



April 30, 2012

Dr. Michael W. Kirst, President
State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Suite #5111
Sacramento, CA 95814



Re: Request for SBE Informational Item:
School Discipline - Suspension and Expulsion

Dear President Kirst:

We write to you as a coalition of community-based groups, anti-crime organizations, education activists, advocates for children and youth, public interest law firms, and civil rights organizations concerned about the overuse, and disproportionate use, of harsh disciplinary measures in California schools.

CHILDREN NOW



As you know, recent data released by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR), and reported by the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Los Angeles Times and countless other print and radio outlets, revealed a stunning inequity in the rates of school exclusion through suspension and expulsion and school-based arrest for children of color.



Students who are suspended or expelled are at greater risk of dropout than their peers and are more likely to repeat a grade, and while disproportionate school discipline policies are by no means the sole cause of the dropout crisis, they are certainly a significant contributor. Research confirms that high rates of out-of-school suspensions correlate with lower achievement scores, even after controlling for race and poverty. Even worse, it also correlates with higher levels of juvenile delinquency.



The OCR data show that California's ten largest school districts averaged a 9.9 percent combined suspension and expulsion rate during the 2009-2010 academic year, while many California districts were even higher, with suspension and expulsion rates exceeding 25 percent in some cases. At individual schools, combined suspension and expulsion rates approached 40 percent, but even more troubling was the disproportionate level among particular subgroups.



The level of disproportionate impact on certain subgroups obviously varies around the state, but out of school suspensions have dire long term consequences for all children. In Los Angeles Unified School District, the out of school suspension rate for African American students was nearly 6 times the rate for whites (17.4% vs. 2.9%). And in the San Francisco Unified School District, African Americans account for 11.9 percent of the student population but 42.5 percent of suspensions and 60 percent of expulsions.

The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the UCLA Civil Rights Project did a more detailed California analysis using the disaggregated data provided by nearly 500 districts. The report titled, "Suspended Education in California," found that in the ten districts where students were at greatest risk for suspension, nearly 1 of every 4

students was suspended. The sample provided by disaggregated data was used to calculate statewide rates that also revealed large racial disparities - African American (18%), American Indian (11%), and Latino (7%) students in the state sample were suspended at least once in 2009-10, compared with white (6%) and Asian American (3%) students.

The good news is that proactive approaches can dramatically reduce suspensions. For example, New America Media recently reported on the success of Richmond High School's implementation of the Restorative School Discipline Project, which cut its nearly 500 suspensions by this time last year in half. We ask that the State Board give this issue the attention it deserves.

Last July the Board provided a venue for a brief informational item on the topic of Chronic Absence, another critical issue most directly impacting similar student populations – and we wholeheartedly commend you for your leadership on that front. We believe this new data on suspension and expulsion rates warrants similar attention and ask that the Board consider hosting a similar informational item on this topic at your July meeting.

Our organizations would be thrilled to work with you to ensure the most productive, informative and concise presentation, and we will be happy to ensure that it proceeds in a manner that honors the time allotment you provide.

Please feel free to contact Brad Strong ([916588-7584](tel:9165887584)), Brian Lee ([415762-8270](tel:4157628270)) or Laura Faer ([213385-2977](tel:2133852977)) regarding this request.

Sincerely,



Barrie Becker
State Director
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
California



Bill Koski
Director,
Mills Legal Clinic, Youth &
Education Law Project



Maisie Chin
Executive Director
Community Asset Development Re-
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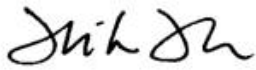
Ted Lempert
President
Children Now



Laura Faer
Education Rights Director
Public Counsel



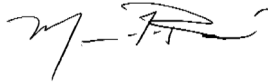
Francisco Lobaco
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Maria Ramiu
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Shannan Wilber
Executive Director
Legal Services for Children

cc: The Honorable Tom Torlakson, Superintendent of Public Instruction
The Honorable Darrell Steinberg, California State Senate
Sue Burr, Executive Director, State Board of Education
Julie Henderson, Senior Advisor for Policy, Office of the Governor