

## California Suspensions Data: Charters and Traditional Public Schools, 2014

### Overview of Findings:

- California's charter schools, on average, suspend students at the same or lower rates than do traditional public schools.
- When looking at the past three years, 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 single 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 and Latino students, the out-of-school suspension rates in charter schools are only about half of traditional schools' suspension rates.

### Detail:

Over the last several years, there has been much research nationally into the areas of restorative justice practices and suspensions rates. In order to better understand these issues, the California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) began work to investigate what the publicly available data indicate about differences between charter and traditional public school suspension rates. The CCSA research team relied on publicly available data from the California Department of Education to ensure that data was available for all schools and that others could replicate this methodology. The research team discovered some complications with the data because CDE redacts its publicly available data files in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).<sup>1</sup>

Due to limited availability of data, there is no one perfect file on which to perform any analysis of suspension rates. The research team therefore analyzed two different publicly available data sets from CDE –unduplicated and duplicated suspension rate files – and found similar conclusions in both. ***Charter schools, on average suspend students at a similar and sometimes lower rates than do traditional public schools. This holds true for all ethnic subgroups as well as all grade levels (elementary, middle & high schools).***

### Unduplicated Counts of Suspensions

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 report, 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. The "Cumulative Enrollment" count provides the total number of unique or unduplicated

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<sup>1</sup> In order to draw conclusions based on this redacted data, certain assumptions must be made, which are outlined in this methodological discussion.

primary, secondary, and short-term enrollments within the academic year (July 1 to June 30), regardless of whether the student is enrolled multiple times within a school or district. Due to the aggregate nature of the data, ethnic subgroup breakdowns are not provided and therefore this file has much less redacted/missing data.

A statewide dataset is not yet publically available but the data can be accessed by individual district. Therefore, the dataset used in these analyses was compiled using suspensions data files for the largest 50 districts and largest 10 county offices of education as determined by the 2013-14 enrollment.<sup>2</sup> These 60 authorizers' suspensions data provided a sample of 42% of the statewide public school enrollment. It also represents 53% of the statewide charter enrollment, encompassing 48% of the charter schools open in 2013-14.

A comparison of suspension rates between charter schools and traditional schools for 2011-12 to 2013-14 revealed almost identical results. Both charters and district schools have seen a decline in suspensions since 2012, but there is no statistical difference between the average suspensions rates for any of the years analyzed.

| Unduplicated Suspension Rates<br>(the percent of students suspended out of school one or more times) |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|
|  | Charter     | Non-Charter |
| <b>2011-12</b>   | <b>4.82</b> | <b>5.05</b> |
| <b>2012-13</b>   | <b>4.56</b> | <b>4.47</b> |
| <b>2013-14</b>   | <b>3.98</b> | <b>3.96</b> |

Further analysis of schools by grade level shows greater differences in suspension rates. Charters and traditional elementary schools show no statistical difference in suspensions across all years. Middle schools and high schools show drastic jumps in suspension rates for both charters and non-charters as compared to elementary schools. *Traditional middle and high schools have substantially (and statistically significantly) higher suspension rates than charter schools.*

|                | Elementary  |             | Middle      |                | High        |               |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
|                | Charter     | Non-Charter | Charter     | Non-Charter    | Charter     | Non-Charter   |
| <b>2011-12</b> | <b>1.86</b> | <b>2.34</b> | <b>8.40</b> | <b>10.68**</b> | <b>6.86</b> | <b>9.18**</b> |
| <b>2012-13</b> | <b>2.37</b> | <b>2.01</b> | <b>7.02</b> | <b>8.79**</b>  | <b>6.63</b> | <b>8.27</b>   |
| <b>2013-14</b> | <b>2.25</b> | <b>1.94</b> | <b>6.21</b> | <b>7.79</b>    | <b>5.32</b> | <b>7.11**</b> |

\*\*statistically significant, p<0.05

<sup>2</sup> <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DQ/DstEnrOther2.aspx?TheYear=2013-14&SortBy=a&cCounty=all&cDistType=all&DType=all>

## **Duplicated Counts of Suspensions**

A better understanding of the racial and ethnic differences in suspension rates required our research team to use the “duplicated counts” file from CDE.<sup>3</sup> The duplicated counts file reports the rate of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students.<sup>4</sup> The unduplicated data outlined in the section above does not need to be redacted for small numbers of students because it does not include any demographic data. However, the duplicated data file *does* report demographics 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, such as 38% of African American data, 33% of Hispanic and 72% of Asian suspensions were missing in the files.

These massive amounts of missing data required the CCSA research team to identify some way to account for the missing data. The approach chosen, similar to that used by UCLA Civil Rights Project in some of its work, was to take the most conservative estimate possible. Because we know that CDE redacted any number between 1 and 10 in each demographic subgroup, we replaced all redacted data with a 1. This gives us the minimum number of students suspended in each subgroup at each school. Using this method we reduced the percentage of missing data overall from 38% to 6%.

According to CDE records, this file counts each incident resulting in a suspension. Students are counted more than once if they were suspended multiple times for different incidents. Rather than looking at each student individually (as in the unduplicated file) each incident is counted here, which may give us additional insight into the overall discipline practices at each school.

*Upon examining the rate of suspensions by ethnic category, we see that charters suspend students at smaller rates for ALL racial subgroups. As shown in the table below, those rates are dramatically different in some cases.*

| <b>Duplicated Suspension Rates</b><br>(the rate of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students) |              |                |                    |              |                |                    |              |                |                    |
|--|--------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|
|  | <b>2012</b>  |                |                    | <b>2013</b>  |                |                    | <b>2014</b>  |                |                    |
|  | <b>Total</b> | <b>Charter</b> | <b>Non-Charter</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Charter</b> | <b>Non-Charter</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Charter</b> | <b>Non-Charter</b> |
| <b>Asian</b>   | 1.84         | 1.29           | 1.86               | 1.48         | 0.83           | 1.51               | 1.13         | 0.64           | 1.16               |
| <b>Latino/Hispanic</b>   | 8.53         | 4.85           | 8.76               | 7.35         | 4.28           | 7.57               | 5.96         | 3.36           | 6.17               |
| <b>African American</b>  | 25.11        | 12.30          | 26.62              | 22.37        | 10.40          | 23.95              | 19.03        | 8.17           | 20.56              |
| <b>White</b>   | 6.21         | 1.67           | 6.61               | 5.48         | 1.65           | 5.88               | 4.59         | 1.47           | 4.95               |
| <b>Total</b>   | 8.26         | 4.28           | 8.54               | 7.19         | 3.78           | 7.47               | 5.91         | 3.02           | 6.17               |