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FIVE CRITICAL FACTS

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN:

SUSPENSION AS A FORM OF EXCLUSION IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY





The FIVE CRITICAL FACTS Series is designed to inform practitioners and researchers about emerging findings relevant to the success of underserved students in education. Data presented in this brief are derived from the California Department of Education (CDE) DataQuest and are publicly accessible via this system. This series is sponsored by the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) at San Diego State University (SDSU) and is inspired by the NASPA “Five Things” Brief Series.

RISE

FOR BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR

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FIVE CRITICAL FACTS

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: SUSPENSION AS A FORM OF EXCLUSION IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

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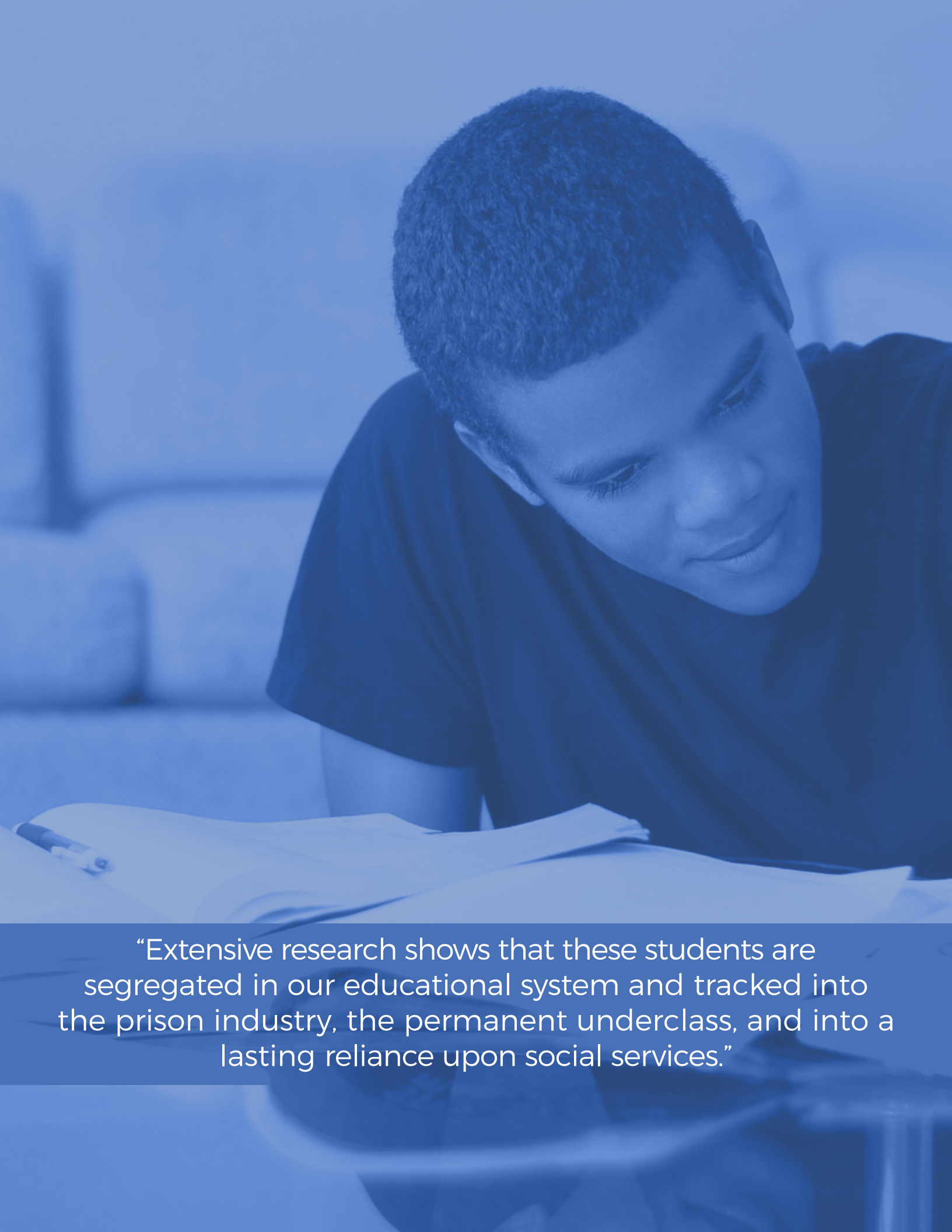
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“Extensive research shows that these students are segregated in our educational system and tracked into the prison industry, the permanent underclass, and into a lasting reliance upon social services.”

INTRODUCTION

California is home to one of the largest public education systems in the world. While the system produces the next generation of college graduates and statewide leaders across numerous fields (e.g., business, nonprofit, civic, health), not all students fare as well in the system. Some students are routinely exposed to exclusionary practices that undeservingly place them in special education, suspend them from school, and in some cases, expel them from learning opportunities altogether (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Extensive research shows that these students are segregated in our educational system and tracked into the prison industry, the permanent underclass, and into a lasting reliance upon social services (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). Unfortunately, research has also demonstrated that these students are more likely to be from communities of color and to identify as male (Howard, 2008, 2013; Townsend, 2000; Wood, 2017; Wood, Essien, & Blevins, 2017). Bearing this in mind, this brief sought to highlight five facts about suspensions in San Diego County. These facts are meant to generate conversations around issues of equity and injustice in the region's educational institutions.

In California, approximately 3.6% of all students were suspended during the 2016-2017 academic year. Fortunately, in San Diego County, the suspension rate is lower than this state average, at 2.8%. However, due to the size of the county, San Diego produces the fifth highest total suspensions (among counties) in the state, suspending 14,776 students in the academic year. That being said, there are districts with varying levels of suspension. Some have rates that exceed the state average and others fall below this average.

METHOD

San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) has the highest total suspensions of Black males in the county. The district suspended 653 Black males in 2016-2017. However, these total suspensions are due to higher enrollments of Black males than any other district in the county. In fact, SDUSD's suspension rate (at 10.2%) is only slightly above the county average of 9.4% for Black males. As such, a better method of identifying districts with exorbitantly high suspensions is to examine the total suspension rate. Based on this understanding, this brief analyzed data derived from the California Department of Education's (CDE) DataQuest. This publicly available resource allows targeted analyses of specific subgroups based on county, district, and school-level exposure to exclusionary discipline. The two primary forms of exclusionary discipline are suspensions and expulsions. Suspensions temporarily remove students from learning environments. Suspensions can be served both in-school (or in-house) as well as out-of-school (or out-of-house). Expulsions permanently remove students from learning environments and are typically enforced when severe infractions of school policy occur. In this brief, we focus on suspensions, including both in- and out-of-school suspensions, for students in San Diego County. From our analyses, we offer the insights that follow

While this report identifies districts with high rates of suspension, the goal is to seek the improvement of educators around these issues. As such, we will engage in ongoing analyses and reporting of these data over time to highlight districts that improve suspension rates for Black males. We look forward to highlighting this improvement in subsequent reports.

A young Black male student is shown in profile, looking down at his work. He is wearing a dark shirt with a buttoned collar. The background is blurred, showing another student. The entire image has a blue tint.

9.4% of Black males
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suspended.

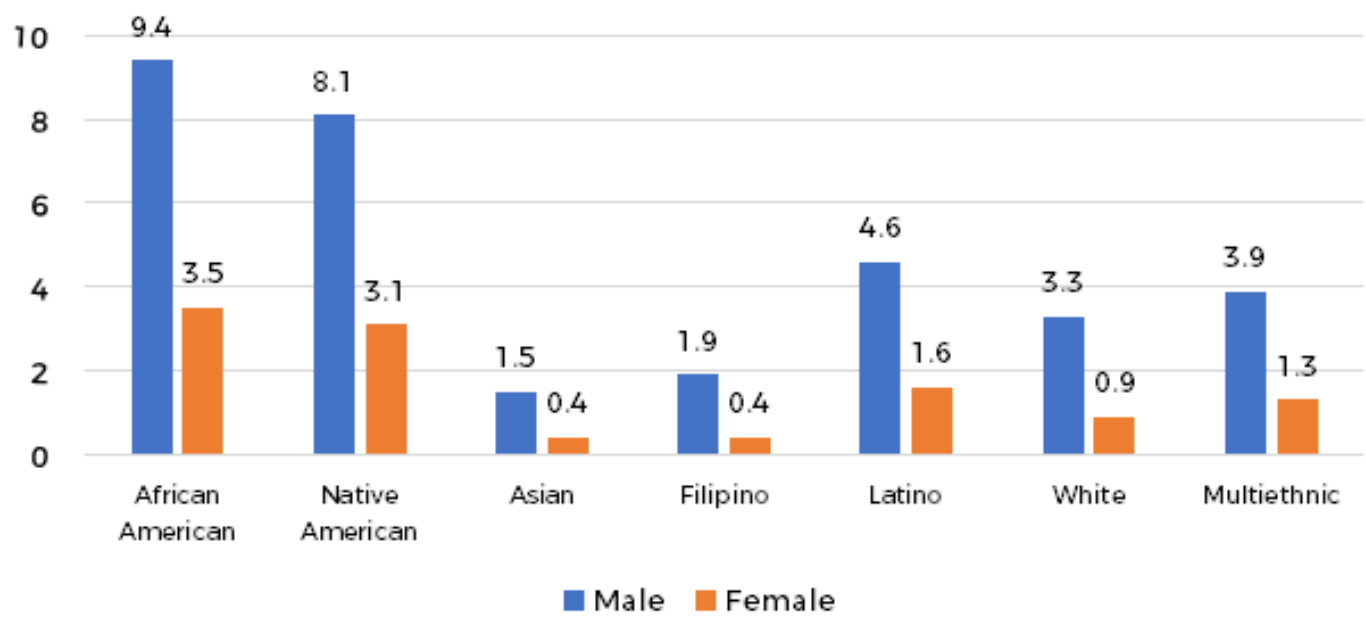
FINDINGS

Black Males are Most Likely to Be Suspended in San Diego County

In San Diego County, the student population most likely to be suspended is Black males. In fact, in 2016-2017, 9.4% of Black males attending public school in county districts were suspended (see Table 1). This rate is 3.4 times higher than the countywide suspension average. This rate is followed by Native American males, who are suspended at 8.1%. While boys and young men are more likely to be suspended than women in general, Black and Native American males are adversely exposed to exclusionary practices. It should be

noted that there is one positive trend taking place. In 2011-2012, 12.3% of Black males were suspended at least once, meaning that this rate has dropped since that time. Beyond one-time suspensions, some students will also be suspended multiple times in a given school year. In the county, Black males are the group most likely to face multiple suspensions. Specifically, among those who are suspended, 37% of Black males will face multiple suspensions.

Table 1.
Suspensions in San Diego County by Race and Gender, 2016-2017



A young Black male student is the central figure, smiling warmly at the camera. He has short, dark hair and is wearing a light-colored, ribbed sweater. His right hand is raised, with a pencil held between his fingers, resting against his forehead. The background is softly blurred, showing other students in a classroom setting. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

“The suspension rate for Black male foster youth is 27.4%”

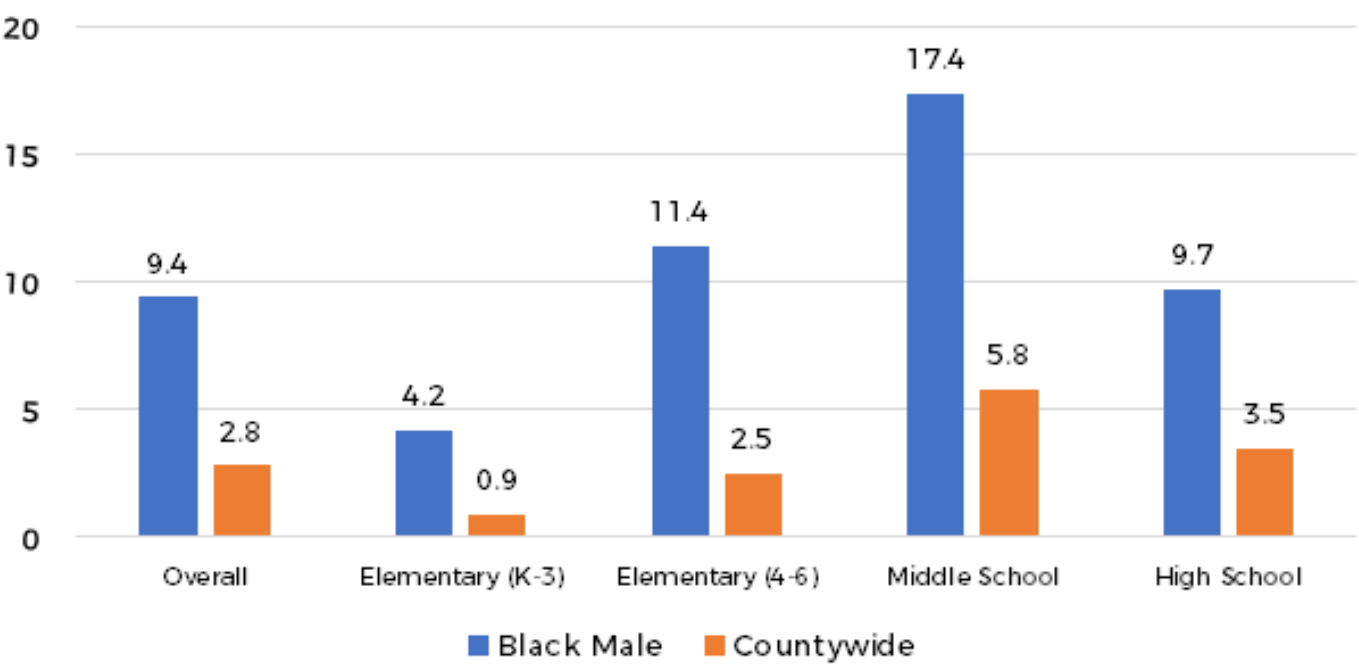
FINDINGS

Early Childhood and Middle School are the “Eye of the Storm”

While the overall suspension rate for Black males in the county is 9.4%, this rate varies across grade levels. For example, the highest suspension rate occurs in Grades 7 and 8 (middle school), where 17.4% of Black males are suspended (see Table 2). This rate is 3 times that of the countywide average for these grades. That being said, while the suspension rates in early childhood education are only half of the overall suspension rate for Black males in the county (at 4.2%), this grade band represents the highest level of disparity. Specifically, in early childhood education (kindergarten through third grade), Black

males are 4.7 times more likely to be suspended than their peers based on the countywide average. As an aside, the increasing suspension rates of Black males across grade levels decline in high school. By high school, the rate drops to 9.7%. This rate is still very high but demonstrates a lower level of disparity with the countywide average (at 2.8 times greater). This might be due to attrition issues between middle school and high school that lead Black males in the county to leave school environments that systematically exclude them.

Table 2.
Suspensions in San Diego County by Grade Level, 2016-2017



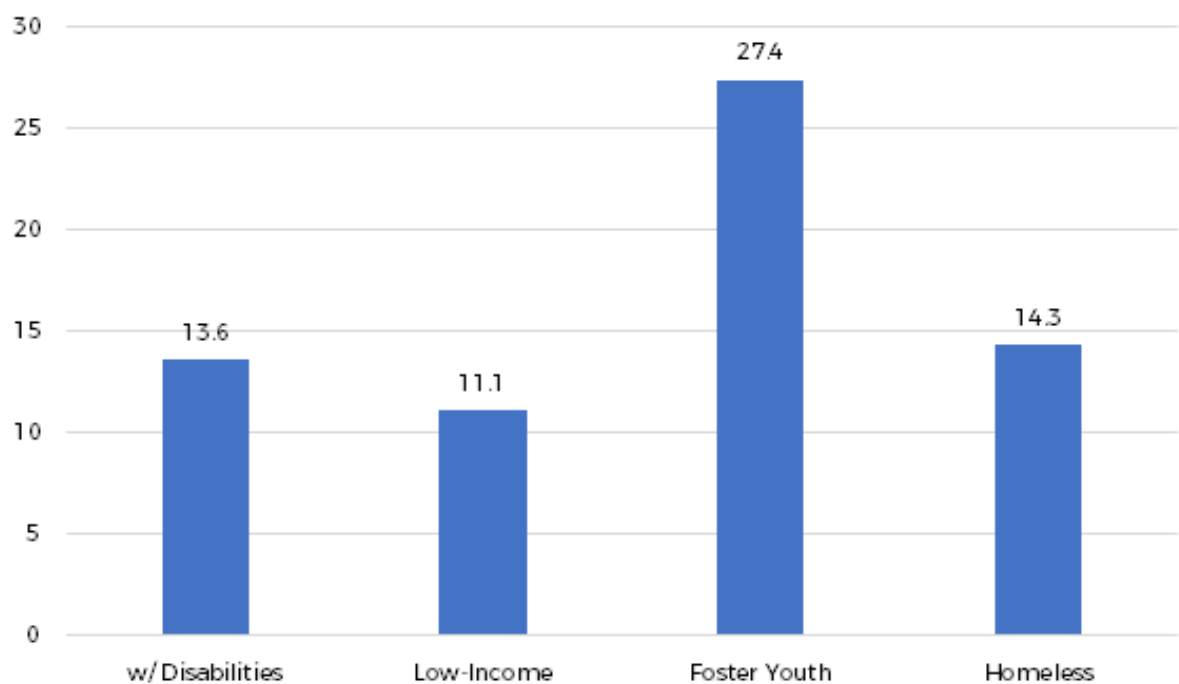
FINDINGS

Black Male Foster Youth are Most Likely to Be Suspended

There are a number of sub-populations that have varying suspension rates. For example, while the countywide suspension average for Black males was 9.4%, the rate for Black males who are low-income is higher, at 11.1%. Moreover, Black male students with disabilities also have noticeably higher suspension rates. In fact, in 2016-2017, 13.6% of these students were suspended at least once. However, the sub-group with the highest suspension rate was foster youth. The suspension rate for these males was 27.4%. In other words, nearly 3 out of every 10 were suspended in the academic year.

Beyond this, there are also intersections between sub-group populations and grade levels. The Black male sub-group in San Diego County most likely to be suspended are those who are foster youth and are in middle school (7th and 8th grade). Shockingly, the suspension rates for Black males in this designation is 53.3%. This rate should serve as a clarion call to all educators, policymakers, and school officials in the region to address the systemic disparities facing Black male learners in the county.

Table 3.
Black male suspensions in San Diego County by Sub-group, 2016-2017



FINDINGS

Lower Suspension but Greater Disparities in Charter Schools

Fewer Black males attend charter schools than non-charter schools. In fact, only 21% of Black males attend charter schools in San Diego county. However, data demonstrate that Black male students enrolled in Charter schools have much lower suspensions than those who are not enrolled in Charter schools. Specifically, the charter school suspension rate is 4.9%, while the non-charter suspension rate is 10.6%. Moreover, charter schools are less likely to levy multiple suspensions against Black males than non-charter schools. Specifically, nearly 40% of Black male students attending non-

charter schools are suspended more than once, in comparison to roughly a quarter of Black students at charter schools. It should be noted that while suspension rates for Black males are lower at charter schools, the within school comparisons are more disparate in Charter settings. For instance, Black males are 2.9 times more likely to be suspended in a non-Charter schools than White males. However, they are 4.5 times more likely to be suspended in Charter settings. Thus, while suspension rates are lower in Charter settings, they are also more disparate for Black males (see Table 4).

Table 4.
A comparison of Black male suspension rates in charter and non-charter schools

School Type	Cumulative Enrollment	Total Suspensions	Unduplicated Count of Students Suspended	Suspension Rate	Percent of Students Suspended At Least Once	Percent of Students Suspended Multiple Times
Non-Charter	10,714	2,046	1,140	10.6%	61.9%	38.1%
Charter	2,814	195	138	4.9%	74.6%	25.4%

The Ten Worst Districts for Black Males in the County

The districts with the highest suspension rates of Black males (based on one-time suspensions) are listed below (see Table 3). These districts include Ramona City, Valley Center, Alpine Union, Escondido Union, and the County Office of Education. It is notable, that the first three districts have limited Black male enrollments yet suspend 18% or more of their Black male students. The school district with the highest suspension rate in the county is Ramona City Unified. In this district, 20% of Black males were suspended. Moreover, 60% of these students were suspended multiple times. Other notable districts in the top 10 include Las Mesa-Spring Valley,

Sweetwater Union, and Grossmont Union, all of which have high total Black enrollments as well as high suspension rates (at 12% or higher). Despite some districts over-reliance upon suspensions, there are a number of districts that may be prioritizing healthier disciplinary practices.



“They are 4.5 times more
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FINDINGS

Table 5.

The Top 10 Worst Districts Suspending Black males in San Diego County¹

	School District	Total Black Male Enrollment	Suspension Rate	One Time Suspensions	Multiple Suspensions
1	Ramona City Unified	25	20.00%	40.00%	60.00%
2	Valley Center Pauma Unified	15	20.00%	66.70%	33.30%
3	Alpine Union Elementary	22	18.20%	75.00%	25.00%
4	Escondido Union High	102	17.60%	77.80%	22.20%
5	Escondido Union	148	16.20%	66.70%	33.30%
6	La Mesa Spring Valley	672	13.40%	64.40%	35.60%
7	Sweetwater Union High	629	12.40%	69.20%	30.80%
8	Grossmont Union High	556	15.30%	60.00%	40.00%
9	SBC High Tech High	34	11.80%	75.00%	25.00%
10	National Elementary	55	10.90%	66.70%	33.30%

¹ County Office of Education was not included in this analysis.

² Charter schools are not included in this analysis.



TOP 5 WORST DISTRICTS SUSPENDING BLACK MALES

1. Ramona City Unified
2. Valley Center-Pauma Unified
3. Alpine Union Elementary
4. Escondido Union High
5. Escondido Union

CONCLUSION

The data presented in this brief demonstrate that Black males are over-represented among those who are suspended in San Diego County. Moreover, the data demonstrate that there are districts that are far too reliant upon suspensions than others. Given this, it is essential that schools and school districts begin to develop practices and policies to better address the issues raised herein. In a recent report, Wood, Harris III and Howard


(2018) offered recommendations for improving suspension rates for Black males across the state of California. We similarly extend those recommendations to the educators and policymakers in San Diego county as a potential path forward for redressing the large disparities in suspension across the region. These recommendations include:

- Implement intensive, ongoing professional development for all educators on unconscious bias, racial microaggressions, culturally mediated behaviors, and teaching practices for boys and young men of color.
- Eliminate the use of suspension as a form of discipline for young boys in early childhood education (preschool through third grade).
- Conduct analyses of school and school district data that can be used to guide discourse between school leaders, parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders on reducing the prevalence of exclusionary discipline in the region.
- Initiate district-level plans to reduce suspension that identify areas in need of attention, specify planned interventions, and track the effectiveness of these interventions over time.
- Establish a countywide¹ exclusionary discipline taskforce that can investigate districts and schools in the county with egregiously high levels of suspensions for Black males.
- Require that advocates be involved as independent representatives for any foster youth who is subject to suspension.
- Provide avenues for students to report educators who they feel are unduly “targeting” them for discipline with follow-up with students afterwards.
- Employ restorative justice as an alternative to school suspension in an effort to build communities and “restore” relationships between all affected parties after an incident has occurred.
- Enhance school resources to identify and support students who have experienced personal trauma.
- Recognize the role that cultural misunderstanding and differences have in producing disparities in suspension.

There are large differences that exist for schools within districts. Some districts have schools that are performing well and others that are not. Beyond these recommendations, we suggest that districts engage in intra-district analyses to identify schools with low suspension rates to learn about practices that can be replicated in other parts of the district.

Taken collectively, these recommendations can serve to improve the lives and educational experiences of Black boys and young men in the county. We urge the county to receive the findings presented here with a sense of urgency.

1 Note: We have modified their recommendations for a statewide taskforce to focus more on county-specific issues.

A young Black man with short, dark hair is smiling and looking towards the camera. He is wearing a light-colored t-shirt. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. A white text box is positioned in the lower half of the image, containing a quote.

“The data presented in this brief demonstrate that Black males are over-represented among those who are suspended in San Diego County.”

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SUSPENSION AS A FORM OF SEGREGATION IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

The **UCLA Black Male Institute** is a cadre of scholars, practitioners and concerned community members whose works are concerned with issues around access and equity for Black males and education. The UCLA BMI also examines issues of race, gender, and opportunities to learn in P-20 learning environments and beyond. The work of the BMI is focused on collaborative scholarship, innovative research, best practice, and policy advocacy for some of the nation's most vulnerable populations.



The **Community College Equity Assessment Lab** (CCEAL) is a national research laboratory under the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University. CCEAL support community colleges with research, assessment, and training activities that support the success of historically underserved students of color. The mission of CCEAL is to develop knowledge and advance promising practices that enhance access, achievement and success among underserved students of color.

