California Race, Education, and Community Healing (REACH) Network

BASELINE

REPORT

Michael D. Corral, Ph.D.

Joseph Bishop, Ph.D.

Travis Bristol, Ph.D.

Maria Luz Espino, Ph.D.

UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools

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Figure 1. Map of REACH Network Participating LEAs and Selected School Sites

Elkhorn Village Elementary K-8
Washington Unified School District
YOLO COUNTY

Leadership Public Schools Richmond
Leadership Public Schools
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

Longwood Elementary
Hayward Unified School District
ALAMEDA COUNTY

James Lick High School
East Side Union High School District
SANTA CLARA COUNTY

J. C. Montgomery
Kings County Office of Education
KINGS COUNTY

El Roble Intermediate
Claremont Unified School District
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Crete Academy
Crete Academy
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Para Los Niños Charter Middle School
Para Los Niños Charter Middle School
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Major General Raymond Murray High
Vista Unified School District
SAN DIEGO COUNTY

Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math Academy at La Presa
La Mesa-Spring Valley School District
SAN DIEGO COUNTY

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The California Race, Education, and Community Healing (REACH) Network was launched in the 2023-24 school year to tackle one of the most pressing civil rights issues in education: persistent racial disparities in school discipline that fuel the school-to-prison pipeline *(Darby, 2021; Hirschfield, 2018; Pearman et al., 2019)*. Led by UCLA's Center for the Transformation of Schools (CTS) and UC Berkeley's Center for Research on Expanding Educational Opportunity (CREEO), this collaborative initiative brings together schools, districts, researchers, and community partners to dismantle exclusionary discipline practices and policies and instead foster conditions for equitable, inclusive, and supportive learning environments for students. Building on previous equity-focused initiatives, including the California Multi-Tiered System of Support (CA MTSS) pilot work, the REACH Network seeks to advance the goals of state Senator Nancy Skinner's SB 274, which prohibits suspensions for "willful defiance"—a highly subjective category that has historically been applied disproportionately to students of color.

The REACH Network's core mission is twofold:

1. Implement evidence-based restorative practices that reduce punitive practices for California's students.

2. Fundamentally reimagine schools through an anti-racist, equity-centered lens, thereby providing all of California's students an opportunity to reach their highest potential.

This 2023-24 school year baseline report offers a comprehensive analysis of 10 diverse school sites, each representing a participating Local Education Agency (LEA) in the REACH Network.

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CONTEXT: CALIFORNIA'S APPROACH TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

In recent years, California has seen a shift in approaches to school discipline, moving away from punitive measures toward more supportive and equitable practices:

- **Restorative justice practices:** A growing number of districts are replacing zero-tolerance policies with restorative approaches that emphasize repairing harm, building relationships, and fostering positive school climates *(Gregory et al., 2018).*

- **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS):** The adoption of PBIS has expanded from approximately 500 schools in 2011–12 to over 3,000 in 2018–19, underscoring a statewide shift toward proactive, positive behavioral reinforcement *(Wang, 2022).*

- **Limiting exclusionary discipline:** Several large districts, such as San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles, have moved to restrict suspensions for "willful defiance," a category often applied disproportionately to students of color *(Wang, 2022).*

- **Enhanced teacher training:** Innovative professional development initiatives focusing on implicit bias, cultural responsiveness, and de-escalation techniques have been implemented across the state *(Okonofua et al., 2022).*

- **Data-driven approaches:** Schools are increasingly using disaggregated discipline data to identify disparities, monitor progress, and inform equitable practices *(Losen et al., 2015).*

While these trends represent progress, challenges remain in achieving equitable disciplinary practices across California:

- **Implementation inconsistency:** The quality and extent of implementation varies widely among districts, leading to uneven outcomes (Smith & Jones, 2023).

- **Persistent disparities:** Despite overall decreases in suspension rates, significant gaps persist:
  - In 2019–20, Black students in California were **3.2 times more likely** to be suspended than their white peers *(California Department of Education, 2021).*
  - Students with disabilities faced suspension rates **2.5 times higher** than those without disabilities *(Brown et al., 2022).*

- **Complex systemic issues:** Hwang et al. *(2022)* found that even as overall suspension rates decreased after discipline reforms in LAUSD, racial disparities remained, highlighting deeply rooted systemic inequities.

These ongoing challenges underscore the need for initiatives like the REACH Network, which aims to address the complexities of school discipline reform through targeted, evidence-based approaches and continuous evaluation of outcomes.

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KEY FINDINGS: YEAR 1

Finding 1: **Persistent and multifaceted disparities in discipline practices and policies exist across REACH Network sites.**

Data from REACH Network school sites reveals persistent and multifaceted disparities in disciplinary practices across REACH Network school sites. These disparities, while showing some signs of improvement, continue to disproportionately impact specific student groups along lines of race, disability status, gender, and socioeconomic background.

Finding 2: **The impact of COVID-19 on discipline rates reveals both disruptions and reversions to pre-pandemic patterns.**

Our analysis of discipline rates before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the resilience of systemic disparities in school discipline practices. Despite an unprecedented disruption, pre-existing patterns quickly re-emerged as schools returned to in-person operations.

Finding 3: **Patterns of suspension disproportionality, particularly affecting Black students, persist across REACH Network sites.**

Suspension data from 2017–18 to 2022–23 demonstrates clear patterns of disproportionality in disciplinary actions, with Black students consistently overrepresented across all suspension categories.

Finding 4: **REACH Network schools serve predominantly nonaffluent, historically marginalized student populations.**

REACH Network school sites encompass a range of cultural backgrounds, with significant representation from Latinx communities and students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. These schools confront tangible challenges, including below-average academic proficiency rates and high levels of chronic absenteeism.

Figure 2. Consolidated REACH Network School Site Racial/Ethnic Suspension Rates and Signs of Disproportionality, 2017-18–2022-23

Racial/Ethnic Group	2017-18		2018-19 (Pre-pandemic baseline)		2019-20		2021-22 (First full year post-pandemic)		2022-23 (Most recent data)	
	Population	Suspension Rate	Population	Suspension Rate	Population	Suspension Rate	Population	Suspension Rate	Population	Suspension Rate
American Indian/AK Native	0%	N/A	0%	N/A	0%	N/A	0%	N/A	0%	N/A
Asian	4.4%	2.3%	3.4%	2.7%	4.5%	1.1%	4.6%	2.2%	4.1%	1.7%
Black	6.9%	13.2%	7.4%	8.9%	6.7%	5.1%	7.4%	8.1%	8.2%	5.6%
Filipino	2.8%	0%	2.5%	4.4%	2.4%	2.0%	2.4%	4.2%	1.8%	1%
Latinx	70.8%	6.4%	71.6%	6.5%	71.4%	4.3%	70.7%	4.9%	73.2%	4.8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.3%	0%	0.4%	0%	0.5%	0%	0.3%	0%	0%	N/A
Two or More Races	2.4%	6.3%	2.2%	5.6%	2.6%	3.2%	2.3%	3.4%	2.3%	7.9%
White	10.7%	3.8%	9.8%	5.2%	9.6%	3.1%	9.9%	3.2%	8%	3.6%
Overall	100%	6.3%	100%	6.3%	100%	4.0%	100%	4.7%	100%	4.7%

Legend

- ■ > 50%
- ■ 20% - 50%
- ■ 10% - 20%
- ■ 5% - 10%
- ■ < 5%
- ■ N/A or No Data

- ■ > 10%
- ■ 7.5% - 10%
- ■ 5% - 7.5%
- ■ 2.5% - 5%
- ■ < 2.5%

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APPROACHES TO ADDRESS EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE

REACH Network members are implementing common approaches to address exclusionary discipline, reflecting a shared commitment to fostering positive, equitable learning environments. These strategies have been developed through internal efforts, expert guidance, and collaborative learning within the REACH Network Community of Practice.

REACH schools are cultivating a culture of empathy and support.

A shift from punitive discipline models to supportive student-centered approaches is underway, with a focus on restorative practices, social-emotional learning, and mentorship programs designed to provide personalized support before issues escalate.

Family and community engagement strengthens the village.

Efforts to engage families and communities are expanding, with initiatives like home visit programs and partnerships with community organizations to leverage local resources for student success.

REACH Network LEAs are committing to data-driven decision-making.

Data is being used to guide practices, with a focus on analyzing student resilience and tracking disciplinary data for more targeted interventions.

Educators are empowered through targeted professional development.

Educators are receiving regular training on restorative practices and culturally responsive teaching methods, equipping them with the skills needed to effectively implement equity-focused approaches.

The proposed strategies by REACH Network LEAs and their participating school sites reflect the initial plans for implementing alternative and restorative practices that are aimed at eliminating disparities in discipline outcomes. Their effectiveness will be evaluated in future reports as implementation progresses.

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LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: FROM YEAR 1 TO YEAR 2

Drawing on our Year 1 findings, a systematic literature review, innovative strategies proposed by participating schools, and thorough analysis of data and artifacts, we offer the following lessons and recommendations to guide the REACH Network's second year of implementation:

KEY LESSONS FROM YEAR 1:

REACH LEAs demonstrate a strong commitment to transformation.

The REACH Network LEA and school site teams demonstrate remarkable dedication to creating equitable learning environments despite competing priorities. This commitment provides a strong foundation for continued progress.

Data has untapped potential as a catalyst for change.

LEAs collect valuable data but often struggle with analysis and application. Enhanced data management capacity is needed to fully realize the potential of data-driven decision-making.

Strong leadership is essential for successful implementation.

District leadership support correlates directly with more effective REACH initiative implementation. Leadership-specific resources and training are essential for success and sustainment.

Sustaining momentum requires ongoing support.

REACH participants express valid concerns about maintaining long-term impact. A comprehensive sustainability plan is necessary to prevent initiative fatigue and regression to old practices.

Consistency in deliverables is critical for measuring progress.

Many sites face challenges with timely submission of data and completion of implementation tasks. Streamlined reporting processes and clear expectations are essential for accurate progress assessment.

Collaboration is a valued and strengthening asset.

Participants find significant value in the network. The collaborative nature of the REACH Network is a key strength that requires further development.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YEAR 2:

Secure multiyear funding and expand resources to sustain and scale the REACH Network's impact.

Sustained, multiyear funding and enhanced resources are essential for the REACH Network to achieve long-term success, scalability, and broader impact across California.

Implement comprehensive, whole-school restorative practices.

Develop phased implementation plans tailored to each school's unique context. Establish restorative practice leadership teams within each school. Regularly assess and adjust practices based on feedback and data.

Invest in robust, culturally responsive professional development for all school staff.

Conduct needs assessments to identify specific areas for professional development. Develop a yearlong PD calendar with a mix of in-person and virtual sessions. Include experiential learning components, such as role-playing and case studies.

Leverage data-driven decision-making.

Standardize data collection methods across the network for comparability. Provide training on data analysis and interpretation for school leaders. Implement regular data review sessions at both school and network levels.

Enhance family and community engagement.

Conduct family and community education sessions on restorative practices. Involve families and community members in school restorative circles when appropriate. Establish a family and community advisory board for the REACH Network.

Align with and enhance state initiatives.

Map REACH Network goals to existing state initiatives (e.g., Local Control Accountability Plan, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Multi-Tiered System of Support). Engage with state policymakers to share REACH Network insights and advocate for supportive policies.

Address implementation challenges.

Conduct a thorough assessment of existing disciplinary systems in each school. Develop transition plans that gradually shift from punitive to restorative approaches. Provide targeted support for staff members struggling with the paradigm shift.

Focus on equity and cultural responsiveness.

Conduct cultural competency assessments in each school. Develop school-specific equity action plans. Ensure diverse representation in all aspects of REACH Network leadership and decision-making.

Commit to long-term, systemic change.

Develop three-to-five-year strategic plans for each participating school and the network as a whole. Establish clear, measurable milestones for each year of implementation. Secure long-term funding commitments to support sustained efforts.

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CONCLUSION

The REACH Network's first year reveals both persistent challenges and promising opportunities in addressing racial disparities in school discipline across California. While overall suspension rates have decreased, significant disparities remain, particularly for historically marginalized students.

Our focus moving forward includes implementing whole-school restorative practices, culturally responsive professional development, data-driven decision-making, and strengthening family engagement. These strategies,

developed collaboratively with our LEAs, have the potential to drive meaningful, lasting change.

Importantly, the REACH Network's efforts are part of a larger ecosystem of change. We recognize and build upon the phenomenal work of our partners and many organizations who have long been dedicated to this critical work. Together, we are poised to reshape school discipline practices and advance educational equity across California, working toward our shared vision of schools as vibrant hubs of support where every student can thrive.

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