FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA

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# ANALYSIS: HOW DOES SCHOOL CLIMATE FARE IN 2017-18 LCAPs?

*NEW CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DASHBOARD KEEPS DISTRICTS ACCOUNTABLE*

The new California School Dashboard is holding school districts accountable and helping them better address the overuse of suspensions, according to an analysis of the 2017-18 Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) of the state's largest 50 school districts—which educate approximately 41% of all students statewide—recently conducted by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national anti-crime advocacy organization. Still, many districts can do more to address school climate in their LCAPs and better incorporate the Dashboard to help students succeed.

"Suspensions from school are a matter of public safety because often sending a kid home leaves them unsupervised, and more likely fall behind in school, drop out, and turn to crime." said Brian Lee, California State Director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, which consists of over 400 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and victims of violence members statewide. "Out roaming the streets is not where we want troubled youth to be. On the contrary, we need to take all measures necessary to keep kids supervised, engaged and learning in class during the school day."

The analysis highlights new research published in 2018 showing that 12 years after being suspended, youth were 30% more likely to have been arrested once, 51% more likely to have been arrested more than once, and 49% more likely to have been placed on probation than similar youth who had not been suspended, even after controlling for 60 variables.

The California School Dashboard sets first-time standards for what suspension rates districts should strive for. The Dashboard uses colors—blue (best) to green, yellow, orange, and red (lowest)—to track each indicator by the full student body and a variety of student subgroups. The colors are assigned based on a combination of current performance and change compared to the prior year.

District LCAPs are required to report if the Dashboard shows that a district has particularly high and/or decreasing rates (orange or red overall) and any specific subgroups that are performing well below the district average. **Of the 36 districts required to report under-performance on suspension rates, all but two satisfied this basic requirement.**

Districts are increasingly recognizing the value of evidence-based alternatives to suspensions, including Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Restorative Justice or Practices, and Social Emotional Learning, with 92 percent including these in their LCAPs, up from 70% in 2014-15 and 84% in 2015-16 LCAPs. Many districts point to their success—calling the alternatives "highly effective" and crediting them with a "drastic decrease in" and "dramatically reducing" suspensions—and are increasing their commitments to these strategies.

"Overall, there is a lot to be encouraged by when it comes to the how districts are addressing the new California School Dashboard in their LCAPs. California is one of only three states with a unique indicator to track suspension rates, and it has set more ambitious goals on suspension than the others," Lee said. "Although there is plenty of room for improvement, districts now know what the state expects of them and can set appropriate goals for suspension reduction in their LCAPs, rather than just establishing locally-designed goals without any real direction or accountability."

There remains much districts can do to improve their use of LCAPs and the Dashboard. Despite the increased commitment to evidence-based strategies, the amount of funding planned for evidence-based alternatives to suspension is unclear in half of districts with these practices. In addition, just over 40% of districts establish distinct goals for low-performing subgroups identified through the Dashboard, even though that would demonstrate their intent, and set a path forward, to improve subgroup performance.

To further improve suspension rates, school climates, and student outcomes, more districts should:

- Establish distinct goals to improve rates for low-performing subgroups;
- Incorporate Dashboard colors into their district goals to show if their numerical goals will actually lead to an improvement in color designation, i.e., from yellow to green;
- Clarify how much funding is actually going to evidence-based strategies to ensure that planned funding is sufficient to be effective and is actually spent; and
- Address safety and connectedness through school climate surveys.

The analysis outlines other steps districts can take to effectively address school climate in their LCAPs to support continuous improvement and student success. The report includes a district-by-district analysis of several key elements.

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