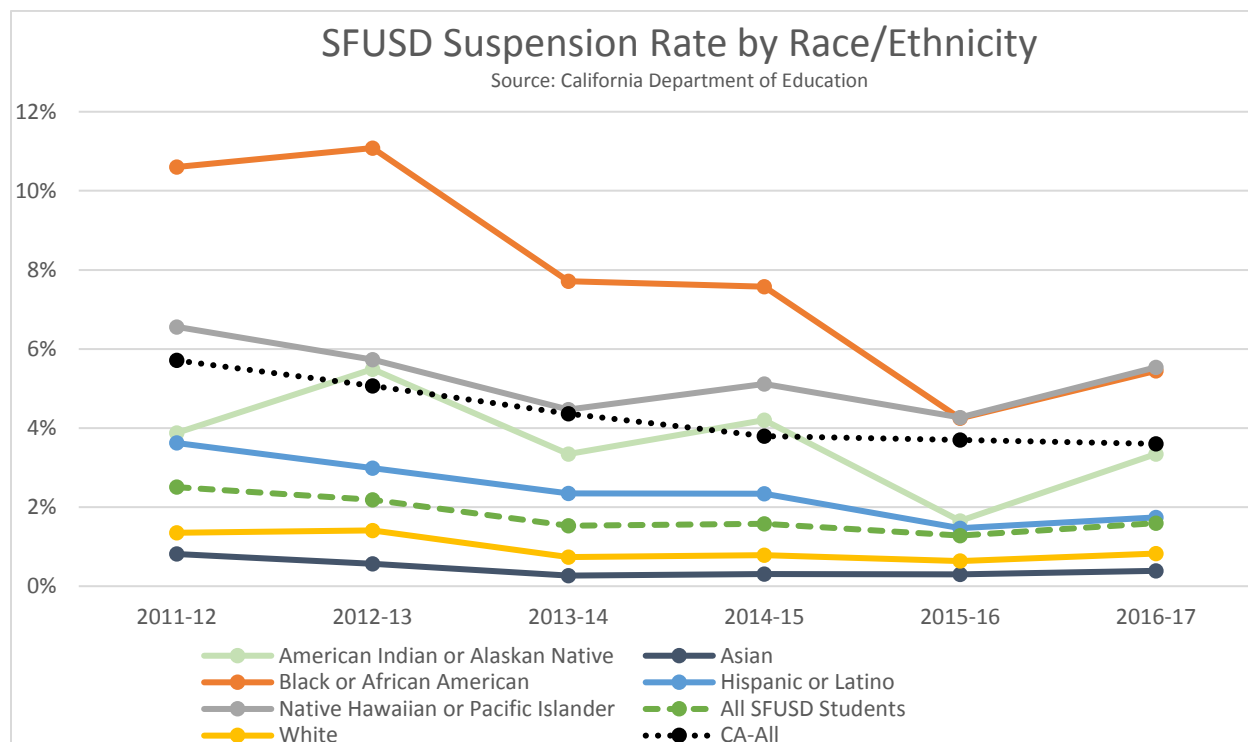


Reduce the SFUSD Suspension Rate



The above chart outlines the rates of suspension across all grades by race/ethnicity for students in the San Francisco Unified School District between 2012 and 2017. The line “CA-All” offers a State comparison.

Data Definition & the San Francisco Trend line

The California Department of Education (CDE) suspension count includes students involved in one or more incidents during the academic year who were subsequently suspended from school; both in and out of school suspensions are included. The CDE suspension rate data displayed above are calculated by dividing the suspension count by K-12 enrollment and then multiplying the result by 100. For the purposes of calculating suspension rates, students who were suspended or expelled multiple times are counted only once. For example, in the 2016-17 school year a total of 1,148 students were suspended a total of 1,816 times. To determine the rates of suspension, the 1,148 students with at least one suspension were included in the calculation. In 2017 the category of ‘Violent Incident, No Physical Injury’ accounted for the greatest proportion of out-of-school suspensions (56%), and ‘Defiance Only’ accounted for the smallest proportion (1.4%).¹ ‘Violent Incident, No Physical Injury’ consistently accounts for the highest proportion of out-of-school suspensions across the 6 years of available data. ‘Defiance Only’ made up the smallest proportion of suspensions for the last two years of data; this category of suspensions has consistently decreased as a proportion of overall suspensions since 2014, when ‘Defiance Only’ suspensions accounted for 23% of all SFUSD out-of-school suspensions.

SFUSD has continued to have a lower rate of suspension than the state average. In the 2011-12 school year the statewide average rate of suspension was 5.7% whereas SFUSD had an average of 2.5%. Since

then, SFUSD's overall suspension rate has generally declined, though it increased from 1.3% to 1.6% from the 2015-16 to the 2016-17 school year. While rates of suspension have decreased for all racial/ethnic groups during this period, disproportionality of suspensions remains a major concern. The rate of suspensions for African American students (5.4%) was nearly seven percentage-points higher in 2016-17 than the rate for White (0.8%) students. From 2011-12 to 2016-17, African American students accounted for 35-49% of all suspensions, but never comprised more than 11% of the total student enrollment. In addition to African American students, Hispanic/Latino, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multiracial, Special Education, and Low Socioeconomic Status students have disproportionate rates of suspension. Middle school students have the highest rates of suspension when compared to elementary and high school.

Story Behind the Curve

Factors Impacting Disparities in Rates of Suspension

There is no single explanation for the racial/ethnic disparities in students who are suspended; however, research highlights the following factors as having an impact.

Overrepresentation of African American Students in Special Education. As discussed above, SFUSD students in special education programs are disproportionately suspended. Nationally, African American students account for 30% of students classified as "emotionally disturbed", a category of Special-Education students defined by the inability to create satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, among other criteria. Students diagnosed as emotionally disturbed perform the poorest of all students in special education, although they have no cognitive deficits.ⁱⁱ More than two out of five students with emotional or behavioral disorders, such as severe depression or aggressive behavior, leave high school before graduating, research has shown, and four years after high school, nearly three out of five have been arrested.ⁱⁱⁱ

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences. Trauma symptoms can be misinterpreted as behavior problems because they often manifest as aggression, irritability or hyperactivity. Students who have experienced trauma may be easily triggered or "set off" and are more likely to react very intensely. The child may struggle with self-regulation (i.e., knowing how to calm down) and may lack impulse control or the ability to think through consequences before acting. As a result, complexly traumatized children may behave in ways that appear unpredictable, oppositional, volatile and extreme.^{iv} Teachers and administrators typically have minimal training on how to identify trauma and may punish student behavior instead of referring students to appropriate resources.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) including abuse, neglect, and histories of domestic and community violence are significant public health concerns in the United States. The National Institute of Mental Health led a study in 2011 that showed that 67% of children tested from the Bayview in San Francisco had experienced one or more ACEs. Of the youth with four or more ACEs, 51% displayed learning/behavior problems.^v

Lack of Parental Involvement. Parental involvement at home and at school has shown to improve student educational outcomes, reduce high-risk behavior (such as alcohol use, violence and other antisocial behaviors) and promote positive school climate. Students who are frequently suspended are also less likely to have parental supervision at home. Further, African American youth are 7.5 times

more likely and Latino youth are 2.5 times more likely than White youth to have an incarcerated parent.^{vi}

Implicit Bias, Stereotypes and Perceived Ability. Given the subjectivity of discipline related to behavior, defiance and disruption, teachers' attitudes toward students and particularly African American and Latino students must be examined. Teachers and school staff's implicit biases influence their judgment regarding behavior, discipline and expectations. Black and Latino youth experience a greater disconnection from school staff, which impacts their participation and therefore their achievement.^{vii}

Policy and Practice Shifts in San Francisco

In 2010 SFUSD became part of the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), which provided a breakdown of suspensions and expulsions at a school, district and county level, as well as by students' ethnic and racial backgrounds, whether they are English Learners or are Special Education students, and the legal implications of their discipline violations. Analysis of SFUSD's data revealed that suspension rates were disproportionately affecting African American and Latino students.^{viii}

With the CALPADS data, local advocates led a "Solutions Not Suspensions" campaign that resulted in the adoption of the Safe and Supportive School Resolution in 2014, focused on addressing the disparities in office referrals, suspensions and expulsions by utilizing data to understand how suspensions are implemented across the district.^{ix} The resolution resulted in the elimination of "willful defiance" as just cause for suspension, which accounted for 36% of all SFUSD suspensions in 2013.^x

At the same time, district officials set out to address the root causes of disproportionate suspensions in an effort to keep more students in school. In 2012, the district submitted a plan to the state describing how it would address the disproportionate suspensions and referrals of Special Education and African American students. In June of 2016, the plan was adopted as board policy, as discussed below.

SFUSD Safe and Supportive Schools Resolution and Policy

The following section describes a selection of SFUSD initiatives that were explicitly implemented in order to reduce reliance on suspension which have expanded since the 2014 adoption of the Safe and Supportive School Resolution. These initiatives form key parts of the Safe and Supportive Schools Resolution and Policy, and were spurred in part by the school climate focus within the state's Local Funding Formula and Local Control Accountability Plan. See the SFUSD's Safe and Supportive Schools Report from April 2017 for more detail.^{xi}

Discipline and Intervention Data Collection and Analysis. The Safe and Supportive Schools Resolution called for the collection of out-of-classroom referral data, as well as intervention and support data. The Behavioral Academic, Social-Emotional Interventions and Supports (BASIS) system was created to track this information.

Student Assistance Program (SAP). The students with the most need for behavioral support are identified through the SAP team. The SAP team at each school identifies student needs and creates plans to support students using a more robust tracking and monitoring of interventions through BASIS. The SAP team uses the data system to ensure students receive support from behavioral staff. These

students and their teachers are supported intensively until the behaviors are manageable or the student is referred to a higher level of support.

Student Transition Process. Additionally, SAP members participate in a Student Transition Process to support vulnerable students' successful transition into their new schools, including between Pre-K to Kindergarten, 5th grade to 6th grade, and 8th grade to 9th grade.

Behavior Action Triage Teams. Behavior Action Triage teams staffed with SFUSD Pupil Service personnel respond to all students, staff and schools in crisis around behavior and climate issues. They are also responsible for proactive capacity building and training around positive behavior interventions and Supports, Restorative Practices, Trauma Informed Pedagogy, Applied Behavioral Analysis, De-escalation and Attendance, and Cultural Competence. All BAT team coaches now undergo implicit bias training.

Focus on Discipline Disproportionality. The Safe and Supportive Schools Policy calls on principals to get approval from central office supervisors whenever it appears necessary to suspend an African American student. SFUSD has also invested in Cultural Competence of Culturally Responsive pedagogy, partnering with consultants to help guide educators through the growth necessary to ensure that schools are places where African American, Latino, Pacific Islanders and any other underserved students can feel they belong, that they are valued and respected and can be successful, academically and socially.

Evidence based approaches to positive school culture. The District utilizes the Behavioral Response to Intervention (BRTi) model to deliver and coordinate practices and strategies that create safe and supportive educational environments while minimizing the use of out of class referrals and suspensions. The strategies coordinated and delivered under the BRTi model include School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), Restorative Practices (RP), trauma-sensitive services, behavior de-escalation, and cultural competency.

SWPBIS is an implementation framework for the use of evidence-based prevention and intervention practices along a multi-tiered continuum that supports the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral competence of all students. RP is a movement grounded in principles designed to create powerful relationships, which are central to building thriving communities. The District set a goal of implementing SWPBIS and RP at all schools by the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year. School-based teams plan and guide implementation efforts.

Alternatives to Suspension. To address the immediate need of alternatives to suspensions in secondary schools, SFUSD piloted and then fully adopted an alternative to suspension Saturday School. Students who would otherwise be suspended are assigned to attend two Saturday Stand Up and Rise! Academies. If they successfully complete the Academies, the suspension is avoided. The curriculum is a combination of restorative practices, college preparation and personal reflection, as opposed to the typically punitive nature of other Saturday School programs.

What Works: A Selection of Best Practices to reduce the Suspension Rate

This section focuses on key practices that have been shown to positively impact suspension rates, particularly for students of color, compiled by the Regional Educational Laboratory at Education Northwest.^{xii} While these practices have been studied within a school context, many are also applicable in a community based setting.

School and Classroom Practices. Strategies that promote efficient and effective classroom management are associated with both lower suspension rates and reduced disproportionality. Many of the practices align with those identified as important for culturally relevant instruction and positive classroom environments, including teacher responsiveness to the social and academic needs of the students. Key approaches include positive, caring teacher-student relationships; high expectations for students; structured school and classroom environments; parental involvement; teacher and student resources (including professional development in educational equity); and preventive and proactive school discipline practices.

Multicomponent, Whole School Approaches. Whole school programs that impact multiple layers of schools including teachers, administration, staff, and students use a systems-based approach that aims to increase safe and caring school environments through a variety of prevention and intervention strategies.

Alternatives to Suspension. Alternatives to suspension practices correct student behaviors without removing the students from classroom instruction or the school setting.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). The goal of SEL programs is to teach students to learn and apply skills that will maximize their social, behavioral, and academic success. The social competency skills taught by most programs include how to recognize and manage emotions, problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, self-management, and how to relate positively with others. Research suggests that students who participate in SEL programs have fewer discipline problems. Effective SEL programs include the expected outcomes for students, use of sequential training approaches, and active instruction strategies. They also incorporate sufficient instruction time to ensure students are competent in the desired skills.

Please see the following selected references for more information on the ‘Story Behind the Curve’ and highlighted ‘Best Practices’

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^{iv} McInerney, M & McKlindon, A. (2015). Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools. <http://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trauma-Informed-in-Schools-Classrooms-FINAL-December2014-2.pdf>

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^{vi} Egalite, A. (2016). How Family Background Influences Student Achievement: Can Schools Narrow the Gap? EducationNext. <http://educationnext.org/how-family-background-influences-student-achievement/>

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- ^{xi} SFUSD. (2017). Safe and Supportive Schools Report. <http://web.sfusd.edu/partners/ops/Resources%20for%20Schools%20and%20Districts%20Staff/SS%20report%20May%204th%2012pm.pdf>
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