.
Source: California Department of Education

Although large and disturbing racial gaps remain, the size of the gaps, using Whites as the comparison group, narrowed for every racial group; the greatest narrowing was 5.1 fewer total suspensions per 100 students between Blacks and Whites. Figure 2 highlights the narrowing racial gap when the groups with higher than average suspension rates are compared to White suspension rates, which are lower than average.

Figure 2: The Diminishing Size of the Racial Gap in California in Terms of Total Suspensions per 100, Compared to White Students, from 2011-12 to 2013-14



It is important to note that, despite the decreasing rates, educators in California still suspend Black and American Indian students at much higher rates than those from most other racial/ethnic groups.

We further break down the rate of suspensions per 100 students in terms of OSS and ISS. It would not be desirable for a decline in one to be completely offset by an increase in the other. As the tables below show, both OSS and ISS declined during this three-year period. Broken down by racial/ethnic group, the three-year trend for California is as follows:

Table 1: Three-Year Trend in Rates of OSS per 100 Students in California

Year	Ethnicity							
	Black	Am. Ind.	Pac. Islander	Latino	White	Filipino	Asian	**Overall**
2011-2012	26.2	16.6	10.5	8.8	6.6	2.8	2.2	8.7
2012-2013	23.5	16.0	8.8	7.6	5.9	2.4	1.8	7.6
2013-2014	20.1	14.0	7.0	6.2	5.0	2.0	1.4	6.3
Decline	**-6.1**	**-2.6**	**-3.5**	**-2.6**	-1.6	-0.8	-0.8	-2.4

Note: Students may be duplicated.
Source: California Department of Education

Consistent with total suspensions (see Figure 1), the OSS rates in Table 1 show that the racial groups suspended most frequently had a greater decline in suspension rates than those groups suspended less often. This means that, like total suspensions, the gap in OSS between Whites and each other group also narrowed during this period.[2]

Most important is that the decline in OSS is not being offset by an increase in ISS, or vice versa. The use of ISS (Table 2) also declined between the 2011-12 and 2013-14 school years.

Table 2: Three-Year Trend in Use of ISS per 100 Students in California

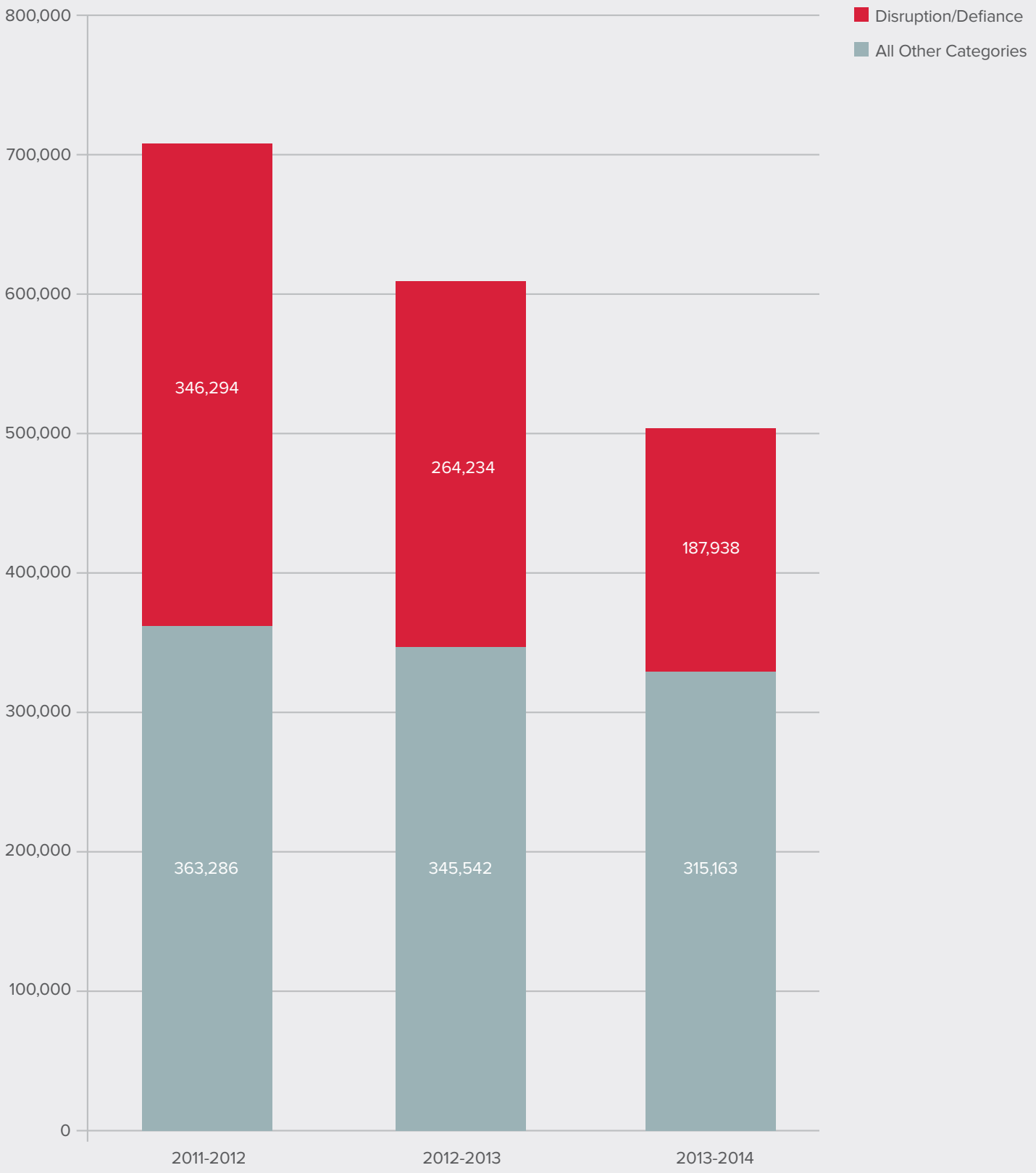
Year	Race/Ethnicity							
	Black	Am. Ind.	Pac. Islander	Latino	White	Filipino	Asian	**Overall**
2011-2012	6.8	5.0	3.3	2.9	2.2	0.8	0.5	2.7
2012-2013	6.2	4.8	2.5	2.2	1.9	0.7	0.4	2.2
2013-2014	5.5	3.6	1.7	1.8	1.4	0.5	0.4	1.8
Decline	**-1.3**	**-1.4**	**-1.6**	**-1.1**	-0.8	-0.3	-0.1	-0.9

Note: Students may be duplicated.
Source: California Department of Education

Downward trends observed for most serious offenses and disruption/defiance. As prior analysis has shown, suspensions are most often meted out for the category known as "disruption or willful defiance." Disruption/defiance is a catchall category for a range of minor misbehaviors that reportedly can include failure to follow instructions, talking out of turn, refusing to do an assignment, eye-rolling, or getting out of one's seat without permission. Last year the state implemented a new law prohibiting schools from suspending children in grades K-3 under this minor offense category. Before the law was passed in 2014, many districts, including Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), had already eliminated disruption/defiance as grounds for suspension. As anticipated, the data show a total decline in suspensions for this category.

Figure 3 captures the magnitude of the use of suspension and the volume of the reductions by looking at the change in the overall number of suspensions, from more than 709,580 in 2011-12 to around 503,101 in 2013-14, a reduction of approximately 206,479. Figure 3 also shows that lowering the number of suspensions in this minor offense category by 158,356, nearly half the number for this category in 2011-12, was the driving force behind the total decrease. Put another way, reductions in the disruption/defiance category represented nearly 77% of the total reduction. As a result, the share of all suspensions that were meted out belonging to the category of disruption or defiance has changed from 48.8% in 2011-12, to 43.3% in 2012-13 to 37.4% in 2013-14.

Figure 3: Total Number of Suspensions by Year, Showing the Number Attributed to Disruption/Defiance



Rates of both OSS and ISS per 100 students declined in this category.

These numbers help capture the magnitude of the number of suspensions. By examining the number of suspensions per 100 students, however, we ensure that the observed decline in suspensions does not merely represent a decline in enrollment. This is especially important at the district level, where enrollment numbers can increase or decrease dramatically in a three-year period. Furthermore, a decline in total suspensions, whether expressed as numbers or rates, does not capture whether the decline occurred in total exclusions from school, such as OSS, a decline in ISS, or both. During the three-year period in question, the overall use of OSS for disruption/defiance decreased by 1.6 per 100 enrolled (Table 3), and ISS by 1 per 100 enrolled (Table 4). The largest reductions in OSS and ISS for disruption/defiance have been for Black and American Indian students.[3]

Table 3: Three-Year Trend in Use of OSS per 100 Students Due to Disruption/Defiance

Year	Race/Ethnicity							
	Black	Am. Ind.	Pac. Islander	Latino	White	Filipino	Asian	**Overall**
2011-2012	10.3	7.2	3.6	3.5	2.5	0.9	0.7	3.4
2012-2013	8.0	5.9	2.8	2.7	2.0	0.7	0.5	2.6
2013-2014	5.7	4.5	1.9	1.8	1.5	0.5	0.3	1.8
Decline	**-4.6**	**-2.7**	-1.7	-1.7	-1.0	-0.4	-0.4	-1.6

Note: Students may be counted multiple times.
Source: California Department of Education

Table 4: Three-Year Trend in Use of ISS per 100 Students Due to Disruption/Defiance

Year	Race/Ethnicity							
	Black	Am. Ind.	Pac. Islander	Latino	White	Filipino	Asian	**Overall**
2011-2012	5.4	3.8	2.6	2.4	1.7	0.6	0.4	2.2
2012-2013	4.6	3.4	1.9	1.7	1.3	0.5	0.3	1.6
2013-2014	3.9	2.3	1.2	1.2	0.9	0.3	0.2	1.2
Decline	**-1.5**	**-1.5**	-1.4	-1.2	-0.8	-0.3	-0.2	-1.0

Note: Students may be counted multiple times.
Source: California Department of Education

Comparing OSS with ISS in this minor offense category (Table 3 versus Table 4) shows that there were more OSS per 100 students meted out each year for disruption/defiance than there were ISS per 100 students.[4]

Another noteworthy trend is that, as the use of suspensions has declined, so has the share of all suspensions attributable to disruption/defiance.[5] This category comprised 39% of the 8.7 OSS per 100 students in 2011-12, but by 2013-14 it made up only 29% of the 6.3 OSS per 100. The comparable data for ISS show that disruption/defiance offenses comprised 80% of the 2.7 ISS per 100 students in 2011-12, and 67% of the 1.8 ISS per 100 in 2013-14.

Effective discipline reform would be expected to lead to an improved learning environment and greater safety, and policymakers should be concerned if a large decline in disciplinary actions for minor categories like disruption/defiance is offset by an increase in disciplinary actions for more serious offenses. Therefore, we also reviewed the data to search for changes in these related categories.

When we combined the three most serious offense categories—violence with serious injury, weapon possession, and illicit drug possession—the rate of "serious offense" suspensions per 100 students (Table 5) remained relatively low in all years, with fewer than two OSS per 100 overall. The use of OSS for these serious offenses follows the same general patterns as are found for minor offenses. Moreover, the three-point racial gap between Black and White students narrowed slightly, the gap between Latino and White students stayed the same, and the gap between American Indian students and Whites widened slightly.

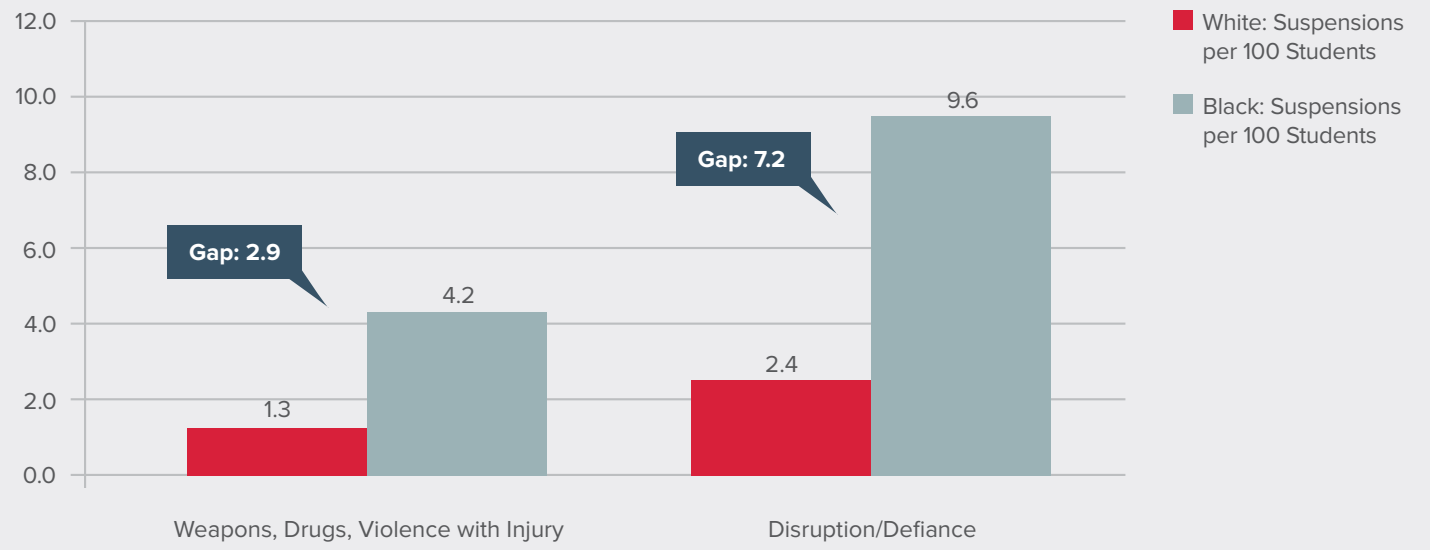
Table 5: Three-Year Trend in Use of OSS,[6] by Serious Offense[7]

Year	Ethnicity							
	Black	Am. Ind.	Pac. Islander	Latino	White	Filipino	Asian	**Overall**
2011-2012	4.5	3.2	2.4	1.9	1.5	0.7	0.5	1.8
2012-2013	4.4	3.4	2.1	1.7	1.3	0.7	0.4	1.7
2013-2014	3.9	3.2	1.7	1.6	1.2	0.6	0.4	1.5
Decline	-0.6	0	-0.7	-0.3	-0.3	-0.1	-0.1	-0.3

Note: For reporting purposes, suspended students are counted within the Federal Offense Category corresponding to the most severe offense each student committed within a given incident.
Source: California Department of Education

Large disparities persist, especially in the most subjective categories. Another important pattern is revealed when the California data for serious offenses are compared with the most subjective and minor offenses, as shown in Figure 4. Despite the narrowing racial gaps, the 2013-14 data show that there is still a large racial gap in the number of suspensions per 100 students, especially between Blacks and Whites; this gap is especially pronounced in the minor disruption/defiance offense category. Although the reasons for the large disparities in this category are beyond the scope of this report, these data suggest that efforts to reduce or eliminate suspensions for such minor offenses can be expected to have the greatest impact on reducing the racial gap in total suspensions.

Figure 4: The Current Racial Gap in Total (ISS and OSS) Suspensions per 100 Students Due to Serious Offenses, as Compared to Disruption/Defiance[8]



The available data show that students of color with disabilities are removed on disciplinary grounds at the highest rates of all.

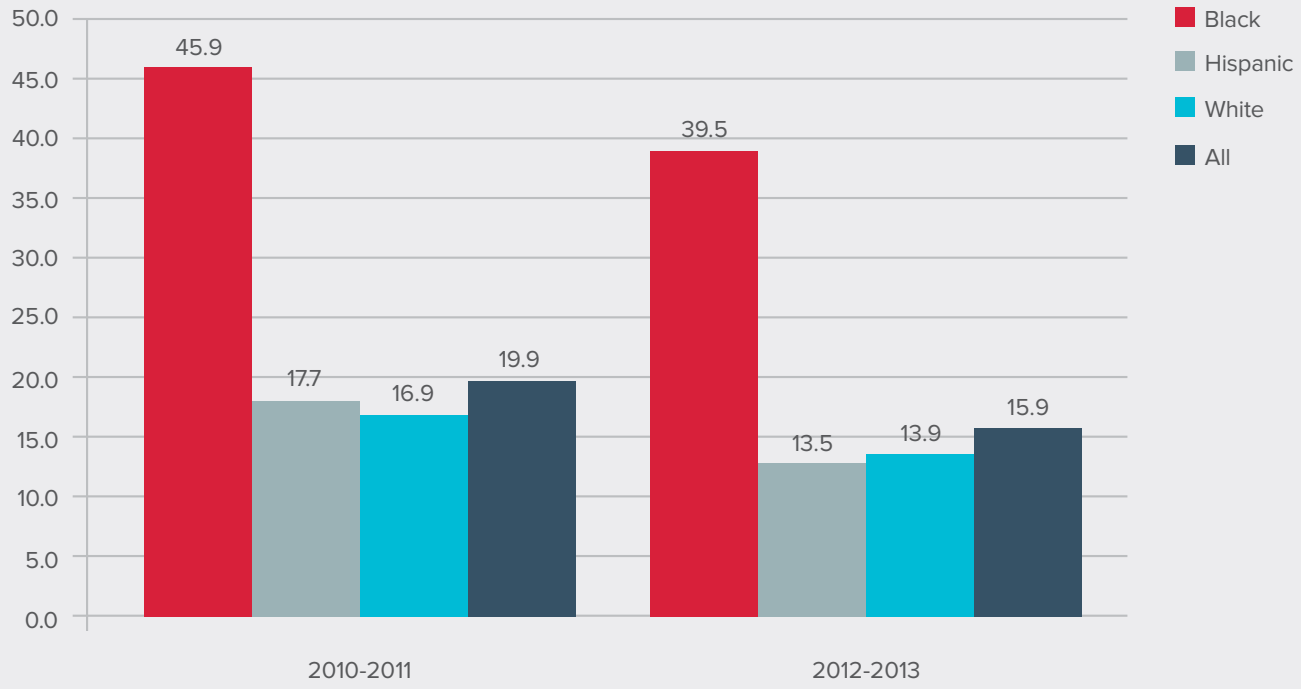
In 2012, the State of California provided discipline data on the out-of-school suspensions of students with disabilities, and those data were further disaggregated by race. We provided our analysis of those data in a July 2013 letter to Governor Brown, including the following:[9]

> The largest racial gaps are noted between Black and White students with disabilities...Compared to their White peers, Black students with disabilities received 10.1 additional out-of-school suspensions per 100 students enrolled. The Black/White gap in this frequent and more subjective category is far larger than the racial gap (4.2 suspensions per 100) in the serious offense category.

The disparities in suspension rates are among the largest and most troubling for students with disabilities, and for Black students with disabilities in particular. For this reason, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) at 20 U.S.C. Section 1418(a) requires states to report discipline data on students with disabilities to the public annually, and that such data be disaggregated by race and ethnicity. However, these data are no longer reported to the public by the California Department of Education. In short, California is failing to comply with federal reporting requirements.

For this report, however, we were able to find a federal website with data on "total disciplinary removals" for students with disabilities in California, further disaggregated by race and disability category, for 2010-11 and 2012-13. These federal data do not necessarily meet the same definitions the state uses to report to the public and used in throughout this report, thus we do not provide a direct comparison. Furthermore, this analysis is focused on the three largest racial and ethnic groups, Blacks, Whites, and Latinos, and is based on the enrollment of students eligible for special education supports and services as defined by the IDEA. The raw data used to construct the figure below are available online in a series of tables published by the federal government.[10] The total number of disciplinary removals was divided by enrollment to determine the number of disciplinary removals per 100 students enrolled.

Figure 5: California Trends in Total Disciplinary Removals per 100 Students with Disabilities by Race/Ethnicity, 2010-11 and 2012-13



Source: U.S. Department of Education (disciplinary removals per 100 students, based on enrollment of students with disabilities ages 6-21 that were reported as eligible for special education pursuant to IDEA). Note that, for 2012-13, the U.S. Department of Education published a similar count in table form for each state, but that prior years were not available. Those findings, although based on enrollment of students ages 3-21, are substantially similar to the findings presented here for 2012-13.[11]

Our other research in this area has documented that, nationwide, students with disabilities are often two to three times more likely others to be removed from school on disciplinary grounds, and that those with emotional disturbances are far more likely than others to be so punished (Losen, Ee, Hodson, & Martinez, 2015). The California data reported to the Office of Special Education Programs for 2012-13 show that there were 15,313 disciplinary removals of students with emotional disturbance and only 24,326 enrolled. This rate is approximately 63 removals per 100 students with emotional disturbance!

The decline in disciplinary removals for students with disabilities does suggest that this subgroup is benefiting similarly from the overall downward trend. California's current rate of nearly 16 removals per each student with disabilities enrolled and 40 removals per 100 Black students with special needs suggests that some schools may be failing to meet the behavioral needs of these children, and that this failure is disproportionately impacting Black children. Unfortunately, the state's current lack of discipline reporting makes it especially difficult to understand whether discipline reform efforts at the state and district levels are benefiting the children in California who are most likely to be excluded from school on disciplinary grounds.

SUSPENSIONS AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

Suspensions at the District Level

Racial disparities and measuring district-level progress. Despite declining state suspension rates, statewide rates can mask the higher rates and larger differences found at the district level. Frequently, disproportionate discipline within a school district is described by comparing the percentage of a group's enrollment to their percentage of the total number of students suspended. In 2013-14 in California, Blacks made up 6.2% of all students enrolled statewide yet 19.6% of all suspensions.[12] While this type of comparison, called the "composition index," does highlight the disproportionality, it is a purely relative measure and therefore does not convey whether suspension use is high or low. Relative measures like the composition index are not well-suited to comparing districts if one is equally interested in comparing the frequency of suspension use or the change in suspension use over time.

Given the research on the harm caused by suspension, we report changes over time at the district level in terms of suspensions per 100 students enrolled so that it is clear whether each racial/ethnic group's exposure to harm from suspension is rising or falling. Our description of the size of the racial gap between any two groups tells readers how many more suspensions per 100 students the group with higher numbers experienced. This use of absolute values and differences allows comparisons to be made from one district to the next. In other words, in order to provide information about reductions in both harm and racial disparities, this report observes the racial/ethnic differences in the frequency of suspensions, along with information on whether the use of suspension is rising or falling.

Because the rate divides the number of suspensions experienced by a given group by that group's enrollment, differences in district demographics are automatically factored in. This is why the number of suspensions per 100 students can easily be compared from one district to the next. We can compare, for example, the Black rate of suspension per 100 students across all the districts in the state without having to reference the Black proportion of the district enrollment. Similarly, assuming there are sufficient numbers of Black and White students enrolled in a given district to calculate valid rates for each, if the racial gap shows that Blacks experienced five more suspensions per 100 enrolled than Whites, that racial gap can be directly compared to the size of the racial gap in any other district. Our analysis of district-level rates for out-of-school suspensions per 100, the district trends in these rates, and the racial gaps observed make up the second half of this report.

District-level rates and trends in OSS by race.[13] Readers should keep in mind that statewide rates tend to mask much higher district suspension rates and far larger racial differences in the use of suspension. In Table 6a we selected the districts with the highest overall rates of OSS, after screening out any districts with fewer than 1,000 students. Readers are encouraged to download the spreadsheet that comes with this report to review their own district's data and to compare their rates to those in other districts.

We chose to feature the 12 districts with the highest suspension rates because they were the only large districts that also had overall rates of more than 20 suspensions per 100 students enrolled. In bold numbers you will find among these 12 districts the single highest suspending district for each of the following subgroups: Blacks, American Indians, Whites, and Latinos.

Table 6a: 12 California Districts with the Highest OSS Rates, 2013-14

District	Overall OSS Per 100	Black	White	Latino	American Indian
Mojave Unified	36.8	70.1	24.1	22.9	–
Fortuna Union High	34.1	–	28.5	44.6	37.1
Oroville Union High	33.8	58.9	35.3	35.7	**56.4**
Sonora Union High	32.0	–	25.0	**61.9**	–
Oroville City Elementary	29.6	62.0	31.3	29.4	29.0
Coalinga-Huron Unified	27.1	–	28.4	26.4	–
Konocti Unified	26.6	44.8	29.9	18.4	26.3
Thermalito Union Elementary	24.1	–	**39.8**	14.4	32.8
Dos Palos Oro Loma Joint Unified	22.9	**74.1**	33.3	18.2	18.9
Vallejo City Unified	22.6	47.0	15.9	14.3	38.6
Fairfield-Suisun Unified	20.2	46.6	16.5	16.8	22.4
Barstow Unified	20.1	51.4	13.5	15.1	20.5

In the highest suspending districts with at least 50 Black students enrolled, the racial disparities in OSS between Blacks and other racial groups per 100 enrolled was quite profound, with a gap of between 20 and 46 suspensions per 100 students. This far exceeds the statewide Black-White gap of 15 OSS per 100 (see Table 2). Also noteworthy is that Latino suspension rates were more than twice as high as White suspension rates in Sonoro Union High, where the rate exceeded 60 OSS per 100 Latinos enrolled. In several districts, however, Latino students were suspended at substantially lower rates than their White counterparts. The wide variance in Latino suspension rates observed in California's districts is consistent with the findings in our national reports (using federal data).

The first question these data raise is, "Why are the rates so much higher in these districts?" One main purpose of this report is to shine a bright light on the frequency and disparity in the use of suspension in California schools. Those on the list above did not include the "county office of education district" that typically contain schools for special student populations, including alternative schools for students with serious or chronic behavior problems. However, a district-level analysis of the reasons for these high suspension rates and extraordinary disparities was beyond the scope of this report.

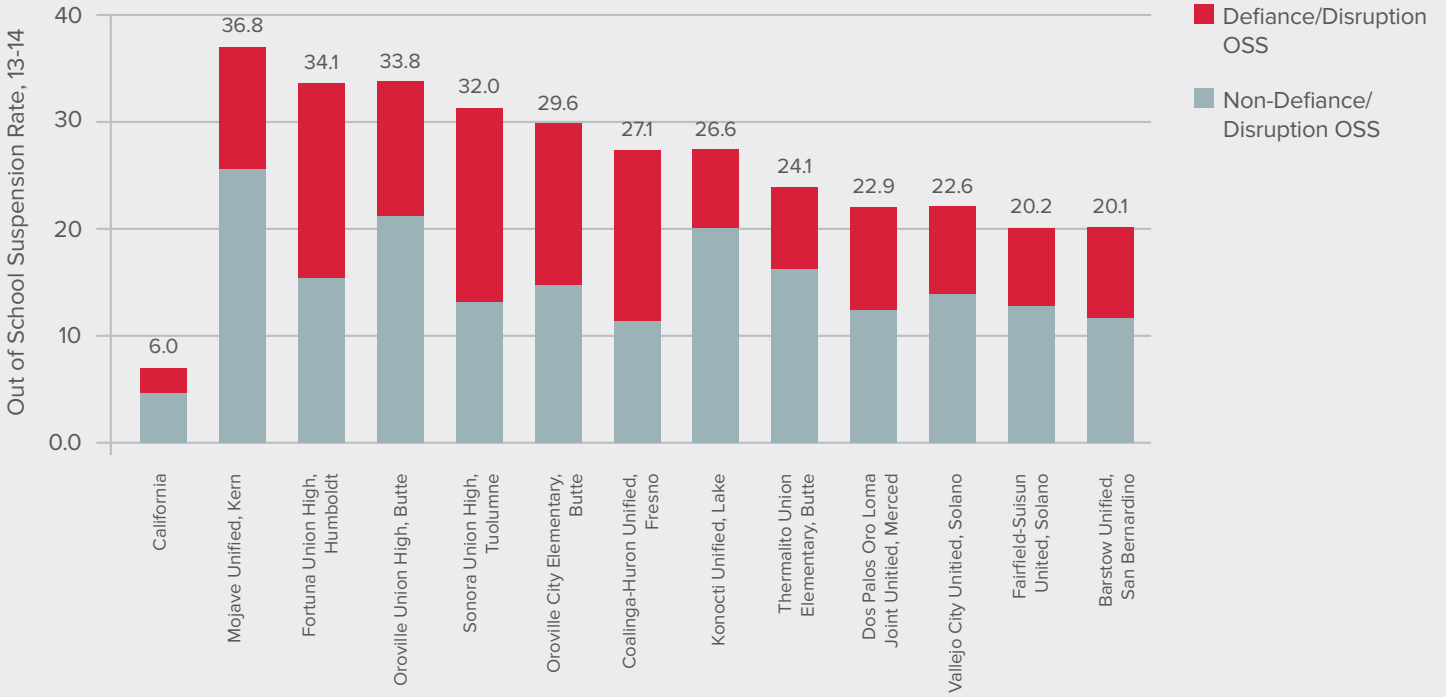
On the other hand, because the California state legislature and the governor recently amended the state code to limit the use of suspension for the disruption/defiance offense category for grades K-3, we did look at the contribution OSS made in this offense category. Readers should note that these data do not reflect that legislated change, but they do reflect efforts initiated in the LAUSD to eliminate suspensions in this category, which were first implemented in 2013-14. Therefore, one can use the breakout in this category to imagine how suspension rates might look if the category were eliminated as grounds for out-of-school suspension in all grades. We also know that, during the period covered by this report, many other districts in California began efforts to reduce suspensions, especially for minor behaviors covered by the catch-all disruption/defiance category. The racial breakdown for this category in the highest suspending districts in the state for 2013-14 are presented in Table 6b below.

Table 6b: Disruption/Defiance Rates for Districts with Extremely High OSS Rates, 2013-14

District	Overall Disruption/ Defiance OSS Per 100	Black	White	Latino	American Indian
Mojave Unified	11.4	22.2	6.8	7.1	–
Fortuna Union High	19.2	–	14.7	30.0	16.1
Oroville Union High	12.9	14.3	13.2	15.1	**23.8**
Sonora Union High	19.1	–	15.8	**34.1**	–
Oroville City Elementary	14.9	30.6	14.9	18.4	13.8
Coalinga-Huron Unified	15.8	–	**16.3**	15.4	–
Konocti Unified	7.4	15.5	7.6	5.3	7.4
Thermalito Union Elementary	8.2	–	14.4	5.9	6.9
Dos Palos Oro Loma Joint Unified	9.6	**32.9**	14.7	7.4	5.7
Vallejo City Unified	7.5	15.6	4.2	5.4	14.0
Fairfield-Suisun Unified	7.5	16.6	5.9	6.6	8.2
Barstow Unified	7.7	19.4	3.9	6.3	8.4

To put these high rates in perspective, recall that statewide out-of-school suspensions in this category accounted for 1.8 suspensions per 100 students (see Table 3) and made up 29% of all suspensions statewide. However, overall rates in each district were at least four times as high as the state rate. Moreover, in 11 of the 12 highest suspending districts presented in Table 6a, OSS for disruption/defiance exceeded this share of the total suspensions, and in four districts disruption/defiance made up more than half of all suspensions (Table 7). In other words, in most of the high-suspending districts, the disruption/defiance category constituted a larger than average percentage of all suspensions. Therefore, it stands to reason that high-suspending districts could make a lot of progress by finding alternatives to suspension for the minor behaviors that constitute disruption or willful defiance. One can see the high share of OSS due to disruption/defiance suspensions in high suspending districts in Figure 6. Notice how high suspending districts have a much higher proportion of suspensions in this category than compared to the state average.

Figure 6: More gains could come from reducing disruption/defiance suspensions in the highest suspending districts.



County office of education districts are among the highest suspending. We separated out the four highest suspending county office of education districts because they typically are designed for special student populations, such as disciplinary alternative schools, schools that are part of the juvenile justice system, community day schools, and schools devoted to serving students with disabilities who need to be educated in a non-mainstream setting. Another critically important difference is that the specialized schools in these districts often enroll students for only part of a 180-day school year. Many have cumulative enrollment rates that are two or three times the "census" enrollment numbers from a single day, while others do not. Therefore, it is possible that the rate of suspensions per 100 enrolled is inflated.

If we use the opportunity to be suspended as the frame of reference, as explained in Appendix B, using the cumulative enrollment could artificially deflate the suspension rate because there is an underlying assumption that the majority of the students are enrolled for the full school year. In other words, if we combine the three students who attend for only 60 days each, into one group, they have the same cumulative opportunity to record suspensions as one student attending for 180 days.

We recalculated the rates for the four highest suspending county office of education districts and found that, if cumulative attendance was used, the enrollment increased markedly. For example, the overall rate in Merced of 89 OSS per 100 enrolled (Table 7) is an overall cumulative rate of 59 OSS per 100. That is a big change, but it is still an extraordinarily high rate. A more specific review of the specialized schools in each of these districts is beyond the scope of this study, but we did not want to exclude them entirely or treat them inconsistently. However, it is also possible that an out-of-school suspension means something different for these specialized schools, especially if a school is part of the juvenile justice system. Unfortunately, racially disaggregated cumulative enrollment numbers were not available, which is one of the many reasons we feature the four county office of education districts with the highest rates, using the

census enrollment. In the far-right column in Table 7, we have provided the rate per 100 students using the cumulative enrollment. Note that each of these four districts had overall rates that were greater than 20 suspensions per 100, when cumulative enrollment was used.

Table 7: County Office of Education Districts with the Highest OSS Rates, 2013-14

District	Overall OSS Per 100	Black	White	Latino	Overall OSS per 100 Cumulative
Merced County Office of Education	88.6	133.3	45.8	98.8	59.0
Sacramento County Office of Education	64.1	82.6	43.2	45.1	32.3
Fresno County Office of Education	54.0	87.5	30.6	56.6	28.6
Los Angeles County Office of Education	45.2	85.0	26.9	41.0	21.5

When OSS rates are this high, it calls into question the efficacy of schools designed to provide more intensive support for students with behavioral problems or other special needs. How can students be getting the additional behavioral support they need if they are suspended from the specialized school and left unsupervised? All of the school districts listed in Table 8 have large Black-White disparities, and three of the four have large Latino-White disparities. Finally, federal law prohibits students from being excluded from school on disciplinary grounds if the behavior in question is a manifestation of their disability. Therefore, further exploration of the high suspension rates in county office of education school districts is warranted.

Recent district reductions in the use of out-of-school suspension also show that great progress is possible. LAUSD is not among the highest suspending districts, nor is it one of the large districts with the greatest reduction in suspensions that we feature below. Nevertheless, the district did make significant reductions that, given its size, no doubt influenced the state's downward trends over this period. The declining suspension rates and narrowing racial gaps in the LAUSD were the intended outcomes of district efforts to change policy and practice.

In 2013, the LAUSD adopted a plan to eliminate the use of suspension in response to willful defiance (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2013). Among other things, the purpose was to increase student attendance, facilitate academic achievement, and decrease racial disparities in discipline. The plan went into effect during the 2013-14 school year. Building on Lasnover's (2015) work, we looked to see if the districtwide disparities in suspension rates decreased after the plan was implemented. It appears that disparities continued on a downward trend, although Black students were still suspended at a higher rate than their peers (Table 9). The suspension rates for the LAUSD are far below those of many other large school districts, and they were so in 2011-12. It is noteworthy that the LAUSD entered into a voluntary resolution agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights in 2009 to address the high and disparate rates of suspension for Black male students (US Department of Education, 2009). That said, the LAUSD's efforts have encompassed the entire student body and have reduced suspension rates for all racial groups; moreover, both the Black-White and Latino-White gaps narrowed considerably. During the first two years that API scores were available, they did rise, overall, for LAUSD.

Table 8: Three-Year Trend in OSS Rates and Racial Disparities in LAUSD

Year	Ethnicity			Gap	
	Black	Latino	White	B/W Gap	B/L Gap
2011-12	12.1	3.1	2.4	9.7	9.0
2012-13	7.1	1.7	1.0	6.1	5.4
2013-14	4.9	1.1	0.8	4.1	3.8

Note: This table provides the total count of suspensions during the academic year, and counts a student more than once if they were suspended multiple times for different incidents.
Source: California Department of Education

Some large districts had very large declines.[15] We do know that, like the LAUSD's decision to end all suspensions for disruption/defiance, some districts, such as the Alameda Unified School District (AUSD), also made efforts to reduce suspensions, especially in this category. Many others, including Oakland and San Francisco, have subsequently eliminated the use of suspension for this offense category. As with the LAUSD, efforts by community members and educators to address excessive and disparate rates at the school level often inspired districtwide policy changes. As the list below (Table 10) demonstrates, many large districts show a substantial decline in suspension rates since 2011-12. Six districts—West Contra Costa, Bakersfield, Central, Oxnard Union High, Livermore Valley, and Covina Valley—cut their total OSS rate by more than half.

Table 9: Large Districts with Biggest Overall Declines in OSS per 100 since 2011-12 (shown with Disruption/Defiance Rate and Decline)

District	OSS RATE (2013-14)	OVERALL DECLINE IN OSS PER 100	Disruption/ De-fiance OSS RATE (2013-14)	OVERALL Disruption/Defiance DECLINE IN OSS PER 100
West Contra Costa Unified	12.3	-13.3	5.4	-8.8
Bakersfield City	10.6	-11.5	5.4	-9.1
Vallejo City Unified	22.6	-10.8	7.5	-4.5
Central Unified	6.8	-10.3	1.4	-6.9
Santa Rosa High	13.3	-9.8	4.7	-6.9
Rialto Unified	12.1	-9.5	2.9	-4.7
Tracy Joint Unified	10.4	-8.7	5.2	-6.2
Ceres Unified	9.2	-8.5	3.6	-5.1
Modesto City Elementary	12.2	-8.4	3.5	-1.2
Oxnard Union High	6.7	-8.1	1.3	-4.8
Hesperia Unified	10.6	-7.5	3.4	-3.6
San Juan Unified	11.7	-7.4	5.5	-5.3
Livermore Valley Joint Unified	2.2	-7.1	0.6	-2.7
Covina-Valley Unified	5.8	-6.4	1.3	-5.2
Antelope Valley Union High	17.8	-6.3	5.89	-8.4

Of course, in recognizing the large districts in Table 10 for having reduced suspension rates since 2011-12, this report's findings should not be misunderstood to suggest that further reductions are not warranted. Only two of the districts listed have reduced total OSS rates to below the statewide rate of 6.3 per 100 students in 2013-14.[16] Three districts, Antelope Valley, Santa Rosa High, and Vallejo, have rates that are more than double the statewide rate. Moreover, the statewide rate of 1.8 disruption/defiance suspensions per 100 students is exceeded by 11 of these districts.

The progress these districts have made in narrowing the racial discipline gap also should not be misconstrued to suggest that the remaining racial gaps are acceptable. When we further disaggregate the OSS rate in these districts by the three major racial/ethnic groups, we see, with a few exceptions, a decline for each of the major racial/ethnic groups (Table 9). Furthermore, in all but one district (Santa Rosa) of those featured below, Blacks had been the group with the highest suspension rate and experienced the largest decline. Nevertheless, a large racial gap remains for Blacks in every district on this list.

Districts like the LAUSD and the two districts featured in the final segment of this report did not make this list of the greatest declines because that required having a fairly high suspension rate in 2011-12.[17]

Equally important is that a decline in suspension rates benefits the group experiencing the highest suspension rate, even if they are not a large segment of the population. As shown in Table 11, Blacks, Latinos, and Whites each had decreasing suspension rates in each of the districts. In most districts, the racial gaps narrowed as rates declined because the subgroup that had the highest rate in 2011-12 declined more than the others. In a few districts, however, the Latino-White gap in suspension rates increased because White rates declined more than Latino rates.

Table 10: Large Districts with Biggest Reductions in OSS per 100, by Race/Ethnicity (DECLINE from 2011-12)

	Black		White		Latino	
District	OSS RATE (2013-14)	DECLINE IN OSS PER 100	OSS RATE (2013-14)	DECLINE IN OSS PER 100	OSS RATE (2013-14)	DECLINE IN OSS PER 100
West Contra Costa Unified	28.9	-30.3	5.8	-10.4	10.3	-10.2
Bakersfield City	28.5	-33.8	10.1	-10.1	8.8	-8.9
Vallejo City Unified	47.0	-25.9	15.9	-9.2	14.3	-7.0
Central Unified	19.8	-24.5	6.5	-5.7	5.8	-10.5
Santa Rosa High	20.9	-16.3	7.6	-4.9	18.8	-16.8
Rialto Unified	29.5	-17.2	15.4	-11.2	9.5	-7.6
Tracy Joint Unified	23.5	-14.0	9.6	-6.1	11.2	-10.7
Ceres Unified	19.8	-11.2	14.7	-5.8	7.8	-9.3
Modesto City Elementary	29.0	-24.1	13.3	-6.0	11.6	-7.9
Oxnard Union High	13.0	-3.2	3.3	-5.8	7.6	-9.8
Hesperia Unified	27.0	-11.9	9.6	-6.5	9.2	-7.6
San Juan Unified	33.5	-20.2	9.3	-6.0	12.0	-8.8
Livermore Valley Joint Unified	10.5	-32.2	1.6	-5.1	3.1	-10.1
Covina-Valley Unified	14.2	-11.1	4.4	-10.6	6.0	-6.2
Antelope Valley Union High	47.4	-18.1	7.6	-6.2	12.0	-3.0

Where API scores rose as efforts were made to reduce suspension rates. Many school districts in California experienced a pattern of suspension rates falling while API scores rose. There are many reasons why this might occur, and sheer coincidence is always a possibility. Nevertheless, between 2011-12 and 2013-14, OSS rates dropped from 9.4 to 6 to 5.2 in the Alameda Unified School District (AUSD), a reduction of 4.2 suspensions per 100 students, and OSS rates in the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) dropped from 7.6 to 6 to 4.6, a reduction of 3 suspensions per 100 students. Meanwhile, in the first two years of this decline, test scores improved by 6 points in AUSD and by 11 points in BUSD. Most important, Black students, the subgroup with the highest suspension rates in both districts, saw the greatest reduction in suspensions per 100 enrolled. As depicted in Figure 6, Black OSS per 100 went from 31, to 20 to 17 in AUSD and from 21 to 18 to 14 in BUSD (a net decline of 14 and 7 suspensions per 100, respectively), while API scores increased.

Figure 7: Decline in Black OSS Rates per 100 Enrolled

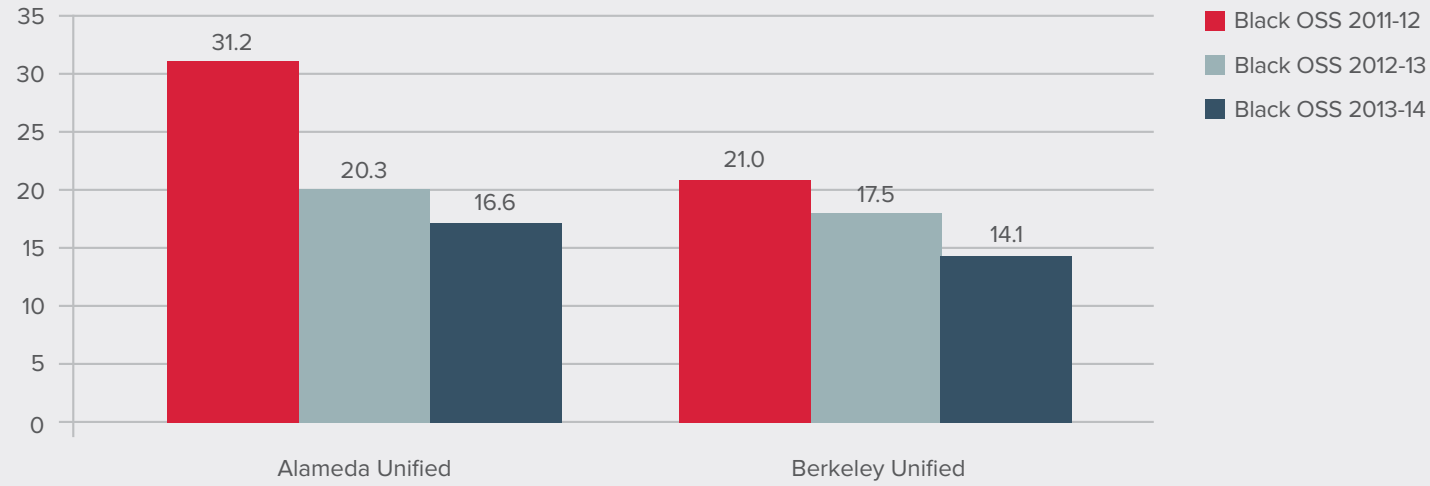
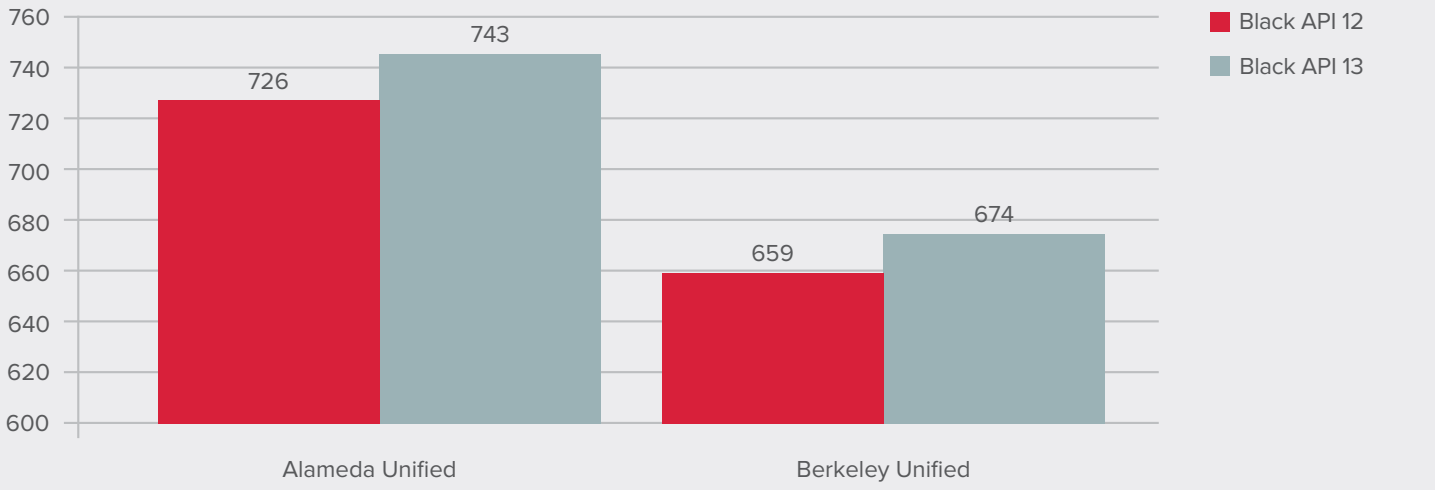


Figure 8: Rise in Black API Scores, from 2011-12 to 2012-13



Suspension rates declined and API scores increased for Latino students.

We selected the Alameda and Berkeley districts in part because these trends held true for each subgroup when analyzed individually (Tables 12 and 13).

Table 11: OSS per 100 Students Enrolled, by Race/Ethnicity

	Year	Alameda Unified	Berkeley Unified
Total	2011-12	9.4	7.6
	2012-13	6.0	6.0
	2013-14	5.2	4.6
	Change	-4.2	-3.0
Black	2011-12	31.2	21.1
	2012-13	20.3	17.5
	2013-14	16.6	14.1
	Change	-14.6	-7.0
Latino	2011-12	13.0	5.2
	2012-13	7.0	4.2
	2013-14	6.9	3.1
	Change	-6.1	-2.1
White	2011-12	6.0	2.9
	2012-13	4.0	2.1
	2013-14	4.1	1.5
	Change	-1.9	-1.4
Change in Size of Racial Gap	Black-White	-12.7 points	-5.6 points
	Latino-White	-4.2 points	-0.7 points

As suspension rates for all three major racial groups declined, the racial gaps in disciplinary exclusion narrowed. Specifically, the Black-White gap in Alameda narrowed by 12.7 suspensions: Blacks went from having 25.2 more suspensions than Whites per 100 enrolled in 2011-12 to having 12.5 more in 2013-14.

In Berkeley, the change in the Black-White gap from 18.2 to 12.6 suspensions per 100 enrolled narrowed the gap by 5.6. The Latino-White gap also narrowed in both districts, from 7 points to 2.8 in AUSD, and from 2.3 to 1.6 in BUSD.

Equally important is that each subgroup made academic gains during the period of declining suspensions, as indicated by higher API scores (Table 13). In AUSD, Black API scores rose 17 points, which was nearly as much as Latinos (22 points) and more than Whites (4 points). In BUSD, Black API scores increased by 15 points, which was 4 points more than Latino scores. White API scores in BUSD remained the highest but were unchanged. This resulted in a narrowing of the racial achievement gaps in both districts..

It should also be noted that the API scores of students with disabilities and the economically disadvantaged in both districts also improved during the same two-year period.

Table 12: API Scores by Race/Ethnicity

	Black		Latino		White	
	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
Alameda Unified	726	743	766	788	885	889
Berkley Unified	659	674	760	764	923	923

We did not conduct an additional comprehensive data analysis of reasons for the changes in these districts and do not hold these districts out as proof that lowering suspension rates will cause a rise in test scores. In fact, it is likely that achievement scores improved partly as a result of strong district leadership, excellent teaching, and other factors likely to boost achievement independent of changes in disciplinary policy. Moreover, although these two districts showed a steady decline in suspension rates for two consecutive years for each racial group and a very large decline for Black students, one would expect that, over a longer period of fairly steady decline, the suspension rates would level off or even increase slightly in some years. The same would be true of growth in API scores over a longer period—that is, it would not be surprising if growth did not show a steady increase for every group every year. Unfortunately, we only have two years of API scores data and three years of discipline data that are disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

After we completed our analysis of every selected district and chose to highlight Alameda and Berkeley, we did request newer data and called administrators in both districts to discuss our findings. We wanted to hear the district leaders' perspectives on their data trends; specifically, whether they thought reducing suspensions contributed to achievement gains, and whether the trends were attributable to any intentional efforts or specific programs In their districts.

The district leadership at both AUSD and BUSD did say they believed that their students' academic gains were related to their district's discipline reform efforts. Administrators in both districts described their efforts to improve the school climate and enhance learning conditions. Moreover, leaders from both districts interviewed for this report tended to echo the view expressed by BUSD's assistant superintendent, Pasquale Scuderi, who pointed out that their concentrated efforts to improve instruction and student engagement likely helped to decrease suspensions.

The following describes what we learned about the ongoing efforts in each district, along with some additional newer data points provided by each district:

Alameda: In January 2014, AUSD issued a press release about their declining discipline rates. Kelly Lara, director of student services, attributed the reductions to the district's positive and progressive discipline plan, character education programs, and districtwide professional development for administrators on student discipline.[18] Lara noted that the discipline plan "seeks to identify interventions and disciplinary practices that will support students in making better choices and understanding the impact of their behavior on both their classrooms and their community." The district also called attention to racial disparities in discipline and publicly acknowledged that their rates were still too high and the disparities too wide.

Numerous administrators described to us what they were doing to address the disparities districtwide, including restorative justice programs at the high school. In response to our further questions about the relationship between improving scores and declining suspensions, Alameda superintendent Sean McPhetridge said, "It's a simple thing; if we keep kids in school, they learn." McPhetridge went on to explain that the district had been making a concerted effort to make their school environments safe and tolerant. He pointed out that the district had invested in a "caring school curriculum," was among the first of California's school districts to reach out to the LGBT student community, and had put supports in place to reduce bullying. He also highlighted the district's investment in schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports, and, most recently, in restorative justice programs in their 6-12 school. Also noteworthy was McPhetridge's personal commitment to ending the school-to-prison pipeline. He described his experiences as an educator, including teaching reading to prisoners on death row at San Quentin. His experiences there inspired his passion for helping historically disadvantaged youth in Alameda. He stated that "if we don't educate we'll build more prisons…We must acknowledge that there are disproportional rates of suspension and special education referrals and restrictive settings, [which] means we are still marginalizing youth of color…[This] is a drain on the community and morally wrong."

Superintendent McPhetridge also highlighted the work of other district leaders, including Kiersten Zazo, a principal, and Audrey Hyman, president of the local teachers union. He noted that Principal Zazo's school incorporated a model of restorative justice that relies heavily on peer mentors, who help individuals who have transgressed take action to restore all parties. In his opinion, restorative justice "embodies the principle of educate, do not incarcerate." He also gives credit to the union leadership and the rank-and-file members, who he said have worked closely and cooperatively with the district and are concerned about inequity. In his words, the teachers "have been keeping their eyes on the prize."

McPhetridge stated that high rates of exclusion and significant racial disparities persist in Alameda, and that he is committed to eliminating them. According to the most recent data AUSD provided to CCRR, there were 432 suspensions in 2014-15, 220 of them for disruption/defiance. The suspension rate per 100 students overall continued to decline, from 5.2 to 4.3 OSS per 100, but this was based on declines for Latino and White students (from 7 to 5.5 and from 4 to 2.2, respectively). Meanwhile, the rate for Blacks increased from 17.8 to 18.5 OSS per 100. In other words, after two consecutive years of decreasing suspension rates and narrowing racial gaps, the most recent data show the racial discipline gap between Blacks and both Latinos and Whites increased in Alameda, while it decreased slightly between Latinos and Whites. It is worth noting that a large share of the suspensions meted out to Black students was for disruption/defiance. According to our calculations, if Alameda had introduced a policy of not suspending students out-of-school for disruption/defiance, the overall Black suspension rate would have declined to 13.7 per 100.

Berkeley:[19] We spoke with several administrators from BUSD, and with school board chair Judy Appel. All stated their support for reducing suspension rates overall, and for increasing efforts to close the discipline gap in particular. Ongoing efforts include initiating a restorative justice pilot program in the high school and using the data on discipline and achievement to identify need and implement support systems for struggling students as soon as possible in order to reduce the likelihood that unmet academic or behavioral needs would contribute to the escalation of problematic misbehavior and a student getting suspended. The district's efforts to improve the school climate were addressed at two BUSD board meetings in September 2015. At the first meeting, teachers union leader Cathy Campbell applauded the district's efforts to close the equity gap and highlighted the need to continue to offer teachers opportunities to increase their cultural competence. She also suggested that the restorative

justice pilot and related monitoring was one of the areas teachers considered most important in helping advance the overarching equity goals. Berkeley superintendent Donald E. Stevens, in his state of the schools address, noted that the district will provide more professional development and coordinate student services using using a system of tiered interventions to help close the equity gap. These efforts will also include expanding restorative practices. The third goal of the district's standards for its local control accountability plan as described by the superintendent, included behavioral health support and restorative justice programs.[20]

School discipline in BUSD was discussed in more detail at the subsequent BUSD board meeting, held on September 30, 2015, as part of the report to the public on progress being made toward goal three of the LCAP. In her evaluation of the LCAP environment, BUSD director of student services, Susan Craig, presented data showing that chronic absenteeism declined from 22% to 17% from 2013-14 to 2014-15. However, during this same period, while total suspensions for the district declined from 266 to 240, suspensions for Black students increased slightly, from 145 to 150. On the other hand, suspensions for Blacks at the secondary level decreased from 129 to 117.

At the September 30 meeting, district leaders described looking into the characteristics of students more likely than others to be suspended, and said that they are seeking more effective ways to intervene early to reduce the number of suspensions, including alternatives such as restorative justice.

Given the possibility that BUSD's suspension numbers for Black students increased slightly in the most recent year (not covered by this report) after consecutive years of large declines is reason to be cautious. However, the way the uptick in suspensions was discussed by the school board was striking - it was regarded as a serious problem for the entire BUSD community - one in which the BUSD board said it was prepared to invest resources, and was committed to solve.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

There is much that schools and districts can do, but there are no quick fixes. Our district analyses suggest that efforts to reduce suspensions can go hand in hand with efforts to improve learning conditions and thereby academic outcomes. We found two California school districts where effective teachers and leaders saw their discipline reform efforts as being aligned with efforts to improve academic outcomes. While there are numerous California districts where API scores declined as suspension rates increased, there are also examples where the counter-narrative holds true. In our brief review of efforts in two districts that our analysis suggested are making progress, we learned that simply lowering suspension rates was not the primary goal, nor was it regarded as an automatic or easy way to boost achievement. Both districts instead believed that reforming school disciplinary policy must be an integral part of the district's educational mission.

One of our core recommendations, which is based on our observations of the most successful districts in California and the most recent research on what has worked to lower both suspension rates and racial disparities (Losen, 2015), is that districts should invest in training leaders and teachers and in providing support for students in ways that improve student engagement. Moreover, districts should not regard implementing changes in discipline policy or practice as being isolated or distinct from their academic mission (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015).

Fortunately, districts willing to invest adequate time and resources can benefit from growing knowledge of how to improve the school climate without relying on suspending students. The consensus is that such efforts should be pursued, which has already resulted in expanded federal guidance for districts (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014) and federal grant opportunities. California has created additional policy incentives, such as the requirement that LCAPs and related budgets describe how each recipient district will meet the goal of improving the school environment. This a required element of the LCAP submission, and 92% of the districts surveyed did include some disciplinary goals in 2012-13. According to the California Department of Justice, which surveyed a representative sample of 200 districts, the number of districts that included discipline goals in 2014-15 declined slightly, to 87%. Furthermore, of the districts surveyed, only 38% included 2014-15 suspension data in their annual update. Districts are supposed to come up with ways to measure their progress that meet their LCAP goals, but they are not specifically required to use discipline data in their update. Finally, although it is not required, only 16% of the district LCAPs included disaggregated suspension goals in their plans submitted for 2015.[21]

On July 21, 2015, the White House convened a summit called Rethink School Discipline, at which the LAUSD's Garfield High School principal stated that his school's efforts to reduce the number of suspensions coincided with an 82-point increase in the school's API scores (Ruiz, 2013). Vallejo superintendent Ramona Bishop stated at the same summit that her district's dramatic reduction in

suspension rates reflects an intense and purposeful effort to improve school climate and graduation rates. The Vallejo school district went from almost 7,200 suspensions in 2010-11 to 2,604 in 2014-15. Moreover, in the coinciding three years from 2010-11 to 2012-13, the district's graduation rates increased from 54% to 65%.

The hard work ahead must go beyond action plans and reduced suspension rates. Recent studies suggest that addressing racial disparities will require taking a hard look at the facts about racial bias. In a series of experimental studies, Stanford researchers presented approximately 250 teachers with a hypothetical scenario in which they viewed the school behavioral record for a student who had committed one or two minor infractions (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). The ethnicity of the student was implied to be either Black or White; otherwise the records were identical. When told this was a first offense, the teachers meted out the same penalty for those presumed to be Black and those presumed to be White. However, when told that it was a second infraction, there were significant racial differences in the punishment given. When the teachers were trying to stem what they believed was a pattern, much harsher punishments were meted out to the students thought to be Black.

The harshest punishment a student can receive is a referral to law enforcement or arrest for school related behavior. In a speech on school discipline made on September 30, 2015, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan relayed that his examination of data on the arrest records of juveniles in Chicago made him acutely aware of the issue and how school practices contributed to it:

> I didn't expect the answer [I got]: that the majority of the arrests were occurring during the school day, in our school buildings, mostly for nonviolent misdemeanors. Those calls to the police to put kids in jail?...We were making them...Today our schools suspend roughly three and a half million kids a year, and refer a quarter of a million children to the police each year. And the patterns are even more troubling for children of color—particularly boys—and for students with disabilities.

We encourage all to read Secretary Duncan's speech, which emphasizes the connection between excessive discipline and academics and describes new research on implicit bias, including how the solution to these problems entails addressing them as part of broader efforts to improve schools and to equalize educational opportunities.

One point that cannot be emphasized enough is that districts can improve the school environment and reap academic benefits while reducing suspension rates and striving for equitable discipline. Therefore, it will be important to expand on efforts in California to eliminate suspensions generally, and especially for minor categories such as disruption/defiance.

Report Limitations: When we looked at the statewide trends in suspension rates and API scores, we found that total API scores declined after one year by 1 point overall, but rose by 4 points at the high school level. Suspensions declined during this two-year period, but only slightly, just 1.6 suspensions per 100 students overall. The 2015 NAEP scores show a similar decline nationally since 2013; in California, both reading and math scores were slightly lower, but they were reported as not significant, statistically speaking (National Assessment Governing Board, 2015).

Given the small decline in API scores and the lack of data to distinguish changes in suspension rates and API scores by grade level, we focused our correlational analysis on the relationship between API scores and suspensions each year, and not on whether the small change in suspension rates was related to the one-point decline in API scores. We analyzed the majority of districts that had reported suspension data

for both years, but excluded districts with only one years' worth of data and county school districts. Additional research on this relationship is warranted, and on whether intentional, successful efforts to reduce suspensions predict improvements in achievement outcomes over time.

Another major limitation was the lack of cross-sectional data needed to examine race with disability and race with gender. It is worth repeating that federal law requires every state to report racially disaggregated discipline data for students with disabilities each year. California quickly jumped from being noncompliant to compliant, but it is currently out of compliance once again. Considering that Black students with disabilities were suspended more than any other subgroup in California, progress on efforts to reduce the use of suspension and evaluate interventions should be made public, as it pertains to those most frequently suspended. We did not have grade-level data, therefore, districts that only have elementary schools are presented with those with that have only high schools.

Ultimately, improved data collection should include grade-level analyses, race with gender, race with disability, and looking at the impact disciplinary exclusion has on LGBT youth. With no data collected on the experiences of this group, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which they are negatively affected or helped by reform measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

Despite the progress documented in this report, suspension rates and the racial gap in discipline remains far too high. We encourage all to follow the lead of district leaders like those in Alameda and Berkeley Unified, who acknowledged that their current rates and disparities were not acceptable, and whose words and actions signaled that serious and coordinated efforts were required to remedy these problems.

- Provide teacher training focused on improving student engagement, support for restorative practices, and more support generally for teachers and leaders to improve school climate.
- Expand efforts to reduce suspensions at the state and district levels, and monitor disaggregated discipline data by race, gender, and disability status.
- Reinforce changes to school codes, with enough resources to ensure appropriate support for educators and implementation with integrity.
- Eliminate suspensions for minor offenses such as disruption/defiance for all grades.
- Make reducing exclusionary discipline one of the core indicators of a healthy school environment.
- Set goals for reducing disciplinary exclusion as part of state and local standards for the required local control accountability plans.
- Invest in research to identify what works to both lower suspension rates and close the discipline gaps by race, disability, and gender. Include an exploration of the relationship between suspension rates and academic outcomes, such as core subject-matter proficiency and graduation rates.
- Increase data collection and reporting on discipline by grade level and across subgroup categories, such as race with gender, and pilot the collection of data on LGTBQ youth.
- Comply with federal law requiring annual state reporting to the public on the school discipline of students with disabilities by race and disability category.

APPENDIX A:
STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RATES OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS AND ACHIEVEMENT IN CALIFORNIA

Appendix A: Study of the Relationship between Rates of Out-of-School Suspensions and Achievement in California

Michael A. Keith II, Tia E. Martinez, Cheri L. Hodson, and Daniel J. Losen

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between aggregate (district-level) Academic Performance Index scores and out-of-school suspension rates in the state of California.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To better understand the relationship between student performance and behavioral outcomes in the state of California, we asked the following:

1. Is there a relationship between district-level Academic Performance Index scores and out-of-school suspension rates overall?
2. Is there a relationship between district-level Academic Performance Index scores and out-of-school suspension rates when disaggregated by race/ethnicity?

From the outset, we hypothesized that:

1. There is an inverse (i.e., negative) relationship between Academic Performance Index scores and out-of-school suspension rates overall.
2. There is an inverse (i.e., negative) relationship between Academic Performance Index scores and out-of-school suspension rates when disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

Methods

Data

The California Department of Education (CDE) provides downloadable data files pertaining to various student outcomes and measures for the state. For our analyses, we utilized discipline and academic data from the CDE public repository.

Discipline. Public files containing aggregate student discipline data—i.e., number of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) disaggregated by race/ethnicity—for the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, respectively. OSS rates were calculated by dividing the number of suspensions for the year by the number of students enrolled. For example, if there were 1,000 OSS in a district and 10,000 students enrolled, the overall OSS rate would be 10 suspensions per 100 enrolled students.

Academic Performance Index. Public files containing aggregate API scores by race/ethnicity for the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, respectively. The API is one component of California's definition of Adequate Yearly Progress, which is required under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The API system falls under a two-year cycle that gives a *base* score for the first year and a *growth* score in the second year. The *base* API comes from the previous spring's test scores (e.g., *base* 2012 API scores)

and the *growth* API comes from current spring's test scores (e.g., *growth* 2013 API scores). It is a score ranging from 200 to 1,000 that annually measures the academic performance and progress of individual schools and districts in California. An API score of 800 is the target that has been set by the state. The API is calculated using results of the Standardized Testing and Reporting program and the California High School Exit Exam. The 2012-13 school year is the final year for which API scores are available, which coincides with the end of STAR testing.

Sample

Our sample was comprised of 747 school districts across the state of California. Only school districts that (1) reported suspension data for both 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years and (2) were not designated as state county education offices were included in the analyses. Most districts designated as state county offices include alternative schools for special populations, which is why they were excluded from our final sample.

In examining the relationship between API scores and OSS rates for the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, respectively, we used the full sample of 747 districts. In answering our second research question, where we examine the relationship between API scores and OSS rates for the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, respectively, by race/ethnicity, the number of districts that were represented varied by each respective student group based on *numerically significant student group* representations. Per the CDE, a *numerically significant student group* was a group with at least 100 students with valid test scores *or* 50 or more students who represented at least 15 percent of the students with valid test scores (2015). Student groups were comprised of the following racial/ethnic categories: Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Filipino, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White, and Two or More Races.

Data Analysis

We computed Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to assess the relationship between API scores and OSS rates. Pearson's correlation coefficient provides information about the *direction* (i.e., positive or negative) and *strength* (i.e., very weak [r = .00 - .19] to very strong [r = .80 – 1.0]) of a relationship (Evans, 1996). As part of the design, we examined aggregate API scores from the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, respectively, and compared them to the aggregate OSS rates for those given years. We also looked at the relationships when race/ethnicity were disaggregated.

Findings

Based on the research showing that suspensions predict increased grade retention and lower graduation rates (Balfanz et al., 2015; Marchbanks III et al., 2015) and lower test scores (Skiba et al., 2015) and necessarily involves a loss of instructional time, we hypothesized that we would find an inverse relationship between API scores and OSS rates. In other words, as districts' API scores go up, districts' OSS rates would go down. We found that there is, in fact, an inverse relationship between API scores and OSS rates (see Tables A1 and A2, below). There are *moderate* negative correlations between the API scores and OSS rates from 2011-12 (r = -.476) and 2012-13 (r = -.518) at the 0.01 level (Evans, 1996). In addition, when disaggregated by race/ethnicity, we found *moderate* to *strong* negative correlations for most student groups (p = 0.01). Most notably, as shown in Table A1 and Table A2, in 2011-12, the Black student group had the strongest negative correlation at the 0.01 level (r = -.646). In 2012-13, as shown in Table A2, the Black and the multiracial student groups had the strongest correlations at the 0.01 level (r = -.669 and r = -.717, respectively).

Limitations

All of the datasets used for our analysis were provided at the district level only. A district's API score calculation is based on the sum total of all student API scores in the given district, not on school scores. Hence, we were unable to examine the relationship at the individual school level. In addition, these analyses were correlational. Therefore, findings should not be confused with analyses seeking to establish a causal relationship or to predict the influence of suspension on API scores.

Table A1: District-Level Academic Performance Index Scores and OSS Rates, by Race, 2012. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
API Scores, by Race										
1. Black	-									
2. American Indian	.83**	-								
3. Asian	.73**	.80**	-							
4. Filipino	.82**	.72**	.68**	-						
5. Latino/a	.82**	.67**	.66**	.82**	-					
6. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.79**	.59*	.40**	.79**	.80**	-				
7. White	.73**	.66**	.81**	.65**	.72**	.27	-			
8. Multiracial (Two or More Races)	.77**	.75**	.84**	.67**	.74**	.23	.91**	-		
OSS Rates, by Race										
9. Black	**-.64****	-.36*	-.61**	-.44**	-.30**	-.35*	-.40**	-.70**	-	
10. American Indian	-.39**	**-.52****	-.41**	-.31**	-.15**	-.23	-.18**	-.43**	.24**	-
11. Asian	-.43**	-.29	**-.58****	-.32**	-.22**	-.12	-.32**	-.62**	.27**	.37**
12. Filipino	-.39**	-.31	-.30**	**-.44****	-.15**	-.19	-.21**	-.34**	.42**	.22**
13. Latino/a	-.49**	-.48**	-.58**	-.47**	**-.42****	-.27	-.42**	-.65**	.52**	.38**
14. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-.34**	-.36*	-.27**	-.27**	-.27**	**-.44****	-.33**	-.24**	.30**	.25**
15. White	-.52**	-.54**	-.70**	-.42**	-.02	-.15	**-.58****	-.70**	.50**	.39**
16. Multiracial (Two or More Races)	-.18**	-.31	-.17**	-.13	-.21**	.02	-.29**	-.18*	.20**	.16**
M	750.17	737.09	902.95	879.61	763.12	765.37	846.69	867.21	21.31	4.71
SD	56.95	61.02	55.62	35.59	49.67	46.63	55.19	56.88	27.84	7.88

Table A1: Continued

Variables	11	12	13	14	15	16	
11. Asian	-						
12. Filipino	.35**	-					
13. Latino/a	.34**	.27**	-				
14. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.35**	.29**	.40**	-			
15. White	.34**	.34**	.71**	.39**	-		
16. Multiracial (Two or More Races)	.19**	.06	.29**	.14*	.24**	-	
M	15.96	7.79	9.12	23.62	10.55	14.05	-
SD	18.76	21.84	10.41	27.37	49.4	35.57	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table A2: District-Level Academic Performance Index Scores and OSS Rates, by Race, 2013. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
API Scores, by Race										
1. Black	-									
2. American Indian	.84**	-								
3. Asian	.74**	.78**	-							
4. Filipino	.84**	.78**	.69**	-						
5. Latino/a	.83**	.58**	.66**	.83**	-					
6. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.81**	.66**	.43**	.80**	.81**	-				
7. White	.75**	.62**	.82**	.65**	.73**	.31*	-			
8. Multiracial (Two or More Races)	.76**	.63**	.81**	.61**	.73**	.20	.88**	-		
OSS Rates, by Race										
9. Black	**-.67****	-.50**	-.59**	-.49**	-.28**	-.43**	-.35**	-.61**	-	
10. American Indian	-.47**	**-.53****	-.43**	-.20*	-.13*	-.17	-.11*	-.46**	.12*	-
11. Asian	-.37**	-.44**	**-.63****	-.34**	-.28**	-.17	-.23**	-.56**	.58**	.07
12. Filipino	-.41**	-.40*	-.30**	**-.42****	-.16**	-.39**	-.23**	-.39**	.39**	.11
13. Latino/a	-.54**	-.44**	-.61**	-.49**	**-.34****	-.38**	-.39**	-.59**	.47**	.20**
14. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-.29**	-.30	-.15*	-.28**	-.19**	**-.50****	-.20**	-.19*	.24*	.06
15. White	-.53**	-.49**	.70**	-.46**	-.29**	-.24	**-.57****	-.66**	.46*	.28**
16. Multiracial (Two or More Races)	-.56**	-.53**	-.73**	-.47**	-.34**	-.28*	-.51**	-.72**	.58*	.27**
M	747.71	734.86	900.78	875.28	760.70	760.40	842.04	861.46	20.51	4.94
SD	57.4	64.19	56.81	36.01	50.26	47.19	55.7	59.99	50.21	12.89

Table A2: Continued

Variables	11	12	13	14	15	16	
11. Asian	-						
12. Filipino	.45**	-					
13. Latino/a	.31**	.39**	-				
14. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.23**	.21**	.25**	-			
15. White	.39**	.42**	.64**	.23**	-		
16. Multiracial (Two or More Races)	.54**	.42**	.56**	.37**	.60**	-	
M	16.15	6.3	7.95	24.28	8.05	12.52	-
SD	28.57	16.03	8.46	31.09	9.8	18.58	

App
*p < .05. **p < .01.

APPENDIX B:
CALCULATING SUSPENSIONS PER 100 ENROLLED USING CUMULATIVE OR CENSUS ENROLLMENT

Appendix B: Calculating Suspensions per 100 Enrolled Using Cumulative or Census Enrollment

Suspension rates in this report are consistently derived by dividing the number of suspensions by the number of students enrolled on a specific date (referred to as the census enrollment). We report these as x suspensions per 100 students enrolled. With the exception of county office of education school districts, we do not report the rate of suspensions per 100 students enrolled cumulatively (the cumulative rate). Our report is concerned with racial disparities, and racially disaggregated cumulative enrollment data were not available. Therefore, we did not consider using the cumulative enrollment data throughout our report.

As described in our reporting on the county office of education school districts, many (but not all) schools in those districts have cumulative enrollment rates that are much higher than their census enrollment (some more than double), and it is very possible that the enrollment of some of these schools expanded each month. Using the census data does run the risk of inflating suspension rates for districts whose enrollment may vary dramatically, especially in districts whose daily enrollment grows significantly over the course of the year. That is why we present suspension rates both ways for the county office of education districts.

Some might assume that, because the suspensions that are collected are cumulative counts, so too should the enrollment used to derive our suspension rate be cumulative. However, both the cumulative and the census enrollment can distort the rate of suspensions per 100 enrolled in ways that are challenging to the accurate reporting of suspension rates.

Although the possibility of inflated rates is a potential problem if suspension rates are based on the census enrollment, using the cumulative enrollment instead increases the potential problem of deflated rates. This is because cumulative enrollment treats short-term enrollees as the enrollment-count equals of those students who attend the full term. This equal treatment is a problem for suspension rates because short-term enrollees have fewer opportunities to be suspended than full-term enrollees. Full-term students, by virtue of their greater number of days in school, have more opportunities to be suspended. The underlying assumption when the census enrollment is used is that most schools operate on a traditional 182-day calendar and most students are enrolled for the entire year. Furthermore, even schools and districts with high mobility may offset the number of incoming students with a similar number of those exiting. The cumulative enrollment only reflects the total number of students that enrolled *at any point and for any duration* during the year and does not subtract those who left.

The lower suspension rates one typically finds when cumulative enrollment is used is especially misleading if there is declining enrollment and/or high dropout numbers. In those situations, a suspension rate that uses the census enrollment from the first quarter of the year may also be lower than a rate that adjusts for enrollment changes. A student that attends for only 60 days and then drops

out could not generate as many suspensions as a student attending for a full year. In other words, 300 students attending for 60 days each can generate 180,000 suspensions at most, which is the same maximum number that 100 students attending for 180 days can generate. If the actual suspensions are the same for the two groups, the 300 students' cumulative enrollment will cause the enrollment to be higher than the census enrollment, and the suspension rate per 100 to be much lower than if derived from the census. In fact, the two groups had an equal number of opportunities for suspension. If the rate had reflected the days of actual enrollment, the suspension rate per 100 enrolled would be the same for the two groups.

The most accurate rate. Neither the census nor the cumulative enrollment type is ideal for reporting suspensions per 100 enrolled. The ideal suspension rate per 100 enrolled would use an enrollment number that counted all enrolled students, but also reflected the proportion of the school year for which they were enrolled. For example, a student attending the school for just 60 days would count as one-third of one enrolled student for the purpose of calculating the suspensions per 100 enrolled.

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ENDNOTES

Endnotes

[1] Of course, many other California schools and districts not highlighted have reportedly reduced suspensions while also showing academic benefits, not losses (Bishop & Shackelford, 2014; Lambert & Reese, 2015; Ruiz, 2013).
[2] Note: Although risk ratios are very useful for highlighting current disparities, they are not appropriate in this context to measure progress over time, where the goal of reform is for all students to benefit. For example, we believe it is a strong sign of progress that, while all groups saw a decline in rates, the Black-White gap narrowed in absolute terms. We applaud the fact that suspension rates declined a great deal more for Blacks than Whites because Black rates were far higher to begin with. Specifically, Black rates declined 5.8 points and White rates only 1.7 points. Yet the purely relative measure of the risk ratio between the two groups rose from 3.74 to 3.86. When two groups being compared both decline, the risk ratio gets smaller *only* when the relative ratio of decline exceeds the starting relative ratio. In the current example, Black suspension rates would have to decline *more than* 3.74 times the amount of the White decline in order for the ratio to get smaller. Despite the much larger reduction for Black rates, their decline of 5.8 percentage points was just 3.4 times more than the decline of 1.7 points by Whites. For the Black-White risk ratio to get smaller, the Black decline would need to have been at least 3.75 times greater than the White decline. In theory, because ratios are purely relative, the risk ratio could expand dramatically even as suspension rates fell below one percent for both Blacks and Whites, and even if the racial gap all but disappeared. Because effective disciplinary interventions would be expected to lower suspension rates for all students, we discourage using purely relative ratios that do not reflect the size of the racial gap in absolute terms or whether suspension rates are high or low, to measure progress. Instead, we intentionally focus on absolute values and whether suspension rates for each group increased or decreased, and whether the racial gap between groups narrowed or expanded.
[3] In describing these as "the largest reductions" we focus on the absolute value of the amount of the reduction because of our concern about the numbers of children potentially harmed. So, for example, a reduction of 10 suspensions per 100 students is considered a greater reduction than a reduction of 1 suspension per 100 enrolled. Obviously, if we evaluated reduction using only the relative comparison of percentage change from the starting value, a reduction of just 1 suspension per 100 could represent a greater relative decline than a reduction of 10 suspensions per 100. To do so would mean that reducing the lowest suspended group by 1 suspension per 100 would be considered greater progress than lowering the highest suspended group by 1 suspension per 100.
[4] It is worth noting that the decline in OSS was greater than the decline in ISS. Moreover, as with OSS declines, the largest decline for in-school suspensions per 100 was for Black and American Indian students. From these two tables we can also see that the racial gap, in terms of the differences in rates of suspensions between the racial/ethnic minority groups at the high end as compared to those at the low end, is large, but narrowed in this minor offense category.
[5] This category had comprised 39 percent of the 8.7 out-of-school suspensions per 100 in 2011-12, but by 2013-14 it made up 29 percent of the 6.3 out-of-school suspensions per 100. For in-school suspensions, the comparable data are that disruption/defiance offenses comprised 81% of the 2.7 in-school suspensions per 100 in 2011-12 and 66% of the 1.8 in-school suspensions in 2013-14.
[6] In reviewing the data for this report, we found that an in-school suspension was an extremely rare response to a serious offense (less than 2/10ths of one suspension for every 100 students overall). Even though ISS for serious offenses rose by a tiny fraction (3/100ths) during this period, if added to OSS rates for serious offenses, the total suspensions for serious offenses still declined substantially during the three-year period.
[7] The grouping of offenses reported uses the categorization made available by the California Department of Education on their website (http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest) in the table entitled "Suspension, Expulsion, and Truancy Report For 2011-12: Suspension by Federal Offense." The Violent Incident with Injury offense category includes the following California Education Code sections: 48915(c)(4) Sexual Battery/Assault; 48915(a)(1) Caused Physical Injury; 48915(a)(5) Committed Assault or Battery on a School Employee; 48900(a)(2) Used Force or Violence; 48900.3 Committed an act of Hate Violence; 48900(q) Hazing. The Weapons Possession Offense Category includes the following California Education Code sections: 48915(c)(1) Possession, Sale, Furnishing a Firearm; 48900(b) Possession, Sale, Furnishing a Firearm or Knife; 48915(c)(2) Brandishing

a Knife; 48915(a)(2) Possession of a Knife or Dangerous Object; 48915(c)(5) Possession of an Explosive. The Illicit Drug Related Offense Category includes the following California Education Code sections: 48915(c)(3) Sale of Controlled Substance; 48915(a)(3) Possession of Controlled Substance; 48900(c) Possession, Use, Sale, or Furnishing a Controlled Substance, Alcohol, Intoxicant; 48900(d) Offering, Arranging, or Negotiating Sale of Controlled Substances, Alcohol, Intoxicants; 48900(j) Offering, Arranging, or Negotiating Sale of Drug Paraphernalia; 48900(p) Offering, Arranging, or Negotiating Sale of Soma. The Disruption/Willful Defiance Offense Category includes the following California Education Code section: 48900(k) Disruption/ Defiance.

[8] The grouping of offenses reported uses the categorization made available by the California Department of Education on their website (http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest) in the table entitled: "Suspension, Expulsion, and Truancy Report For 2011-12: Suspension by Federal Offense." The Violent Incident with Injury offense category includes the following California Education Code sections: 48915(c)(4) Sexual Battery/Assault; 48915(a)(1) Caused Physical Injury; 48915(a)(5) Committed Assault or Battery on a School Employee; 48900(a)(2) Used Force or Violence; 48900.3 Committed an act of Hate Violence; 48900(q) Hazing. The Weapons Possession Offense Category includes the following California Education Code sections: 48915(c)(1) Possession, Sale, Furnishing a Firearm; 48900(b) Possession, Sale, Furnishing a Firearm or Knife; 48915(c)(2) Brandishing a Knife; 48915(a)(2) Possession of a Knife or Dangerous Object; 48915(c)(5) Possession of an Explosive. The Illicit Drug Related Offense Category includes the following California Education Code sections: 48915(c)(3) Sale of Controlled Substance; 48915(a)(3) Possession of Controlled Substance; 48900(c) Possession, Use, Sale, or Furnishing a Controlled Substance, Alcohol, Intoxicant; 48900(d) Offering, Arranging, or Negotiating Sale of Controlled Substances, Alcohol, Intoxicants; 48900(j) Offering, Arranging, or Negotiating Sale of Drug Paraphernalia; 48900(p) Offering, Arranging, or Negotiating Sale of Soma. The Disruption/Willful Defiance Offense Category includes the following California Education Code section: 48900(k) Disruption/ Defiance.

[9] See letter to Governor Brown, July 2013. Available at www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu.

[10] At the website www.ideadata.org, researchers can find the child-count data for students aged 6-21 in one table, and the discipline data for total disciplinary removals in a separate table for the same years. We only pulled data from 2010-11 and 2012-13, which was the most recent available.

[11] TOTAL DISCIPLINARY REMOVALS OF CWD (IDEA) IN STATE BY RACE/ETHNICITY, AGES 3 THROUGH 21

Student Group	Hispanic/ Latino	Black or African American	White	Asian	American Indian or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or more races	All Races/ Ethnicities
Number of Disciplinary Removals per 100 Children with a Disability	10	40	10	0.0	30	10	10	10

Explanatory Note: The number of disciplinary removals per child with a disability (IDEA), ages 3 through 21, by race/ethnicity category. *This table converted to per 100.* The numerator is the total number of disciplinary removals in a particular race/ethnicity category and the denominator is the total number of children with disabilities (IDEA), ages 3 through 21, in a particular race/ethnicity category as of the state-designated child count date (between October 1 and December 1, 2012). Data reported for IDEA 2012-13 Discipline and 2012 Child Count and Educational Environments.

Source: U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs publishes this information for each state under "Part B data" at: https://osep.grads360.org/services/PDCService.svc/GetPDCDocumentFile?fileId=10486

[12] Some may find this comparison of "suspension share" to "enrollment share" easier to grasp. However, the composition index and other relative measures are not ideal for understanding changes over time in this context, where a reduction in suspensions is much preferred over an increase. This is because changes to the *relative share* of suspensions over time do not reflect whether suspension use is increasing or decreasing. State-level suspension and enrollment data may be found using the *Suspension by Federal Offense and Enrollment* reports in DataQuest (http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/). Rates were calculated by dividing Total # of suspensions for Black students by Total # of suspensions (Overall).

[13] This analysis excluded data from Fresno Unified and Victor Valley Union High school districts because of errors in reporting in the current or prior years. They are, however, including in the statewide averages for 2013-14. Furthermore, California's Department of Education updates public website with corrected data on an ongoing basis.

[14] For the text of this report segment, we only feature the district-level out-of-school suspension rates by race/ethnicity if there were at least 50 students of the given racial/ethnic category represented. We applied this limit to call attention to high rates for subgroups in districts where those subgroups had a substantial enrollment presence. The spreadsheets that accompany this report, which include data on every district, do not contain this limitation. Furthermore, our editing decision does not mean that when a subgroup has fewer than 50 students their high suspension rates should be ignored. Moreover, we chose to focus on OSS rates in the text of this report because OSS rates tend to be much higher in California than rates of in-school-suspension (ISS) at the district level. For example only one district in California exceeded an ISS rate of 20 suspensions per 100 (Lindsay Unified), and the next highest was 8.5 ISS per 100. We also did not emphasize ISS because of the possibility that an ISS might involve school personnel providing academic and/or behavioral supports. We do not assume that an ISS provides any benefit, but there is no potential for the school to continue to educate students who are suspended out-of-school. The sortable spreadsheets that accompany this report do provide breakdowns for each district by all the racial/ethnic groups, and for ISS as well as for the categories of disruption/defiance and for the combined categories of violence with injury, illicit drug possession, and weapon possession.

[15] Each district had at least 10,000 students enrolled.

[16] The statewide rate is not a per-district average but is based on calculating all state suspensions by total state enrollment.
[17] Had we calculated the reduction as a percentage of the starting suspension rate, we would have wound up with many districts that had very low suspension rates to begin with.
[18] AUSD press release dated January 30, 2014. Available at www.alameda.k12.ca.us.
[19] We spoke with Judy Appel, president of Berkeley Unified School District's board of education, Pasquale Scuderi, and additional administrative staff.
[20] BUSD's board meetings held on September 9 and September 30, 2015, were available on YouTube.
[21] Email exchange with Jill Hagib, special assistant, regarding pending California Department of Justice Truancy Survey, which included findings on LCAP contents based on a review of approximately 200 plans for each of the last two years.