School Attendance and Discipline in California

**What It Is**
Kidsdata.org offers the following measures of school absence and exclusionary discipline:

- The number and rate of K-12 public school students expelled, suspended, and reported truant from school, as recorded by the California Dept. of Education; depending on the indicator, data are available for the state, counties, and school districts overall, by disability status, by foster youth status, by homelessness status, by race/ethnicity, and by socioeconomic status.

- Estimates of reasons for absence in the past month and truancy in the past year among students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs, derived from student reports.

- Staff reports on the extent to which truancy or cutting class is a problem at their school.

**Why This Topic Is Important**
Regular school attendance is a predictor of academic success. Frequent absences for any reason are linked to negative school outcomes, including lower test scores and higher dropout rates, which can have lifelong effects on employment and earning potential. A child might miss school for many reasons, including excused absences (such as for health or personal reasons), truancy, and exclusionary punishment (suspensions and expulsions). Rates of chronic school absence tend to be higher among students who live in poverty, those with special health care needs or disabilities, youth of color, English Learners, homeless students, and children in foster care.

Students who are suspended or expelled are more likely than their peers to have academic problems, drop out of school, and enter the juvenile justice system. In the 2015-16 school year, U.S. public school students lost more than 11 million days of instruction due to suspensions. Suspensions and expulsions disproportionately affect children of color (particularly African American/black and American Indian/Alaska Native students), those with disabilities, and LGBTQ youth.

Exclusionary punishment also leads to significant societal costs. For example, dropouts resulting from suspensions have been estimated to cost California approximately $2.7 billion over the lifetime of a single 10th grade student.
**How Children Are Faring**

Nearly 220,000 California K-12 public school students were suspended from school in 2019—35 for every 1,000. Suspension rates vary dramatically across regions with data, from 17 per 1,000 to 86 per 1,000 for counties and from fewer than 5 per 1,000 to more than 200 per 1,000 for school districts in 2019. Statewide, suspension rates by demographic group show disparate disciplinary treatment of students of color (particularly African American/black and American Indian/Alaska Native youth), students with disabilities, homeless students, foster youth, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In 2018-2019, students with disabilities were suspended at more than double the rate of their peers without disabilities, and foster youth were suspended at more than four times the rate of non-foster youth.

In 2019, California students were expelled from school at a rate of 0.8 per 1,000, a drop of more than 45% compared with 2012. Across groups with data, students with disabilities, foster youth, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students of every race/ethnicity also experienced a decline in expulsion rates over this period. Still, disparities persist. In 2018-2019, rates of expulsion among African American/black (2 per 1,000) and American Indian/Alaska Native (2.3 per 1,000) students were more than double the rate for Hispanic/Latino students (0.9 per 1,000), more than triple the rate for white students (0.6 per 1,000), and ten times the rate for Asian American students (0.2 per 1,000).

*View references for this text and additional research on this topic: https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/77/school-attendance-and-discipline/summary*