

# Beyond the Ban:

## An Overview of California School Suspension Data

Suspensions harm students by removing them from the learning environment without addressing root causes of their behavior.<sup>1</sup> Recent legislation (e.g., California's recent ban on suspensions for willful defiance through AB 420, SB 419, and SB 274) seeks to reduce the use and impact of suspensions in California. Yet, an analysis of state suspension data between the 2017-18 and 2023-24 school years indicates that rates remain mostly unchanged and racial disparities persist.

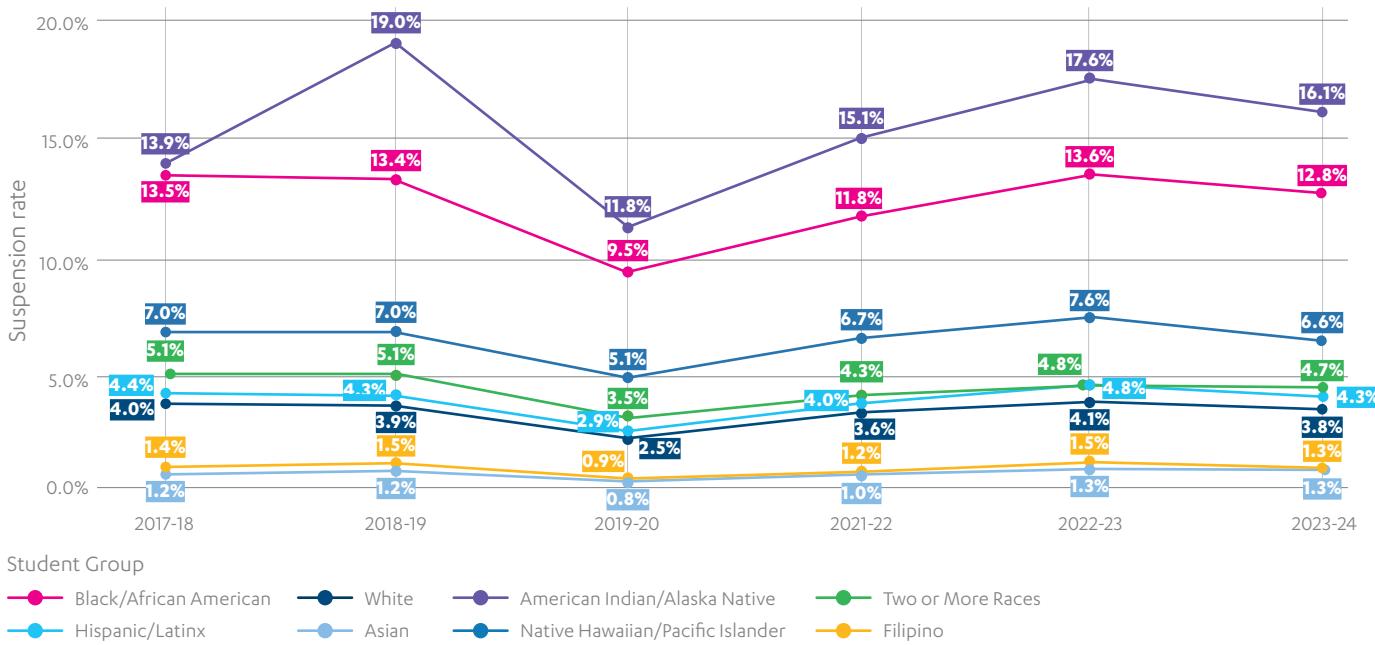


### Student Suspension Data Reveal System-Wide Inequities

#### Statewide Suspension Rates by Race/Ethnicity

Traditional schools | All Grades | Rate=total suspensions/cumulative enrollment

Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native students are overrepresented with statewide suspension rates of 12.8% (Black/African American) and 16.1% (American Indian/Alaska Native) during the 2023-24 school year. These rates are nearly triple and quadruple the rate of 4.3% of all California students combined. Data across the six years mostly demonstrates slight shifts but no real narrowing of racial disparity gaps, despite a dramatic decrease at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.



1. Summarized excerpt from CDE. (2024, June 13). State guidance for new laws on discipline. California Department of Education (CDE). Retrieved December 6, 2024, from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/el/le/yr21ltr0819.asp>.

\*To enhance readability and clarity, most percentages mentioned in this report have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Total suspensions: represents total number of suspensions, including counts of students suspended multiple times, against the total number of overall suspensions for all students including counts for multiple suspensions.

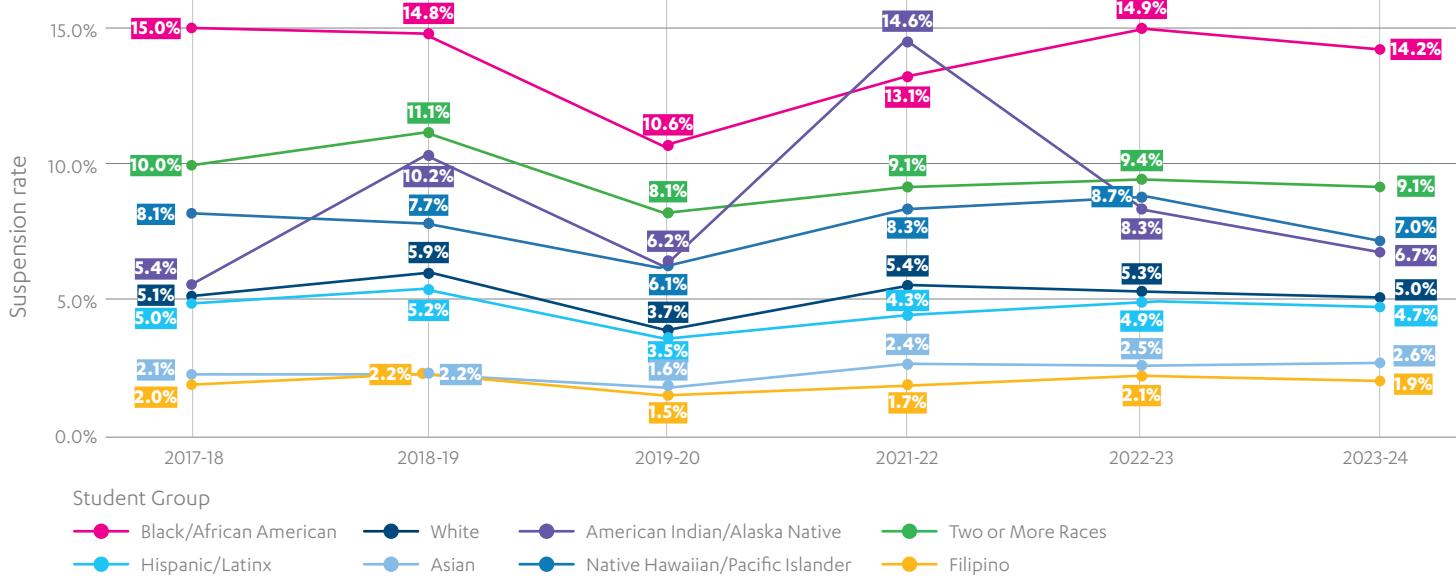
## Disparities Persist Despite Overall School Population Demographics

### Suspension Rates in Schools with Predominantly Black vs. White Enrollment<sup>2</sup>

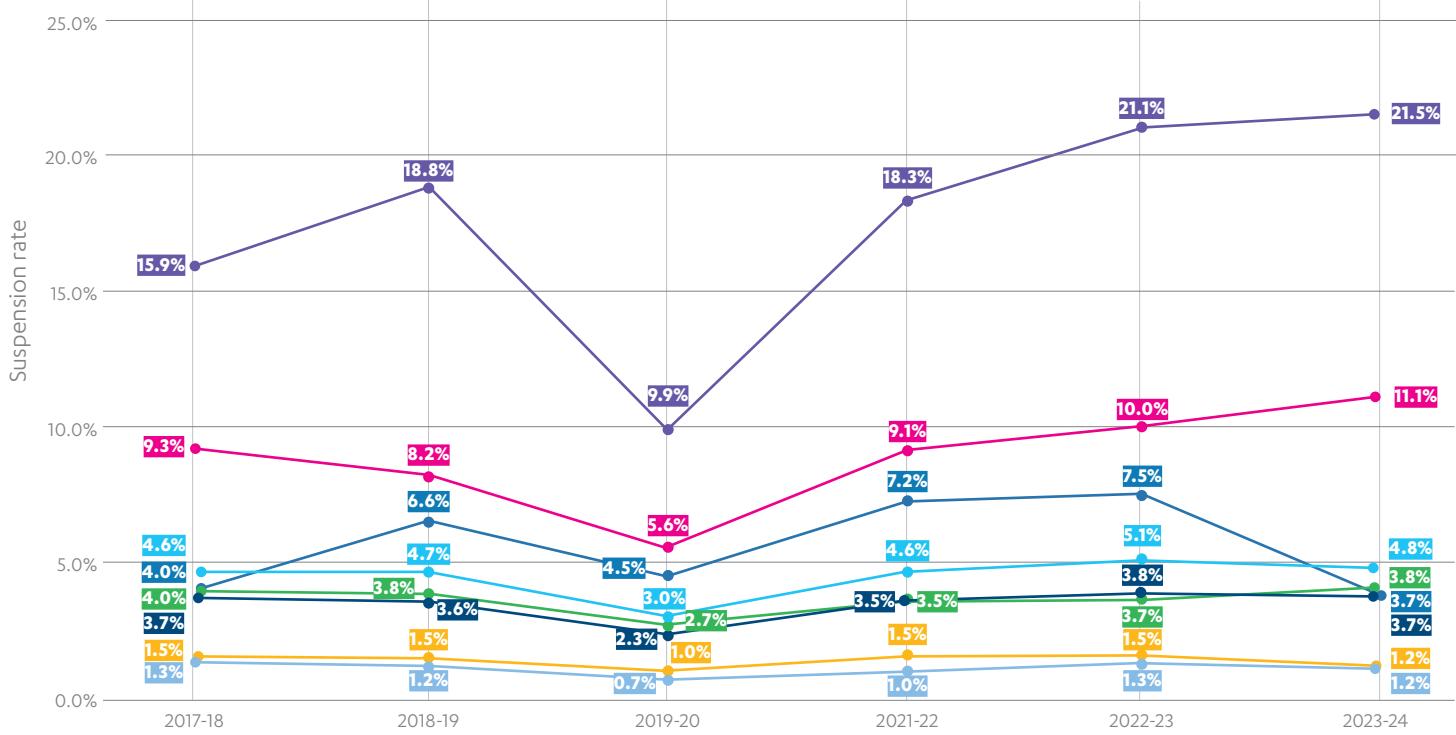
Traditional schools in top quartile for Black vs. white enrollment, 2017-18 through 2023-24

Regardless of the demographic makeup of a school, Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native students are among those with the highest rates of suspension (as demonstrated in tables below). Further analysis reveals suspension rates for all groups were mostly higher in schools with predominantly Black student populations (compared to schools with a smaller proportion of Black students). Conversely, suspension rates for almost all groups were lower in schools with predominantly white student populations, but still disproportionately higher particularly for Black students in those schools.

#### Highest-Black Enrollment Schools



#### Highest-White Enrollment Schools



2. Traditional schools only: quartiles reference highest shares of Black or white enrollment.

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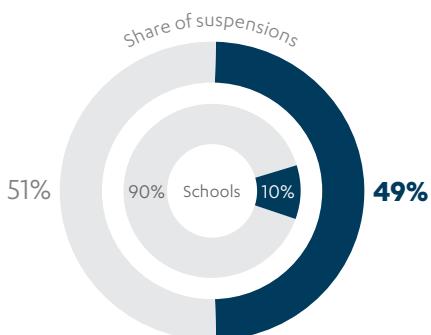
## Unequal Burden: Concentration of Suspensions Suggests School Climate Concerns

### Suspensions Concentrate in Handful of Schools<sup>1</sup>

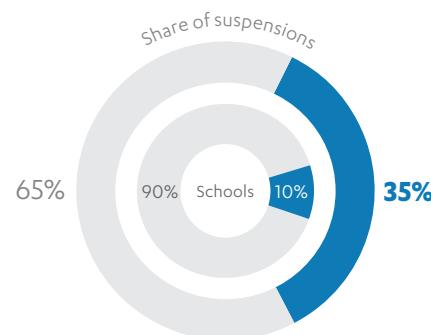
Share of total suspensions attributed to the top 10% of traditional schools, by level

Suspensions remain highly concentrated within a smaller share of traditional schools. Across 2017-18 and 2023-24, a significant portion of overall suspensions came from just a few schools. During the 2023-24 school year specifically, the schools with the highest rates of suspension (top 10%) account for a significant portion of suspensions across all elementary, middle, and high schools. For example, 49% of suspensions happened in just 328 elementary schools (out of 3,276 across the state). This suggests that while all schools might contribute to statewide suspension rates, some might have an over-reliance on exclusionary student discipline practices.

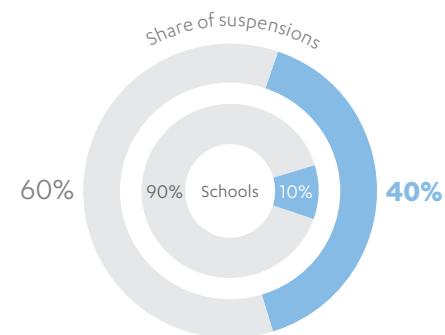
#### 2023-24 Elementary Schools



#### 2023-24 Middle Schools



#### 2023-24 High Schools



## Path Forward: Restorative Student Discipline

Restorative practices are highly relational, centering harm repair through dialogue, shared accountability, co-creative decision-making, and community building.<sup>3</sup> Adopting school- and district-wide restorative practices and policies is essential for maximizing impact. The [California Race, Education, and Community Healing \(REACH\) Network](#) is a statewide initiative bringing schools, districts, researchers, and community partners together to share data, best practices, and strategies for leading efforts to reduce discipline disparities and enhance student outcomes. The following are some of the strategies REACH Network participating school sites and districts have put into place. Consider which your school/district can start implementing today.

### Committing to Data-Driven Decision-Making

- Regular analysis of discipline data & patterns
- Tracking proactive metrics (eg, sense of belonging)
- Ongoing cycle of inquiry & continuous improvement

### Leading a Culture of Empathy and Support

- Broad implementation of restorative practices
- Social-emotional learning integration
- Cultural responsiveness training
- Model mindset shift from the top



### Integrating Family and Community Engagement

- Family engagement initiatives
- Community resource partnerships
- Build in family and community voices

## Contact



**Michael D. Corral, Ph.D.**  
Project Director,  
REACH Network  
[mcorral@seis.ucla.edu](mailto:mcorral@seis.ucla.edu)



**Luis A. Cisneros**  
Research Analyst,  
REACH Network  
[lcisneros@seis.ucla.edu](mailto:lcisneros@seis.ucla.edu)



Scan to learn  
more about the  
REACH Network:

3. Boyes-Watson, C., & Pranis, K. (2021). *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*. St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press.

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