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California Sees Significant Drops in Student Suspensions and Expulsions

SACRAMENTO—The number of students being suspended or expelled in California declined sharply during the last school year as more schools and districts put into place measures designed to keep young people in the classroom and learning, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson announced today.

Across the state, the total number of expulsions decreased by 12.3 percent, from 9,758 in 2011-12 to 8,562 in 2012-13. The total number of suspensions—either in-school or out of school—dropped 14.1 percent, from 709,596 in 2011-12 to 609,471 in 2012-13.

“Educators across California work hard to keep students in school and learning,” Torlakson said. “It can be a challenge to find the balance between maintaining a safe learning environment and giving young people the tools and opportunities they need to succeed. But we’re working with schools and districts throughout the state to do exactly that.”

A review of almost every ethnic subgroup of students, particularly the larger subgroups, shows substantially fewer of them were suspended. Among African-American students, 53,187 were suspended in 2012-13, down 5,606 or 9.5 percent from the year before. Among Hispanic students, 179,867 were suspended in 2012-13, down 20,416 or 10.2 percent from the year before. Among white students, 68,913 were suspended, down 8,363 or 10.8 percent from the year before.

Still, disparities exist in the rates of suspension. For example, African-American students make up 6.3 percent of total enrollment, but 16.2 percent of suspensions. Hispanic students make up 52.7 percent of total enrollment, but 54.6 percent of suspensions. White students make up 25.5 percent of total enrollment, but 20.9 percent of suspensions.

“This is the first time we have had this level of data to compare from one year to the next, and that’s valuable information for districts as they consider their practices moving forward,” Torlakson said. “Although fewer students are being removed from the classroom in every demographic across the state, the rates remain troubling and show that educators and school communities have a long road ahead.”

Statewide, “student defiance” is an often reported reason for suspensions. This area also saw the largest declines. There were a total of 259,875 suspensions statewide for defiance in 2012-13, down 81,237 or 23.8 percent, compared to the year before. There were a total of 8,562 expulsions for 2012-13, of which defiance was the most serious offense in 495 of these expulsions, down 113 or 18.6 percent from the year before.

Los Angeles Unified School District made major policy shifts and adopted a “restorative justice” program to teach students a set of principles and practices centered on promoting respect, taking responsibility, and strengthening relationships instead of suspending students for defiance-related offenses, resulting in a 37.5 percent drop in suspensions and a 15.1 percent drop in expulsions. Vallejo City Unified School District also implemented practices revolving around restorative justice and school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports, resulting in a 25 percent drop in suspensions and 21.4 percent drop in expulsions. Napa Valley Unified School District implemented a school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports program as well, resulting in an 18.9 percent drop in suspensions and a 75.5 drop in expulsions.

The California Department of Education (CDE) has created research-based programs to help districts develop alternatives to suspensions and expulsions.

- Student support experts at the CDE worked with The California Endowment, California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care, Region IX Equity Assistance Center at WestEd, and Attendance Works to identify positive alternatives to suspension and expulsion, and develop related strategies to improve attendance as part of an overarching initiative to keep students in school.
- Torlakson hosted a state interagency forum to explore behavioral intervention approaches to reduce chronic absenteeism in school.
- The CDE ran regional workshops for 20 key local educational agencies to provide information on restorative justice, schoolwide positive behavioral interventions, and supports to reduce high rates of suspensions and suspensions coupled with racial disparities.
- The CDE worked with Public Counsel to post online [Behavioral Intervention Strategies and Supports](#) guidelines to help districts keep students in school with positive reinforcement instead of punitive discipline practices.

Also, the CDE’s California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) enabled the state to collect this level of data and provide for the first time last year information disaggregated by subgroups of students. Because the 2012-13 data is the second year of suspension and expulsion information extracted from CALPADS, it can only be compared to the 2011-12 data, which served as a baseline. The 2011-12 and 2012-13 CALPADS data cannot be compared accurately to previous years’ suspension and expulsion data under the Uniform Management Information Reporting System (UMIRS).

Caution must be used when interpreting the number of students suspended and expelled, and the number and types of incidents and offenses. This is because some students may have been both suspended or expelled multiple times, and some incidents may be composed of several different offenses. CALPADS allows CDE to produce unduplicated counts to generate more accurate rates, compared to the old UMIRS data collection. As the CDE continues to collect information via CALPADS over time, the data and its interpretation will improve as districts become more familiar with entering information into the system.

The 2012-13 suspension and expulsion are available on the CDE's [DataQuest](#). The reports may be viewed at the state, county, district, and school levels. Reports on the most serious federal offense are available as part of reporting requirement under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Reports are also available specifically on California *Education Code* Section 48900(k) related to defiance, which comprise the majority of student offenses. Downloadable data files will be available at the CDE's [Expulsion and Suspension Data](#) Web page. Truancy data is still being tabulated.

Statewide Comparison of 2011-12 and 2012-13 Discipline Data

Table 1: Statewide Suspensions

Statewide Suspensions	2011-12	2012-13	Number Difference	Percent Difference
Total Suspensions	709,596	609,471	-100,125	-14.1%
Unduplicated Students Suspended	366,629	329,142	-37,487	-10.2%

Table 2: Statewide Expulsions

Statewide Expulsions	2011-12	2012-13	Number Difference	Percent Difference
Total Expulsions	9,758	8,562	-1,196	-12.3%
Unduplicated Students Expelled	9,553	8,264	-1,289	-13.5%

Table 3: Statewide Defiance Suspensions/Expulsions

Defiance Suspension/Expulsions	2011-12	2012-13	Number Difference	Percent Difference
Total Defiance Suspensions	341,112	259,875	-81,237	-23.8%
Defiance Expulsions	608	495	-113	-18.6%

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The California Department of Education (CDE) is a state agency led by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. For more information, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov> or by mobile device at <http://m.cde.ca.gov/>. You may also follow Superintendent Torlakson on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/cadepd> and Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/CAEducation>.