



### Summary of Key Issues

In 2014-15, CCSA became aware of analysis and reports planned regarding racial disparities in suspension rates in California charter schools, conducted by the UCLA Civil Rights Project, which recently released [a national study](#) and then a [national charter study](#) on the same topic. When the CCSA's Achievement & Performance Management (APM) team began exploring the data, we found that charters have a U-shaped distribution, with some of the highest and lowest suspension rates in California.

In December 2014, [CCSA's Member Council](#) asked Malka Borrego to chair a task force to look at the issue, evaluate data, collect best practices and make recommendations for any response the Association should be making. [Eighteen school leaders](#) from across the state representing many different types of schools participated, among them three Member Council representatives and two Board members. Some of these schools had higher suspension rates, others had lower rates. The Task Force met three times between January and March 2015. At the [first meeting](#), the Task Force heard a [presentation on the data](#) from one of the UCLA report authors, Tia Martinez. In the [second meeting](#), the Task Force participants discussed best practices in their schools. In the [third meeting](#), participants discussed potential recommendations and commitments their schools would make.

Concurrent to this process, CCSA was also monitoring a Senate Bill introduced by Senator Leno (SB 322) that would require charters to comply with the same laws for suspension and expulsion as school districts and reduce from 30 to 10 days the amount of time a charter has to provide information to the school district on a pupil that is expelled or leaves a charter school. The premise for this bill was that charter schools had disproportionately high rates of suspensions and that applying traditional school regulations would thus result in better outcomes. Through the process of providing data for the task force we documented that charter schools actually had lower rates of suspensions statewide, at least according to publicly available data. Therefore, we argued in [testimony submitted to Senator Leno's office](#), this law was an unnecessary reregulation of charter schools that would reduce the flexibility and autonomy charter schools needed to continue to improve and innovate on best practices in student discipline. The data show that:

- California's charter schools, on average, suspend students at the same or lower rates than do traditional public schools.
- When looking at the past four years (2011-2015), we see no statistical difference school wide in average suspension rates for charters and traditional public schools.
- When we break this down by grade level, we see similar rates for elementary schools. But for middle and high schools, we see that charters have statistically significantly lower suspension rates than do traditional public schools.
- Moreover, for every racial subgroup, the average rate of suspensions for charter schools is lower than traditional schools. In some cases, the differences are dramatic. For African American students, the out-of-school suspension rates in charters are only about half of traditional schools' suspension rates.

CCSA ultimately defeated SB322 in a floor fight, thanks in large part to the robust data analysis as well as the compelling testimony from leaders and students whose schools had participated in the CCSA Suspensions/Expulsions Workgroup. Not only were we able to defeat anti-charter opponents on a floor fight for the first time, but we were able to do so in resounding fashion. Opponents was able to get only 31 votes in support of the bill, 10 votes short of the number needed for passage.

CCSA produced two detailed analyses of publicly reported suspension data (one based on [2013-14](#) and an updated version based on [2014-15](#) data).

When the Task Force concluded, the Member Council discussed pursuing the following actions:

- Disseminate learnings
  - Hold sessions at CCSA's 2016 conference [\[three sessions were held – We Can Do Better! Finding Alternatives to Student Suspension, Suspending the School-to-Prison Pipeline, Less Sticks, More Carrots: How Reimagining Discipline Can Break the School-to-Prison Pipeline\]](#). Sessions are also in the works for CCSA's 2017 conference
  - Create knowledge brief(s) on the issues and best practices [\[this has been completed\]](#)
  - Create a section of our website where we house suspensions information and resources for schools [\[this has been completed\]](#)
  - Conduct webinars to raise awareness among more California charter schools on the data, the best practices and available resources *[note: we haven't done this yet]*
  - Partner with national efforts *[note: since we began our efforts in this area, the US Department of Education has since launched a national campaign called [#RethinkDiscipline](#) that we have helped to disseminate and share information. We have also helped disseminate a recent national best practices knowledge brief from the [National Charter School Resource Center](#) via the CCSA school discipline best practices webpage]*
- Additional research
  - CCSA could conduct additional research (likely would be next school year) highlighting innovative practices and shining a spotlight on success. (Could also report on high suspension rates to call for greater progress.)
- Going deeper
  - One of the Task Force school participants commented that much of their learning had come not just from implementing the initial “good idea” or program, but rather through iterating and refining it over time. She commented that she'd be interested in ways to learn from other schools about how these practices actually work, how they get better over time, what lessons were learned along the way, etc. Staff brainstormed several potential options, each with respective pros and cons. CCSA could:
    - Facilitate networks in different regions where schools learn from one another on these issues (but these would likely be time and resource intensive to manage and school interest might wane over time).
    - Could host “going deeper” webinars where schools could share what they'd done (but webinars are notoriously hard to make interactive)
    - Could expand a section of our portal where schools begin to learn from one another (unclear whether we could really get schools to participate)

**This Task Force was able to achieve several important outcomes:**

**1) We know a lot more about the suspensions data for charters than we did before**

- CCSA now has data on key suspension statistics that we did not have before beginning this process. Due to limited availability of data, there is no one perfect file on which to perform any analysis of suspension rates.
  - The first way to analyze this data is to examine the unduplicated counts (in other words, the percent of students suspended out of school one or more times). For the purposes of calculating suspension rates in these reports, students who were suspended multiple times are counted only once in the report totals. CDE calculated the suspension rates by dividing Students Suspended by Cumulative Enrollment multiplied by 100. A statewide dataset is not yet publically available but the data can be accessed by individual district. Therefore, the dataset used in our analyses was compiled using suspensions data files for the largest 50

districts, the largest 12 county offices of education, and the State Board of Education as determined by enrollment.<sup>1</sup> These 63 authorizers' suspensions data provided a sample of 42% of the statewide public school enrollment. It also represents 55% of the statewide charter enrollment, encompassing 49% of the charter schools open in 2014-15.

- The second data file provides duplicated counts, reporting the rate of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students.<sup>2</sup> The duplicated data file reports demographic subgroups and therefore has numerous redactions. For any group with between 1 and 10 suspensions during the school year, CDE redacted the count of students to protect student privacy. This redaction schema resulted in very high levels of student data missing (50% of African American data, 33% of Latino, and 73% of Asian suspensions were missing in the files). Because we know that CDE redacted any number between 1 and 10 in each demographic subgroup, we replaced all redacted data with a 1. Although it may still be a vast underestimation of suspension rates, this gives us the minimum number of students suspended in each subgroup at each school.
- Due to the conflicting format of suspension data in these two files, they cannot be combined to perform detailed demographic analyses.

## **2) We have some great ideas on best practices and recommendations emerging from this Task Force**

- The Task Force surfaced some great ideas regarding best practices they are using at their schools and recommendations they would have for other schools looking to reduce suspension rates and maximize student safety, engagement and learning.
- We were able to identify schools with high suspension rates that have worked hard to reduce those rates, such as Green Dot to provide concrete examples of alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

## **3) We were able to get charter schools organized on this issue**

- School leaders participating in the Task Force now understand these issues at a greater level of depth and will be helpful to CCSA's legislative advocacy efforts in response to upcoming suspension legislation.
- CCSA may be able to parlay this into advocacy efforts to respond to other emerging threats of re-regulation (such as one [announced by LAUSD](#) to initiate a workgroup regarding what happens to charter students during the intermediary period pending expulsions and dealing with suspensions.).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DQ/DstEnrOther2.aspx?TheYear=2014-15&SortBy=a&cCounty=all&cDistType=all&DType=all>

<sup>2</sup> So for example, a school could have 102 suspensions for every 100 African American students. That would mean that some students were suspended multiple times.