The Civil Rights Project

Proyecto Derechos Civiles

Methods and Instructions

Spreadsheet Overview:

The attached excel spreadsheet includes data on the risk of suspension for all racial groups in most school districts in California. The purpose of the data tool is to facilitate access to information on the rates of and disparities in suspensions for students across the state. The excel sheet contains three separate worksheets for the following three categories of students: 1) all students, which combines students with and without disabilities, 2) only students with disabilities, and 3) only students without disabilities. This document provides a description of the methodology we used to calculate the suspension percentages as well as a brief explanation of how to use the file.

Methods:

The data used in this spreadsheet comes from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), a survey administered by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR). This survey represents all school districts enrolling over 3000 students, and sample of districts with less than 3000 students in California. Ultimately, it gathered data from 504 school districts, serving approximately 90 percent of all students in the state. Because the CRDC does not require every district in the state to submit data, the reported absolute number of students suspended represents an undercount for the state.

Measure of Suspension Risk: In our analysis, we calculated the number of students suspended at least once as a percentage of their enrollment for students at the state and district level by race and disability status. We describe this percentage throughout this report as the "risk" for suspension. OCR required the sample of districts to report on the unduplicated number of students who were suspended just one time, and in a separate column, those suspended more than one times. We combined these mutually exclusive categories to arrive at the number of students suspended out of school one or more times during the 2009-2010 school year. In-school suspensions were not included in our analysis, as were students that were expelled, arrested at school or referred to law enforcement. The OCR data and our measure of suspension risk looks at *the unduplicated count of students* receiving one or more out of school suspensions over the course of the school year.

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Suspension Categories: Each workbook has 9 ethnic group categories including American Indian, Asian combined, Asian or Pacific Islander, Asian, Hawaiian, Hispanic, Black, White, and 2 or more races. Because districts had the option of grouping or separating out Pacific Islanders from Asians, the Asian combined category provides a single suspension rate for all Asian groups combined, regardless of how the district reported its data. Additional columns include the district's overall suspension rate, Total, and suspension rates for students classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP).

Exclusion Criteria: When deciding whether to include a district's data, we took precautionary steps and excluded any district where we had a strong reason to suspect that the data was not accurate. This could occur for two reasons: 1) a district reported more suspensions than students for any subgroup (resulting in a suspension rate of over 100%), or 2) a district reported no suspensions whatsoever district wide (resulting in a suspension rate of 0% for all subgroups). In the second scenario, we compared OCR reported suspensions with suspension data reported by the California Department of Education for the same school year. If any discrepancy was found that could not be explained by rounding errors, that district was excluded from the spreadsheet.

Final note: we excluded from our analysis the risk for suspension of students with disabilities who did not have an IEP, but received supports or services exclusively under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 because the suspension numbers for students in this category were not disaggregated by race or gender and the numbers were typically very low.

How to use this spreadsheet:

The spreadsheet contains three tabs or worksheets for three different populations including all students (combined students with and without disabilities), students with disabilities, and students without disabilities. Each workbook includes most districts in California, but may display a different number of rows because of districts that were eliminated according to our methodology and exclusion criteria.

Each worksheet is sorted alphabetically by district name. You may search for a district's name by using the search feature (Ctrl-F [PC] or CMD-F [Mac]) in Excel. Alternatively, you may also sort the sheet by any of the columns. For example, the sheet may be sorted by Hispanic suspension rates, highest to lowest, using the Data Sort feature in Excel.

Data filters have also been applied to each worksheet as indicated by the arrows and pull down menu bars next to each column from the header row. By clicking on the arrow next to the desired column, you may select only those districts that meet any criteria you choose. For example, you can choose to select all districts that have suspension rates over 20% or hide any districts that have less than 5%. Any number of possibly numerical criteria can be used across one or more columns.