



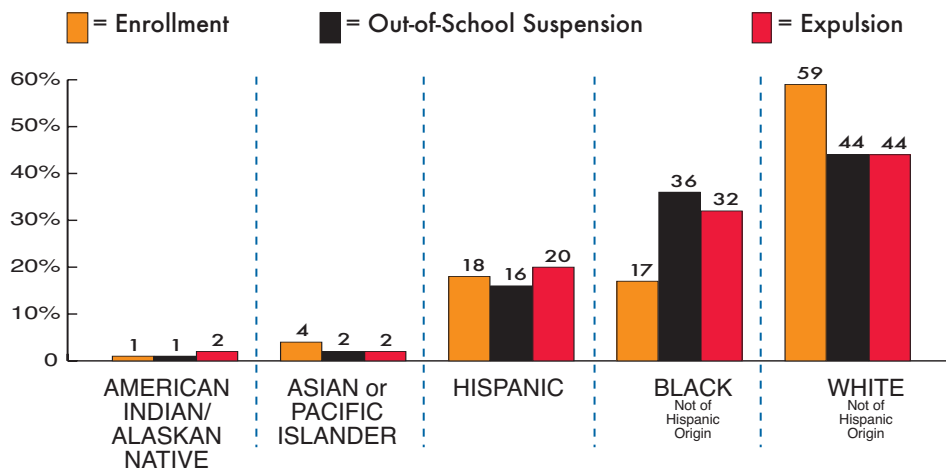
# Suspension and Expulsion At-A-Glance

For many years, public schools have “disciplined” students who commit serious violations of school rules or pose a threat to school safety by temporarily suspending or permanently expelling them from school. Beginning in the late 1980s, rigid “zero tolerance” policies were adopted by many states, including California. By the mid-1990s, zero tolerance became federal policy partly as a response to highly publicized school shootings. Initially, zero tolerance policies required that students be excluded from school for particular offenses such as bringing weapons or drugs to school or for fighting. In many schools, these policies have led to harsher punishments for first offenses and to the use of suspensions and expulsions for minor school code infractions, as well as serious ones. Although the school shootings that triggered “zero tolerance” policies involved white students at predominantly white schools, students of color are suspended and expelled at rates far higher than white students. Finally, although exclusionary school discipline policies are intended to ensure productive learning environments, when students are removed from school their learning is severely disrupted. Moreover, there is little scientific evidence showing that suspension and expulsion are effective in reducing school violence or increasing school safety.

This fact sheet briefly reviews trends in suspension and expulsion, presents research findings about the ineffectiveness of these actions, and identifies promising alternatives. It also lists resources for parents and students who wish to learn more.

## National Enrollment vs. Disciplinary Actions

Source: Office for Civil Rights, 2002 Elementary and Secondary School Survey





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## National Trends

- More than 3 million students were suspended and another 89,000 were expelled during the 2002-2003 school year.<sup>1</sup>
- African American students represent 17% of public school enrollment, but 33% of suspensions that removed them from school. White students make up 63% of public school enrollment and represent 53% of out-of-school suspensions (OSS).<sup>2</sup> Out-of-school suspension results in student removal from school for at least one day.
- The three student discipline issues most frequently rated as serious or moderate problems by principals at elementary and secondary levels schools were tardiness, absenteeism, and physical conflicts.<sup>3</sup>
- Research shows that students of color are most often referred and suspended for non-violent conduct such as “disrespect of authority,” “defiance of authority,” and “disobedience.”<sup>4</sup>
- The number of states with a law requiring LEAs to provide educational services to expelled students in an alternative setting decreased from 18 to 10 between 2001-2002 to 2002-2003.<sup>5</sup>

## Statewide Trends

- More than 396,000 California students were suspended and another 18,682 were expelled during the 2002-2003 school year.<sup>6</sup>
- African American students represent 8% of California public school enrollment, but 19% of suspensions that removed them from school.<sup>7</sup>
- Hispanic students make up approximately half of California’s students enrollment (46%) and also account for approximately half of state expulsions (47%) and suspensions (45%).<sup>8</sup>
- One out of every five expelled students in the United States attends a California school.<sup>9</sup>
- Many California expulsions have nothing to do with school safety. “Disruption of school activities or willfully defying the authority of school personnel” ranked as the #1 offense resulting in expulsion.<sup>10</sup>
- California school districts are *required* to provide alternative educational services<sup>1</sup> to students expelled from their home school, yet it is estimated that 1,957 students were left without an education.<sup>11</sup>

## Regional Trends

- More than 82,000 LAUSD students were suspended during the 2002-2003 school year.<sup>12</sup>
- The number of students expelled in LAUSD increased from 617 in 2002-2003 to 674 during the 2004-2005 school year.<sup>13</sup> Compared to their school enrollment (12%), African American students in LAUSD are over-represented in out-of-school suspensions (27%) and expulsions (22%).<sup>14</sup>
- In 2002-2003, Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in LAUSD accounted for 28% of out-of-school suspensions and 14% of expulsions.<sup>15</sup>

## Evidence about the Effects of Suspension and Expulsion

- There is little scientific research to show that zero-tolerance or other "get tough" measures are effective in reducing school violence or increasing school safety.<sup>16</sup>
- Several studies have found negative student outcomes following suspension and expulsion, such as delinquency, substance abuse and school dropout.<sup>17</sup>

## Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion

- Small, personalized schools
- School-based violence prevention programs
- Individual and group counseling
- In-school suspension
- Restorative justice programs
- Saturday, after school, or lunchtime detention, coupled with remedial support “pro-social” skill-building
- Participation in community-based intervention programs
- Conflict resolution workshops

## Resources for Parents and Students

- *ACLU of Northern California, Students’ Rights Guide*  
<http://www.aclunc.org/students/guide/punish.html>
- Student Advocacy Center of Michigan, QuickGuide to Suspensions and Expulsions  
<http://www.studentadvocacycenter.org/index.shtml>
- Advancement Project and the Harvard Civil Rights Project, *Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policies*  
<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu>
- Advancement Project, *Arresting Development: Addressing the School Discipline Crisis in Florida, Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track, Derailed.*  
<http://www.advancementproject.org>
- The North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention- Project EASE (Educational Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion), *Promising Strategies Document*  
<http://www.ncdjdp.org>
- Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Briefing Papers, *Children Left Behind: School Suspension and Expulsion in Indiana*  
<http://ceep.indiana.edu/ChildrenLeftBehind/>







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- 1 National expulsion and suspension data retrieved from U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2002). Elementary and Secondary School Survey, State and national projections for enrollment and selected items by Race/Ethnicity, and Sex. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available on-line at <http://vistademo.beyond2020.com/ocr2002r>
- 2 *Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline*, Advancement Project & The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2000. Available at <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu>
- 3 Heaviseide, S., Rowand, C., Williams, C., & Farris, E. (1998). *Violence and discipline problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97* (NCES 98-030). Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=98030>
- 4 See, for example, Skiba, R.J., Michael, R.S., Nardo, A.C., & Peterson, R. ( 2000). *The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, Indiana Education Policy Center. *Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline*, Advancement Project & The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2000. Retrieve at <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu>; Skiba, R. (2000). *Zero tolerance, zero evidence: A critical analysis of school disciplinary practice*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 5 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Report on the Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act in the States and Outlying Areas for School Year 2000-2001, Washington, DC, 2003. and U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, *Report on the Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 in the States and Outlying Areas for School Year 2002-03*, Washington, D.C., 2006. Reports are available at: [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html)
- 6 Office for Civil Rights, 2002 Elementary and Secondary School Survey.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 DataQuest, Statewide Expulsion Information by Education Code for 2003-04. <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
- 11 Office for Civil Rights, 2002 Elementary and Secondary School Survey.
- 12 Los Angeles Unified School District, District Accountability Report Card 2004-2005. [www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/bulletins/ldstldtz.html](http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/bulletins/ldstldtz.html)
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Office for Civil Rights, 2002 Elementary and Secondary School Survey.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 See, for example, Skiba, Russell. *Zero Tolerance, Zero Evidence: An Analysis of School Disciplinary Practice*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Education Policy Center, August 2000. Zweifler, Ruth, and Julia de Beers. *The Children Left Behind: How Zero Tolerance Impacts Our Most Vulnerable Children*. Michigan Journal of Race and Law, Fall 2002, pp. 191-220.
- 17 Fine, M. (1991). *Framing Dropouts Notes on the Politics of an Urban Public High School*. Albany: State University of New York Press. *Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline*, Advancement Project & The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2000.



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