

# FIXING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

## THE BIG PICTURE

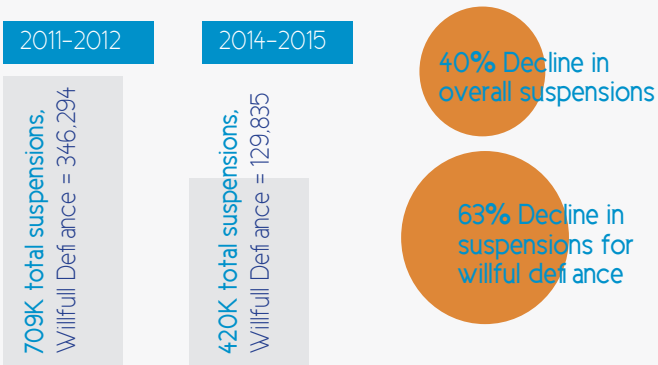
Public education is a human right and considered the foundation for opportunity and success. Unfortunately, some students are unnecessarily removed from school instead of having their needs met. Just one out-of-school suspension (a school administrator's decision to remove a student from school for one or more days) makes a student twice as likely to drop out and three times as likely to wind up in the juvenile justice system.<sup>1</sup> These practices hurt the most vulnerable students more: Black and

Latinx youth, foster youth, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

## HARSH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

During the 2016–2017 school year, California schools issued 381,845 suspensions, and 233,478 students were suspended at least one time.<sup>2</sup> Many students in California are suspended for minor misbehavior.<sup>3</sup> For instance, students disciplined for “defiance” have been removed from school for behaviors such as chewing gum in class, talking back, or wearing the wrong

From 11–12 to 14–15, the total number of CA suspensions fell by 40% driven by a drop in suspensions for disruption/defiance.



clothes. During the 2016–2017 school year, one in five suspensions in California was for defiance only.<sup>4</sup>

In California, schools suspend students of color at much higher rates than white students. Black students are about 3 times as likely to be suspended as their white peers (9.8% vs. 3.2% in 2016–2017).<sup>5</sup>

There is no evidence that Black students misbehave at higher rates.<sup>6</sup> Rather, Black students are just more likely to be punished than their white classmates for things that require adults to make a judgment call, like disrespect, noise, and loitering. Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as students without disabilities (7.1% vs. 3.2% in 2016–2017).<sup>7</sup>



mental health outcomes.<sup>9</sup> With all of these negative impacts, there is no research to support that suspensions and expulsions are even effective at helping students learn or making school safer. In fact, decades of research show that alternatives to suspension and expulsion -- including positive behavioral interventions and supports, restorative and trauma-informed practices, peer mediation, and social work and mental health counseling, just to name a few -- are far better at preventing behavioral issues, resolving conflict, strengthening teacher-student relationships, and creating a healthy, supportive environment for all students.<sup>10</sup>

## EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES HARM OUR STUDENTS AND DO NOT IMPROVE BEHAVIOR

Suspensions put students at much higher risk for dropping out, and the earlier a suspension happens, the more harm it causes.<sup>8</sup> Not only do suspensions and expulsions set young people up for failure and increase their chances of incarceration, they make students feel shame, alienation, rejection, and that their relationships with adults have no value, leading to higher instances of depression, substance abuse, and other negative