



Improving Health Through Equitable School Budgeting

**Kern High
School
District**



I. Executive Summary of Findings

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) has provided local school districts with more control to meet the needs of their most vulnerable students. As advocates bring to the surface the connection between education and health outcomes, districts have an opportunity to invest in public education solutions that can produce better health results. This policy brief provides recommendations on how Kern High School District can improve health and academic outcomes for its most vulnerable students.



II. Background

Health is an often overlooked indicator and an outcome of educational attainment in the United States. Higher educational attainment is linked to longer life expectancies and superior health outcomes.¹ Two reasons for this are higher wages, and jobs that provide better access to health insurance and care.²

Americans with a higher level of education are less likely to have a heart condition, stroke, hypertension, high cholesterol, and emphysema, be obese, overweight and suffer from diabetes and asthma.³ An important factor could be that educational attainment is linked with positive health prevention practices, such as exercise, health screenings for mammograms, pap smears, colonoscopies, and vaccinations, such as flu shots.⁴ The more educated are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco and using illegal drugs.⁵ Early detection and preventative care are key to improving public health.

Education also has an immediate impact on a young person, through the experiences they have in their daily lives while at school. School disciplinary policies and parent engagement are thus two significant factors that not only affect a student's educational outcome, but also their health. Recognizing that schools have the power to impact a young person's physical, social and emotional health, advocates increasingly connect education reforms to health outcomes.

This new recognition comes at an opportune time. In 2013, the state dramatically changed the way it funds school districts across the state by adopting the new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). In addition to reversing cuts made during the Great

Recession, the new law directs added resources to higher-need school districts, by giving them "supplemental and concentration" grant funding tied to the number of low income, foster youth, and English learner students in each district. LCFF also gives districts more flexibility than they'd had in the past by replacing a host of "categorical" funding programs, with strict requirements on how state dollars could be spent, with more flexible grants that can be allocated to meet local needs.

To ensure that districts use their new flexibility wisely, the state also required them to meet new transparency and accountability standards. In particular, districts are required to publish a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) each year, which lays out their priorities and lists the specific actions and funding the district will leverage to accomplish those goals. Districts are required to consult with the community, including students, parents, and teachers, while developing their LCAPs.

The result of these changes means that districts are seeing increased funding from the state while also being called upon to more effectively match resources to student needs. This policy brief provides analysis and recommendations to help Kern High School District (KHSD) take advantage of the changes created by LCFF to improve the health and educational outcomes of its students.

III. Profile for Kern High

KERN HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Kern High School District (KHSD) is located in Kern County, California. It is California's largest 9-12 high school district, with 18 comprehensive high schools serving more than 38,000 students.

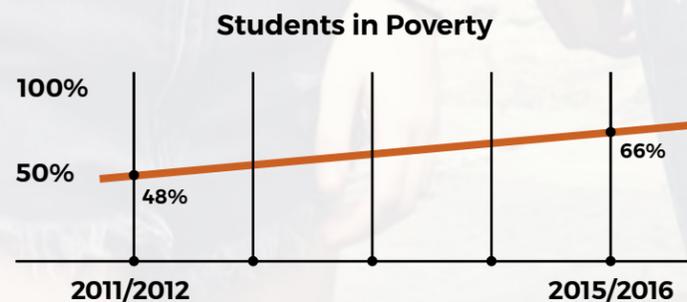
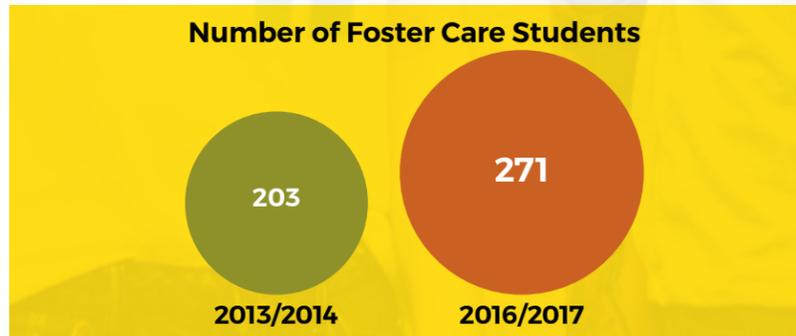
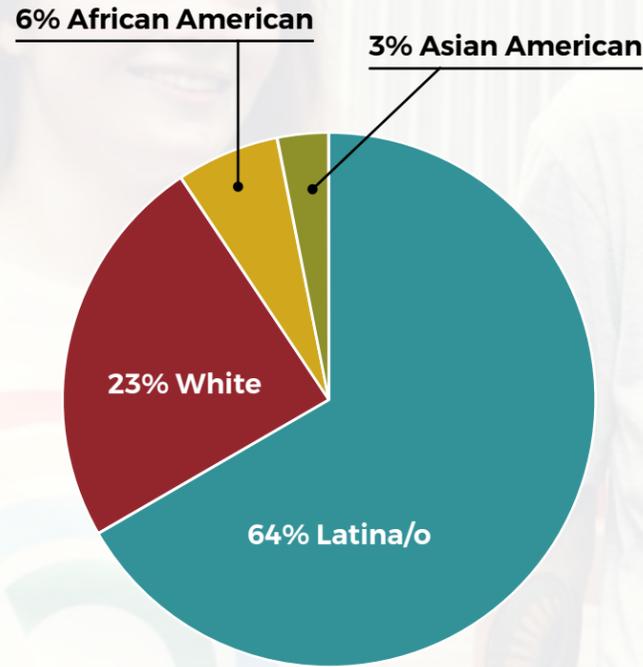
Demographically, the District is 64% Latina/o, 23% white, 6% African American, and 3% Asian American. In the 2015-2016 school year, 66% of students were identified as high-need through the Local Control Funding Formula, meaning they fell into one of three categories: 1) foster youth students; 2) English-language learners; or 3) students who are low-income and therefore qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Kern High has 271 foster youth students, which is a significant increase from 203 in 2013-2014. The number of students in poverty is also on the rise from 48% (2011-2012) to 66% (2015-2016).

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT⁶

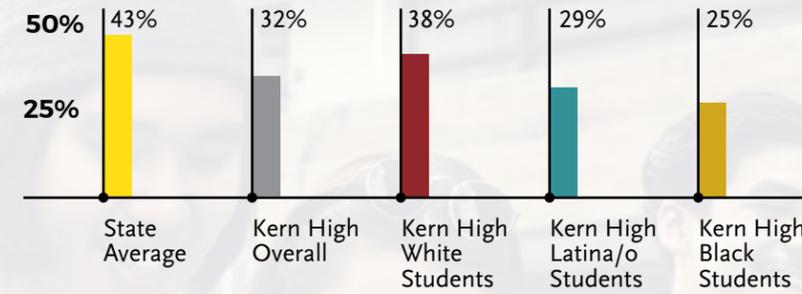
1. In the 2014-15 school year, KHSD students graduated at a slightly higher rate (87%) compared to California students overall (82%).
 2. Only 32% of KHSD graduates meet eligibility requirements for admission to a four-year public university in California, by getting a C or better in the A-G courses – this is more than ten points below the state average of 43%. There are significant disparities within that overall rate, however: the rate for white students is 38%, while only 29% of Latina/o students and 25% of Black graduates meet the A-G requirements. And only 1.5% of English language learners meet the requirements and graduate UC/CSU eligible.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE⁷

1. KHSD had a high number of suspensions in FY 14-15, with 5,471 out-of-school suspensions, 22% of which were for willful defiance.⁸
 2. An additional 2,760 in-school suspensions were imposed, 90% of which were attributed to willful defiance.
 3. African Americans represent 16% of all out-of-school



Graduates Meeting Requirements to Enter Four-Year Public University



The socioeconomically disadvantaged are only passing A-G courses at

21%

Only 1.5%

of English language learners are UC/CSU eligible.

5,471

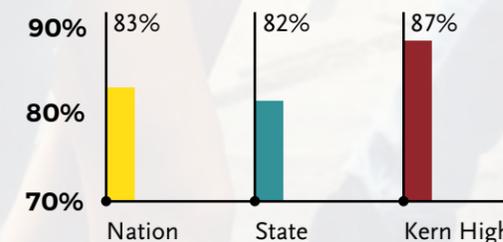
out-of-school suspensions

2,760

in-school suspensions

African Americans represent 16% of all school suspensions even though they represent only 5.9% of the population.

Graduation Rates (2014/2015)



suspensions even though they represent only 6% of the student population.

HEALTH INDICATORS⁹

11% of 9th graders did not pass the health test for aerobic capacity, which measures respiratory fitness, and 20% did not pass the body composition health test, which measures percent body fat.

In Kern County, there's a positive correlation between school connectedness – which measures whether students feel they are treated fairly, feel close to others at school, feel happy and a part of the school, and feel safe at school – and refraining from binge drinking and having lower levels of depression, suggesting that it is a significant protective factor for students. 97% of students with high level of connectedness reported no binge drinking in the last month in comparison to only 86% of students with low levels of connectedness. The least connected students also had the highest rate of depression related feelings, at 42%, compared to 23% of students with high levels of school connectedness.¹⁰

Of 9th graders: Only 20% are scoring in the healthy fitness zone for body composition, only 11.7% for aerobic capacity.

IV. School Issues & Health Outcomes

HARSH DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

Schools are supposed to be welcoming public spaces that foster student physical, mental and emotional development to help them reach their full potential. Instead, for many African American and Latina/o students the opposite is true: schools are pushing them out, leading to immediate and long-term negative health effects. Racial bias from school staff can exacerbate the problem for African American and Latina/o students, who often face harsher punishments in their schools when compared to their white counterparts for similar minor infractions.¹¹ This is what community leaders and advocates call the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’.

The implementation of harsh disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions in schools cause more harm to child and adolescent development than good. When students are removed from class they lose precious learning time, and they lose a sense of school connectedness, which is a protective factor for risky behavior.¹² Suspended students can become alienated, build resentment, and develop distrust of school staff. It is no wonder that they are more likely to have poor attendance, be at risk for failing a grade and for dropping out of school. Further, suspended students are more likely to be in contact with the criminal justice system.¹³

Students who faced harsh disciplinary actions in school are also more likely to engage in risky behaviors, including substance abuse.¹⁴ In a longitudinal study, seventh grade students who were suspended were found to be twice as likely to start using tobacco less than a year later, when controlling for prior use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Researchers and advocates both agree that suspensions profile and label students negatively amongst their peers. Some studies suggest that students may begin engaging in risky behaviors in order to fit into the negative reputation that the suspension assigns them in the school context.¹⁵

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Harsh disciplinary action in schools can hurt students and affect their social, emotional, and physical health. The key is looking for disciplinary policies and practices that increase a student’s connectedness to their peers, teachers, and administration. When students feel connected to others, including adults, it serves as a protective factor that can prevent them from engaging in violence, drinking, smoking and early sexual activity, which increases the risk for teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁶ Students who have strong connectedness to their schools have better mental health, report having lower levels of emotional stress and are also less likely to attempt suicide.¹⁷

Restorative justice has been critical to moving away from damaging a student’s relationship to their school when harm occurs. Restorative justice is a shift in attitude that moves away from alienating students and removing them from school, and instead focuses on resolving the conflict between all parties involved. Instead of pushing students away, it forces them to address the conflict and repair any harm they may have caused.

When implemented, restorative justice has been shown to increase student connectedness. Researchers found that restorative justice programs reduced student absenteeism by 50% and tardiness by 64%.¹⁸ Restorative justice schools also saw a significant increase in graduation rates when compared with schools that use traditional disciplinary practices.¹⁹

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

While many schools have historically not been effective at establishing strong relationships with students, the same can often be said for their connection with students’ families. Many schools assume parents have little to offer or have little interest in contributing to their child’s well-being.²⁰ As a result, parents often report feeling disconnected from their children’s school.²¹

School practices can be a major factor for either encouraging or deterring parent involvement. Many school districts do not adequately invest in training employees on effective parent engagement practices. School events may be inaccessible to parents due to language barriers, lack of available translation, and events that occur during typical work hours when parents are unavailable. Many parents also report feeling uncomfortable and unwelcome during school staff interactions.²² Previous experiences with racism in the public school system also deters many African American parents from participating in school events.²³

If we are to improve health and academic outcomes for children, parents play a critical role. Parent engagement decreases the chances that their children will engage in risky health behaviors such as using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. It decreases emotional distress, promotes healthier eating habits and decreases the likelihood of suicide.²⁴ Parents can also improve their children’s mental health by simply being present in their education and in their lives. And this improvement in emotional health and behavior translates to improved academic achievement.²⁵

Parent engagement makes a significant difference in a child’s relationship to school and long-term educational success. Studies show that students exhibit stronger attendance, pass more classes, earn more credits, are more likely to graduate on time, and are less likely to drop out. Students earn higher grade point averages and score higher on standardized tests. Students also improve in their behavior both at home and school.²⁶

Research demonstrates that parent engagement is more than traditional volunteering for the school dance or attending a teacher-parent conference. There are a multitude of ways parents can be involved, from setting expectations at home, monitoring their study habits and behavior, and directly engaging with educators. While all of these are important, a parent’s expectation for their children’s academic success has been found to be the most significant.²⁷ Even if a parent may not be able to participate in a parent conference or volunteer at a school event, they can still play an important role by setting

high expectations for their children’s achievement. Early parent participation also has the most long-term impact. Students in grades 2-4 make greater improvements in their academic achievement when parents are involved in comparison to older students.²⁸

School districts can learn from these practices by investing in resources for parent engagement and professional development for all school site employees and faculty, training them on how to be more inclusive and welcoming to parents. School districts should start training early childhood and elementary school educators early to maximize parent engagement. At every age level, school sites can work with parents to set high goals and expectations for students through workshops, parent conferences and personal home visits. When parents support their children, it serves as an immediate protective factor for their health and helps them to be successful over the course of their life.

FOSTER YOUTH STUDENTS

Students in the child welfare system are of significant importance as they are more likely to have health problems and be disconnected from school than their counterparts, with a lower level of connectedness at an earlier age.²⁹ Since school engagement usually decreases with age, this puts foster youth at greater risk for low school connectedness.

In a study, 32% of foster youth students ages 12-17 had been suspended or expelled from school and 17% had skipped school in the past year.³⁰ In the same study, 39% had low levels of school engagement defined by initiative to complete homework assignments, motivation to complete schoolwork, consistency with completing assignments and attitudes towards school. Nearly one-third of foster youth are not involved in any after-school activities, including sports, and student organizations. Because school connectedness is a protective factor for health and academic outcomes, school districts need to target limited resources for foster youth students on best practices that increase their engagement in school.

V. Equity and Spending in Kern High School District

THE NEED FOR EQUITY

LCFF changed traditional approaches to public education funding and provided school districts with additional funds for foster youth, English language learners, and low-income students. Achieving true equity requires more sensitive approaches, however.

For example, just looking at qualification for free and reduced lunch to identify low-income students treats a student in a family of four with a household income of \$40,000 the same as a student in a family of four with an income of \$8,000. Clearly, there are students who are at a much greater disadvantage and who should be prioritized when funding decisions are made.

In addition, many school boards and superintendents do not consider funding equity within their districts, opting to distribute resources evenly rather than targeting the highest-need students and campuses. Districts should instead follow the lead of the California Department of Education by following an equity-based formula that identifies the unique needs of their school sites.

We have produced a research-based ranking of Kern High School District's schools by need for additional funding under the LCFF. This ranking, based on a Student Equity Need Index (SENI), not only measures student performance and achievement in the classroom, but also takes into account the neighborhood conditions that can negatively affect a student's academic success. The index also incorporates duplicated numbers, counting students twice or more if they fall into more than one of the three high-need student populations highlighted in the LCFF. Districts should use the SENI to target LCFF funding towards the highest need schools in order to ensure that resources are distributed to the students who need it the most.

The SENI is calculated using duplicated counts of LCFF/LCAP targeted students (free and reduced lunch, English learner, and students in foster care) in addition to seven

other measures ranging from school and student indicators to larger community factors. These include school specific data on academic achievement, suspensions, physical fitness, and high school drop-out rates. Community indicators included the availability of violence prevention resources, languages other than English spoken at home, exposure to gun violence, and the rate of child maltreatment allegations in the neighborhood. All of this data is combined to rank the schools from the highest need to the lowest, in order to prioritize funds to the students who need it the most.

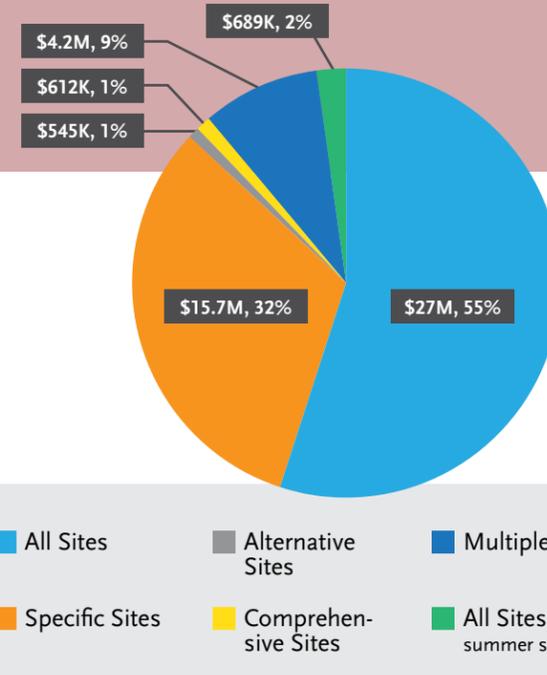
HIGHEST NEED SCHOOLS:

1. North High
2. Tierra del Sol Continuation School
3. Mira Monte High
4. South High
5. West High
6. East Bakersfield High
7. Bakersfield High
8. Golden Valley High
9. Ridgeview High
10. Arvin High

KHSD'S SPENDING OF EQUITY-BASED FUNDING

For fiscal year 2016-2017, KHSD is receiving \$48 million in LCFF supplemental and concentration grants, which are equity-based dollars generated by high-need students. The District is allocating 55% of this funding to district-wide expenditures (\$27 million), with only 32% (\$16 million) of its equity-based funding going to targeted school sites.

Equity Based Spending – Sites



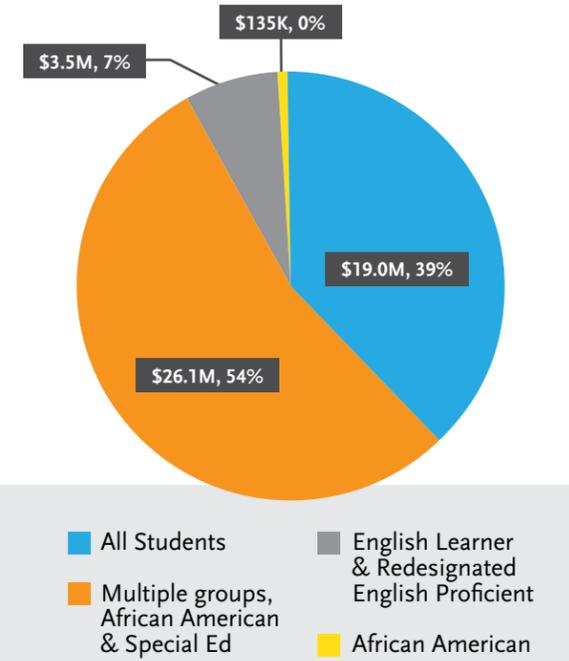
In order to ensure limited resources are targeted to the highest need students, KHSD should adopt an equity-based formula for distributing funds based on the Student Equity Need Index.

MAJOR EXPENDITURES INCLUDE:

1. \$12.6 million for Restoring Class Size
2. \$8.1 million for Career Technical Education
3. \$2.5 million for Technology Infrastructure
4. \$3.2 million for Bilingual Aides
5. \$2 million for Teacher-Librarians
6. \$1.4 million for Counselors
7. \$1.3 million for Truancy Prevention staff

Kern High School District's proposed spending of equity-based dollars allocates about 54% of the spending (\$26 million) to programs that benefit the targeted LCFF sub-groups (low income, foster youth, and English learners), plus African American and Special Education students; 39% (\$19 million) will go to all student populations; and 7% (\$3.5 million) will go exclusively to English learners. Programs exclusively for foster youth are included in the "Multiple Groups, African American, and Special Education" category, so it's unclear whether services for them are seeing increased investment.

Equity Based Spending – Student Population



While it is true that Kern High is overall a relatively high-need district, with 66% of students falling into one or more of the LCFF targeted populations, it does not appear to be especially rigorous about conceptualizing its investments in terms of which campuses and students will specifically benefit from extra funding produced by low-income, English language learner, and foster youth students. By becoming more transparent and accountable to the community, parents, and students that it serves, the District could better meet students' needs, and make faster progress towards the goals of LCFF.

VI. Policy Recommendations

RESOURCES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

As noted above, for FY 16-17, the District does not specify spending for foster youth, instead including those services in broader categories. As a threshold recommendation, the District should return to its prior practice of separately reporting foster youth investments, so advocates and parents can better understand how these students are being prioritized. Additional recommendations include:

1. Appointing a youth counselor for each school site to conduct an annual review of foster student education records and ensure foster students receive the necessary academic support and services.
2. Training school-site personnel on foster students' rights to remain in their current school, even when foster placements occur.
3. Allocating funds to provide transportation to keep youth in their current school.

FULLY RESOURCED PARENT CENTERS

Parent Centers are an important and essential link toward creating an integrated and inclusive school environment. Parent Centers serve parents, teachers, social workers, and advocates; they have a vital role in breaking down barriers, addressing issues of parent engagement, and provide training and information to parents in a language they can understand. KHSD has budgeted \$921,000 in equity-based funding for parent centers in FY16-17, and projects to increase that amount to \$1.1 million in FY17-18. While the district is making an effort to dedicate more funding to these facilities, it does not report site-level funding – so it is unclear what type of parent services are available on each campus, or whether the high-need communities are seeing an increased, and equitable investment.

The District should establish fully resourced parent centers in high-need schools that:

1. Establish a parent-engagement action plan with measurable outcomes for each school site with representatives from all major stakeholders, including parents, administrators, teachers, and counselors.
2. Ensure programs are relevant and meet the needs of parents to ensure programming is impactful.

3. Be pro-active and create welcoming environments for all parents regardless of their socioeconomic status, language, race, or gender. Parent activities and trainings should be accessible by providing translation, hosting events during non-traditional school hours, and be proactive by personally calling parents to events.
4. Provide technology education for parents to increase access to financial aid, scholarships, college applications, and school website information.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Overall, KHSD has made a commitment to support restorative justice practices on school sites, but should increase its commitment in the highest-need schools in order to promote positive mental and physical health for students. In FY 16-17, the District has allocated \$6.6 million equity-based dollars for school climate investments, including counselors, community specialists, and social workers. These investments lay important groundwork for a successful program, but more remains to be done.

Districts should provide sufficient resources to implement restorative justice programs at the highest-need schools. With these resources, school sites should be able to:

1. Review school site disciplinary policies and practices and transition schools to use restorative justice and positive behavior intervention and support as an alternative to harsh disciplinary practices.
2. Provide training for teachers and all school staff on implicit bias and restorative justice.
3. Establish a “School Climate” committee to assess school site implementation and accountability.
4. Provide students and their families real-time data on school disciplinary practices, disaggregated by race and gender to support tracking and accountability.
5. Increase and improve mental health services for students and their families.
6. Pilot a “Home Visitation Program” to recover students, increase attendance, and decrease drop-out rates.

VII. Resources

1. Dolores Huerta Foundation³¹
2. Faith in the Valley³²
3. California Rural Legal Assistance³³
4. Centers for Disease Control: Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health³⁴
5. Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools: A Guide for Educators by Advancement Project, AFT, National Education Association & National Opportunity to Learn³⁵
6. Centers for Disease Control: Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy. Reframing School Dropout as a Public Health Issue³⁶
7. ACLU of Northern California: The Right to Remain a Student: How California School Policies Fail to Protect and Serve³⁷
8. Advancement Project: Test, Punish, and Push Out: How Zero Tolerance Policies and High Stakes Testing Funnel Youth into the School-to Prison-Pipeline³⁸

1 Woolf SH, Johnson RE, Phillips RL, Philipsen M. Giving everyone the health of the educated: an examination of whether social change would save more lives than medical advances. *Am J Public Health* 2007; 97(4):679-83. Retrieved at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17329654>.

2 Id.

3 Cutler, David M. et al. “Education and Health: Evaluating Theories and Evidence.” (July 2006.) NBER Working Paper No. 12352. Retrieved at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w12352>.

4 Id.

5 Id. at 1.

6 Ed-Data. Kern High. Retrieved at <http://www.ed-data.org/district/Kern//Kern-High>.

7 Id.

8 Assembly Bill 420 of 2014 eliminated the ability to suspend a student (K-3) for acts of “willful defiance” starting January 1, 2015. The bill will sunset 2018. Further, although the District does not make data on involuntary transfers publicly available, local civil rights organizations, including Building Healthy Communities partners, argue that decreasing suspension numbers in recent years mask a racially-discriminatory practice of involuntarily transferring students into alternative education settings that lack academic opportunities. See *Sanders v. Kern High School District*, Complaint, at <https://www.clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=13909>.

9 Id. at 6.

10 California Healthy Kids Survey, 2011-2013 data. See <http://chks.wested.org/query-chks/>.

11 Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2014). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation* [Special issue: Restorative Justice].

12 Advancement Project, Restorative Justice: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools (March 2014). Retrieved at <http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf>.

13 West Ed: Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Research Review (February 2016). Retrieved at http://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RJ_Literature-Review_20160217.pdf.

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18 Id. at 13.

19 Jain, S., Bassey, H., Brown, M., & Kalra, P. (2014). Restorative justice implementation and impacts in Oakland schools (prepared for the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education). Oakland, CA: Oakland Unified School District, Data In Action.

20 K. Cotton & K. R. Wikeland. Parent Involvement in Education, (Northwest Regional Education Lab, 2001).

21 Smith J. G. (2006). Parental involvement in education among low-income families: A case study. *School Community Journal*, 16, 43–56.

22 Id. at 20.

23 Hill, N. E., & Taylor, L. C. (2004). Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13, 161–164. doi:10.1111/j.0963-7214.2004.00298.x.

24 Resnick MD, Bearman PS, Blum RW, Bauman KE, Harris KM, Jones J, et al. Protecting adolescents from harm. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 1997;278(10):823–832.

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26 Wendy Miedel Barnard, Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 26, Issue 1, January 2004, Pages 39-62, ISSN 0190-7409, retrieved at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2003.11.002>; A. T. Henderson & K. L. Mapp. A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement. (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002).

27 Fan, X. & Chen, M. Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review* (2001) 13: 1. doi: 10.1023/A:1009048817385.

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29 Kortenkamp, Katherine, and Jennifer Ehrle. Jan. 2002. The Well-Being of Children Involved with the Child Welfare System: A National Overview. *New Federalism: National Survey of America's Families*. Series B, No. B-43; Pears KC, Kim HK, Fisher PA, Yoerger K. Early School Engagement and Late Elementary Outcomes for Maltreated Children in Foster Care. *Developmental psychology*. 2013;49(12):10.1037/a0032218. doi:10.1037/a0032218.

30 Ehrle, Jennifer, and Kristin A. Moore. 1999. Benchmarking Child and Family Well-Being Measures in the NSAF. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute. *National Survey of America's Families Methodology Report No. 6*.

31 See <http://doloreshuerta.org>.

32 See <http://faithinthevalley.org>.

33 See <http://crla.org>.

34 See https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf.

35 See <http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf>.

36 See https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/07_0063.htm.

37 See <https://www.aclunc.org/publications/right-remain-student-how-ca-school-policies-fail-protect-and-serve>.

38 See <http://www.advancementproject.org/resources/entry/test-punish-and-push-out-how-zero-tolerance-and-high-stakes-testing-funnel>.

Endnotes

Building Healthy Communities is a comprehensive community initiative that is creating a revolution in the way Californians think about and support health in their communities. Residents are proving that they can make health happen in their neighborhoods, schools and with prevention—and in doing so, they are creating a brighter future for their children.

Thousands of residents, youth, businesses and organizations are leading the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) South Kern effort to positively change the health of our communities through a shared vision, goals and action plan. Residents in Arvin, Lamont, Weedpatch and the unincorporated areas of Greenfield are proving that we have the power to make health happen in our communities.

Advancement Project is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization. In California we champion the struggle for greater equity and opportunity for all, fostering upward mobility in communities most impacted by economic and racial injustice. We build alliances and trust, use data-driven policy solutions, create innovative tools and work alongside communities to ignite social transformation!

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