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New Report Exposes Extreme School Suspension Rates for Native Youth in California Schools

San Diego--Sept. 16--Native American students in California public schools suffer outrageously high suspension and expulsion rates largely due to teacher bias and systemic racism, according to a new report released today.

In one rural county, for example, Native youth were 40 times more likely to be suspended.

The report, [From Boarding Schools to Suspension Boards: Suspensions and Expulsions of Native American Students in California Public Schools](#), is a collaboration by researchers from the Sacramento Native American Higher Education Collaborative (SNAHEC) in collaboration with the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) at San Diego State University (SDSU).

Educators called on Gov. Newsom, who has apologized for the “genocide” against Native Americans in California, to address the school suspension issue.

"The data clearly indicates the path Governor Newsom must take to make his recent pledge to begin reconciliation between the State of California and its tribal nations a reality," said Ricardo Torres, a board member of Sacramento Native American Health Center and report contributor. "The safeguarding of Native children in public schools is fundamental to the success of reconciliation."

"This report shines a light on a problem our communities have known about for years, yet schools ignore due to Native students representing an ‘insignificant’ population size," said Dahlton Brown, Executive Director of Education for Wilton Rancheria in Sacramento County. "It is deeply unjust for schools to be complicit in the continued oppression of our youth, and I hope this report starts conversations between Native educators and school systems to address these disparities."

The report is based on data self-reported by districts, and, examined in the context of the tragic history of Indian boarding schools, indicates many public schools are still dangerous places for Native American students.

The founding philosophy of the boarding schools was to “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” through forced assimilation, which often led to students suffering physical, mental and sexual abuse. In California today, many Native American students are suspended due to “willful defiance,” a vague term that in many cases can actually refer to Native American students standing up for their culture or resisting school systems that fail to respect indigenous identities.

The report highlights a number of key findings that raise concern:

- The statewide suspension rate for Native American children and youth is 7.2 percent, much higher than the statewide suspension average of 3.5 percent.
- The expulsion rates for Native boys has been steadily rising, they are expelled at a rate that is 4.2 times higher than the state average, representing the highest expulsion rate for any racial/ethnic or gender group.
- Early childhood (kindergarten through third grade) is the area with the greatest suspension disparity. Native American boys are 2.5 times more likely to be suspended while the rate is 3.7 times greater for Native American girls.
- The top counties for suspending Native American boys were Modoc County, Mono County, and Lassen County. Modoc County was the top county suspending both Native American boys at 38 percent and Native girls at 26.1 percent.
- Kings County was the top expulsion county for both Native American boys and girls. Native American boys are more than 40 times more likely to be expelled in this county than the statewide average. For Native American girls, the rate is 20 times higher than the statewide average – these rates are egregiously high.
- The number one suspension district for Native American boys in California are Fortuna Union High in Humboldt County. This district suspends more than 71 percent of their Native American males. This is followed by Modoc Joint Unified in Modoc County at 42.5 percent.
- The top suspension district for Native American girls is Loleta Union Elementary in Humboldt County. In this district, 32.3 percent of Native American girls were suspended. This district has long struggled with its service to Native American students, having been the focus of a 2013 Office of Civil Rights investigation for its treatment of Native students.

The study provides recommendations for reducing the suspension and expulsion of Native youth in public schools. These range from suggestions for professional development and the preparation of school district personnel to better understand and respond to trauma, and a call for the elimination of suspensions in early childhood education. The report also includes several anecdotes from real Native American parents whose children suffered questionable suspensions or expulsions.

“As a parent of a middle schooler, I’m alarmed by the report’s findings. It’s important to make sure that Native students are understood, valued and academically supported in the K-12 system,” said Crystal Martinez-Alire (Miwok), a report contributor. “To succeed and achieve their goals, Native students need to feel a sense of belonging in their schools.”

The report is part of an ongoing series focused on suspensions of youth of color in California public schools, following the release of the “*Get Out!*” and “*Capitol of Suspensions*” reports focused on Black boys and young men.