

# CYBHI

Children and Youth  
Behavioral Health Initiative



## Where Discipline Meets Behavioral Health

Restorative Approaches to Supporting  
Students Without Exclusion

February 26, 2026



OFFICE OF THE  
CALIFORNIA  
SURGEON GENERAL



UCLA Center for the Transformation  
of Schools

# Welcome & Introductions



**Dr. Michael D. Corral**  
*REACH Network Project Director*  
UCLA Center for the  
Transformation of Schools



**Dr. Sohil Sud**  
*Director*  
Child and Youth Behavioral  
Health Initiative, CalHHS

# Agenda

1. Framing Presentation
  - Discipline Context in California
  - Linking Behavioral Health and Student Discipline
  - Alternatives to Student Discipline
  - Case Study: LUSD Comprehensive School Counseling
2. Panel Discussion
3. Live Q&A
4. Closing

# Understanding the Impact

A look at what the data—and the reality—are telling us about the discipline context in California.



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# Every suspension carries an academic and health cost.

## Research shows correlation with lower or decreased:

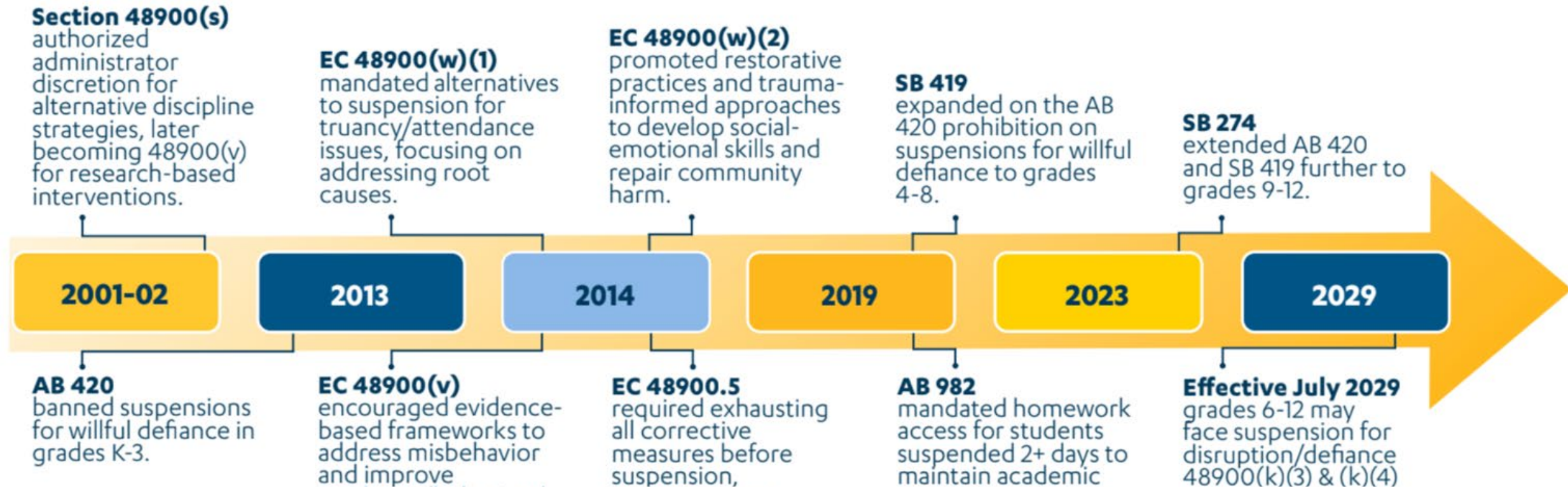
- Instructional time
- Academic growth
- Sense of belonging
- Emotional resilience
- Prosocial and coping skills

## And increased likelihood or occurrence of:

- Grade retention
- Dropout and disengagement
- Stress and trauma
- Justice system involvement

**References:** Noltemeyer, A. L., Ward, R. M., & McLoughlin, C. (2015). Relationship between school suspension and student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review*, 44(2), 224-240; Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., et al. (2011). Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement. Council of State Governments Justice Center & Texas A&M; Losen, D. J., & Whitaker, A. (2018). 11 million days lost: Race, discipline, and safety at U.S. public schools (Part 1). ACLU of Southern California & UCLA Civil Rights Project; Angton, A., Niño, M., et al. (2024). The long-term consequences of school suspension and expulsion on depressive symptoms. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 61, 100631; LiCalsi, C., Osher, D., & Bailey, P. (2021). An empirical examination of the effects of suspension and suspension severity on behavioral and academic outcomes. *American Institutes for Research*, 8.; Rausch, M.K., & Skiba, R.J. (2014). Discipline and Achievement 1 The Academic Cost of Discipline : The Relationship Between Suspension / Expulsion and School Achievement.;

# Over the past decade, CA has enacted major discipline reforms – notably a phased ban on “willful defiance.”



# Yet, even with historic reforms, schools are struggling to change the pattern.

## Traditional Schools Statewide — Suspension Reason Trends

Key Finding: As Willful Defiance drops, other categories increase — but total suspensions stay relatively stable

How to Read This Chart: • Colored lines (left axis) show each category as a % of all suspensions that year • Light blue bars (right axis) show the total number of suspensions • Data includes all traditional (non-charter) elementary, middle, and high schools statewide



Source: REACH analysis of 2017-18 through 2023-24 suspension data from the California Department of Education's California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). Analysis includes traditional public schools aggregated at the school level, with suspension rates calculated as total suspensions divided by cumulative enrollment.

**What the data show:**  
Suspensions for “willful defiance” have declined sharply, but other suspension types are rising.

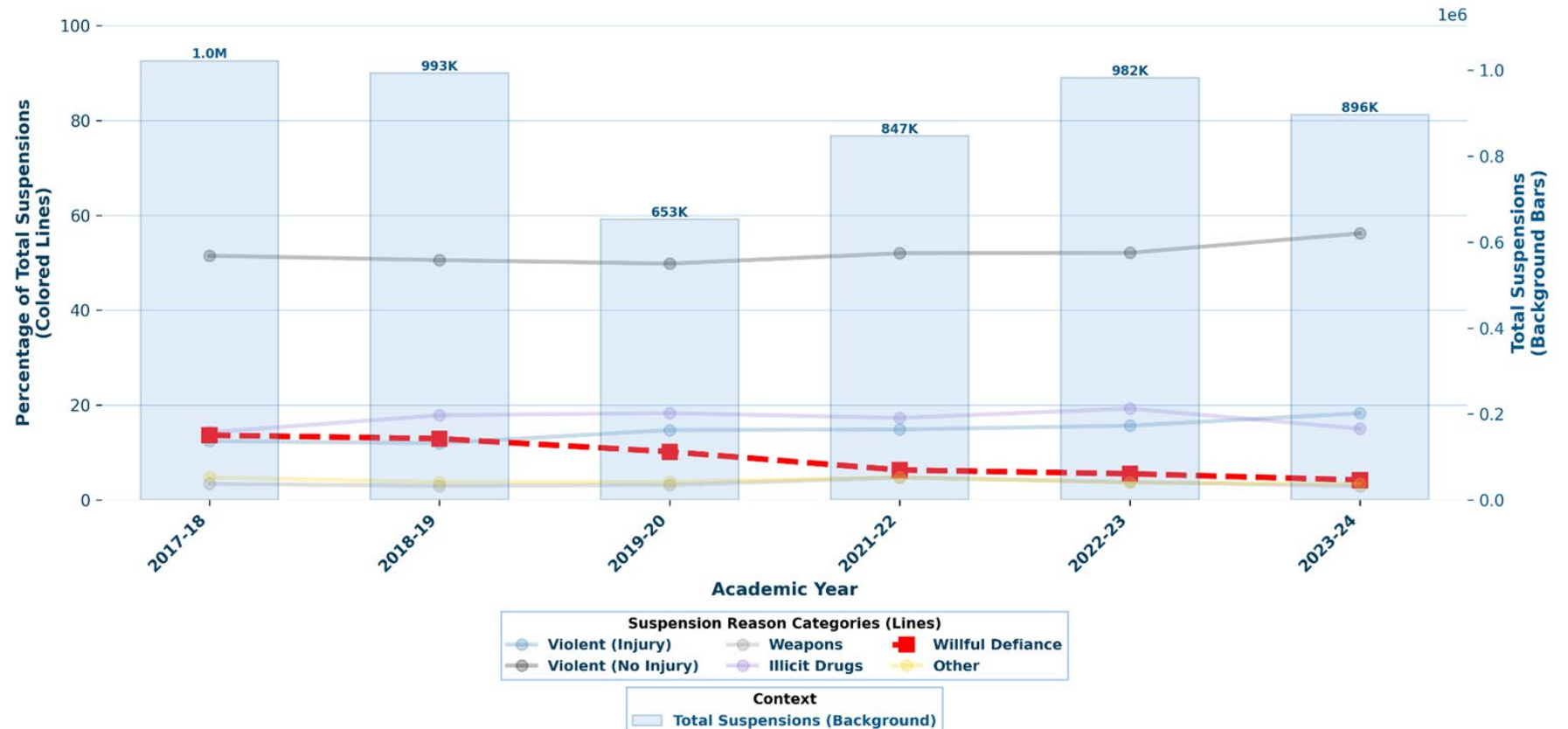
**What this means:**  
Schools may be relabeling behaviors rather than changing responses—policy shifts without practice change.

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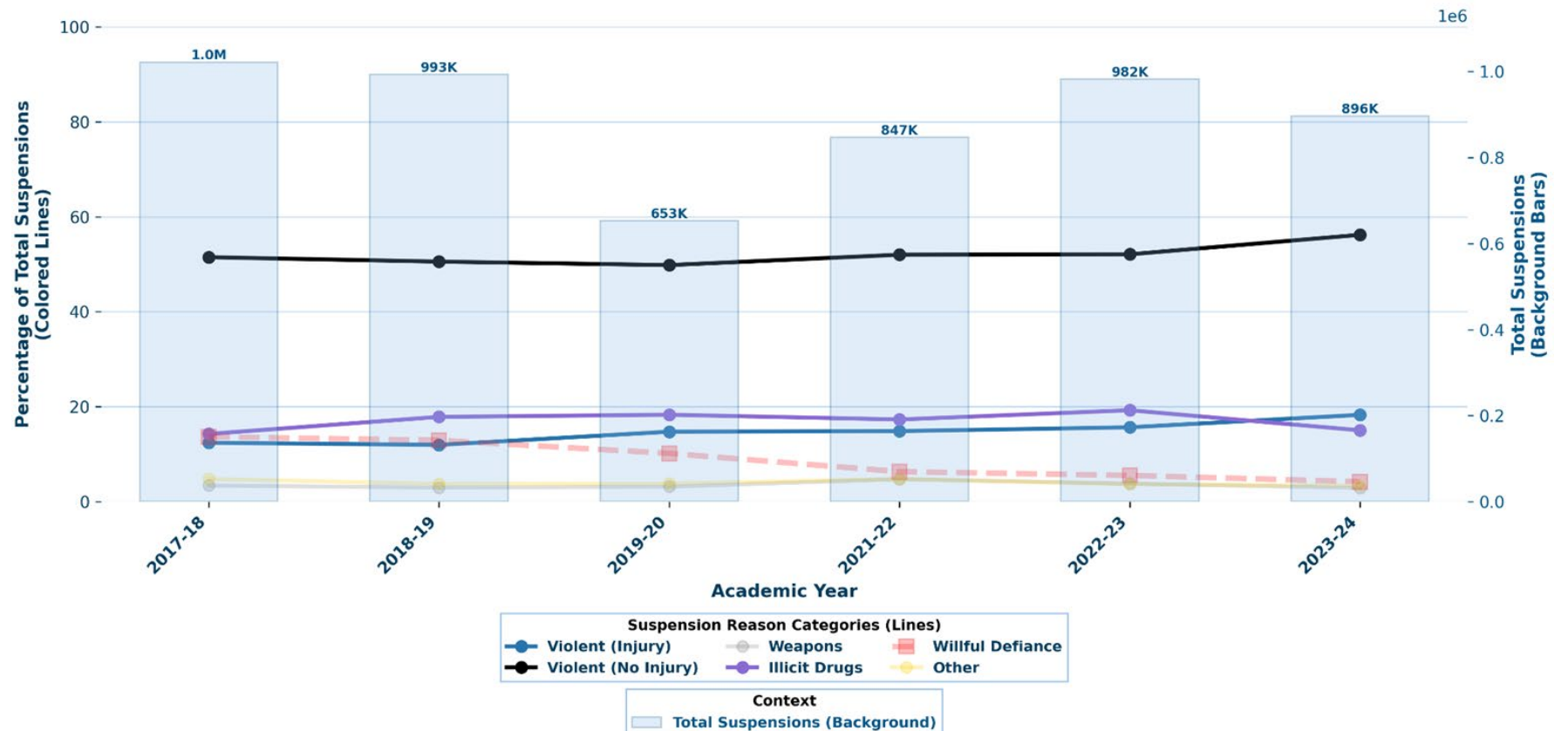
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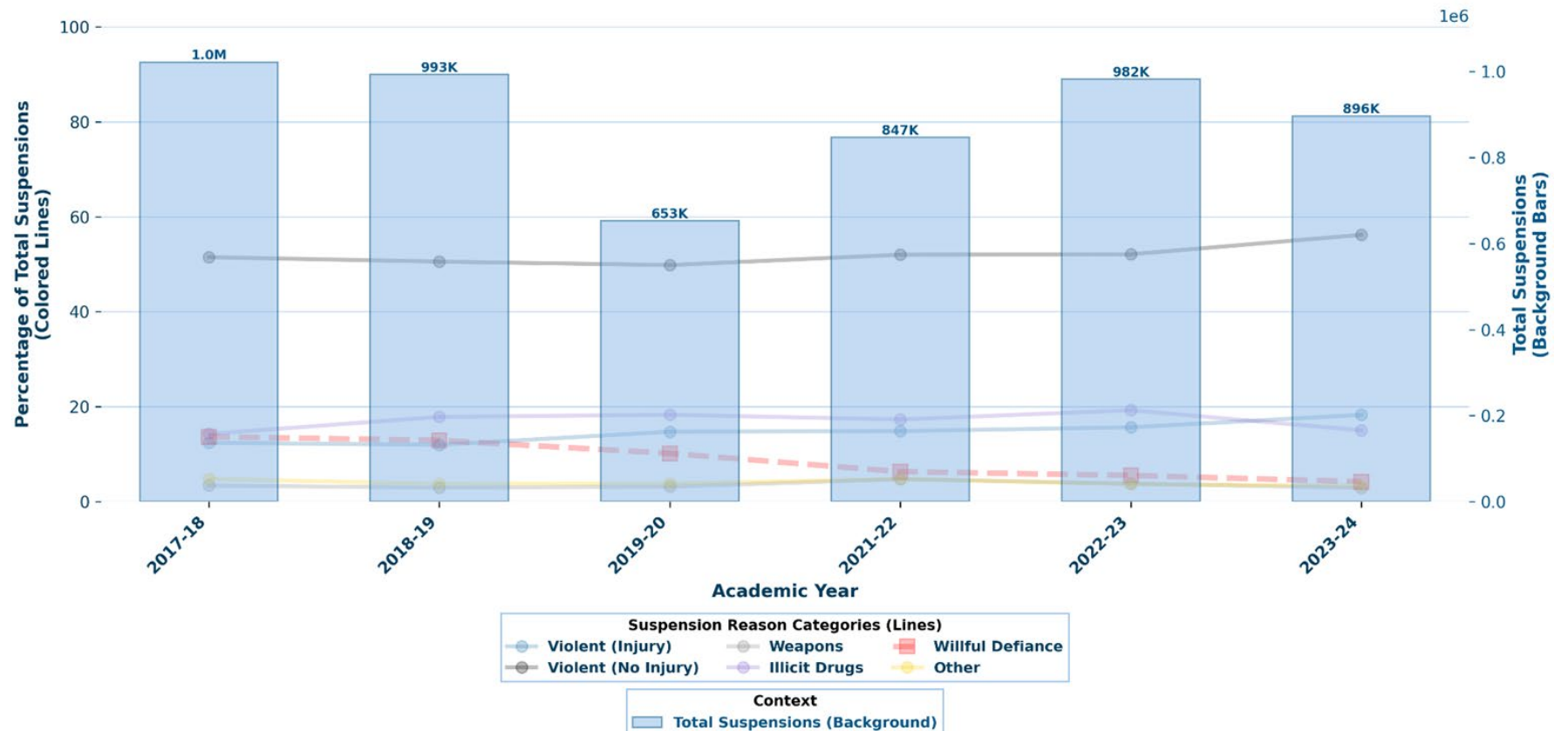
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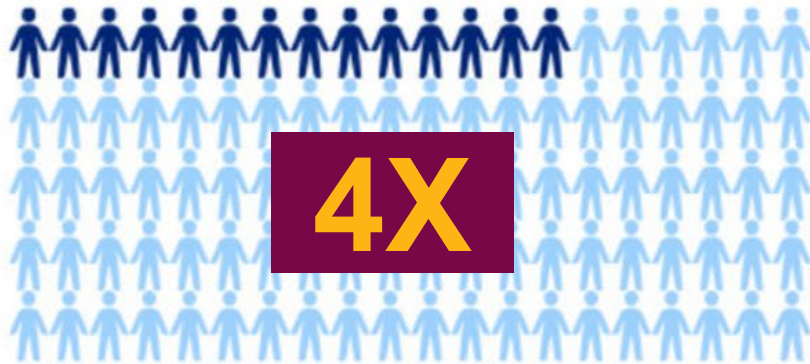


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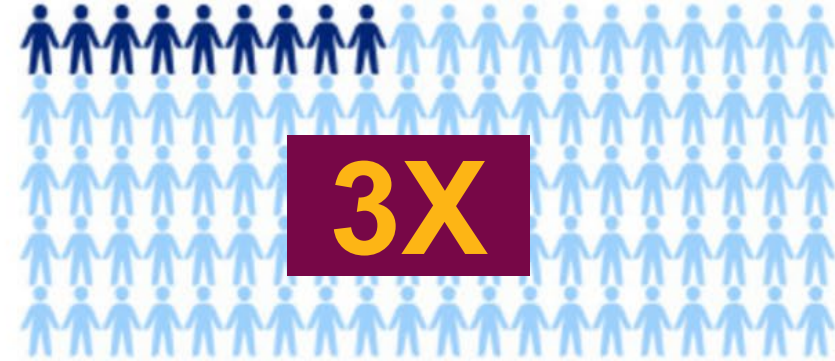
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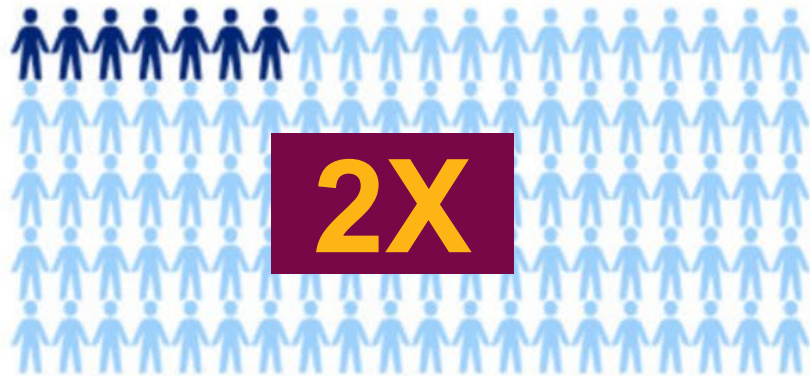
# And the numbers tell a clear story about the disparities...



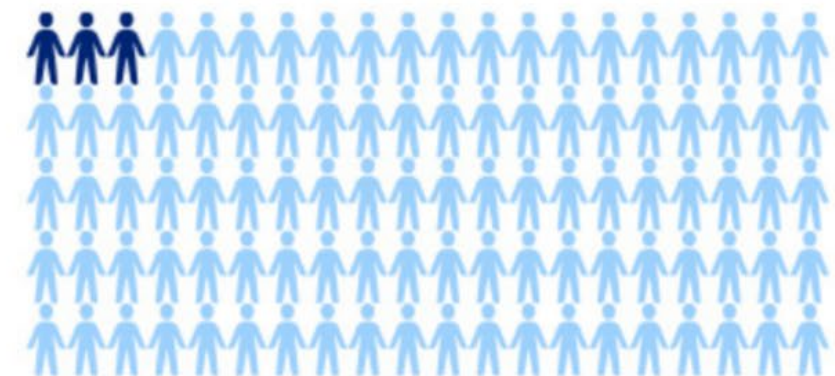
14 (of every 100) students in foster care suspended statewide



9 (of every 100) Black students suspended statewide



7 (of every 100) American Indian/AK Native students suspended statewide



3 (of every 100) overall students suspended statewide

# Where Discipline Meets Behavioral Health

Why behavioral health alignment is essential to transforming student discipline.



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# School Discipline & Health

“This systematic review yielded 19 studies on the punitive school discipline –health association. It suggests that punitive school discipline in early life is largely a harmful exposure adversely impacting health. Specifically, punitive school discipline was associated with an increased risk for:

- death by suicide
- persistent depressive symptoms
- depression
- drug use disorder in adulthood
- borderline personality disorder
- antisocial behavior
- physical injuries
- trichomoniasis
- pregnancy in adolescence
- tobacco use
- and smoking experimentation

*Duarte CD, et al. Ann N Y Acad Sci. 2023 Jan;1519(1):129152. doi: 10.1111/nyas.14922. Epub 2022 Nov 17. PMID: 36385456; PMCID: PMC10929984.*

# School Discipline ↔ Behavioral Health



# School Discipline, Health & *Protective Factors*

“...given inverse associations between protective factors with depression and anxiety symptoms, efforts to bolster protective factors may promote emotional well-being irrespective of individual youth’s personal exposure [to exclusionary discipline]. These actions can range from informal efforts to connect youth to resources to structured programs targeting these buffering protections.

So M, et al. *Pushed Out and Drawn In: Exclusionary Discipline, Mental Health, and Protective Factors among Youth in Public Schools*. J Sch Health. 2024 February; 94(2): 128–137. doi:10.1111/josh.13405.

## Individual-level

- extracurricular youth development opportunities
- positive identity
- social competency

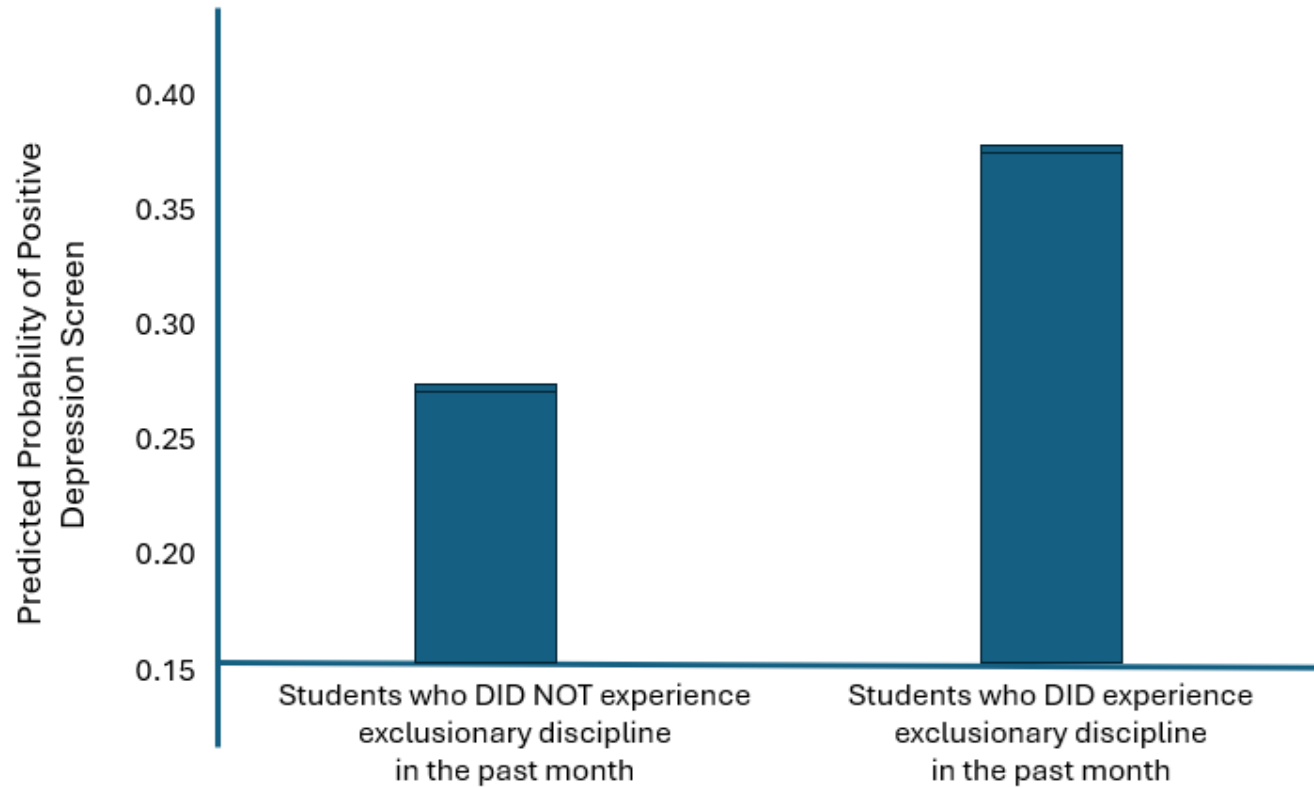
## Interpersonal-level

- parent connectedness
- friends caring
- other adults in the community caring

## School-level factors

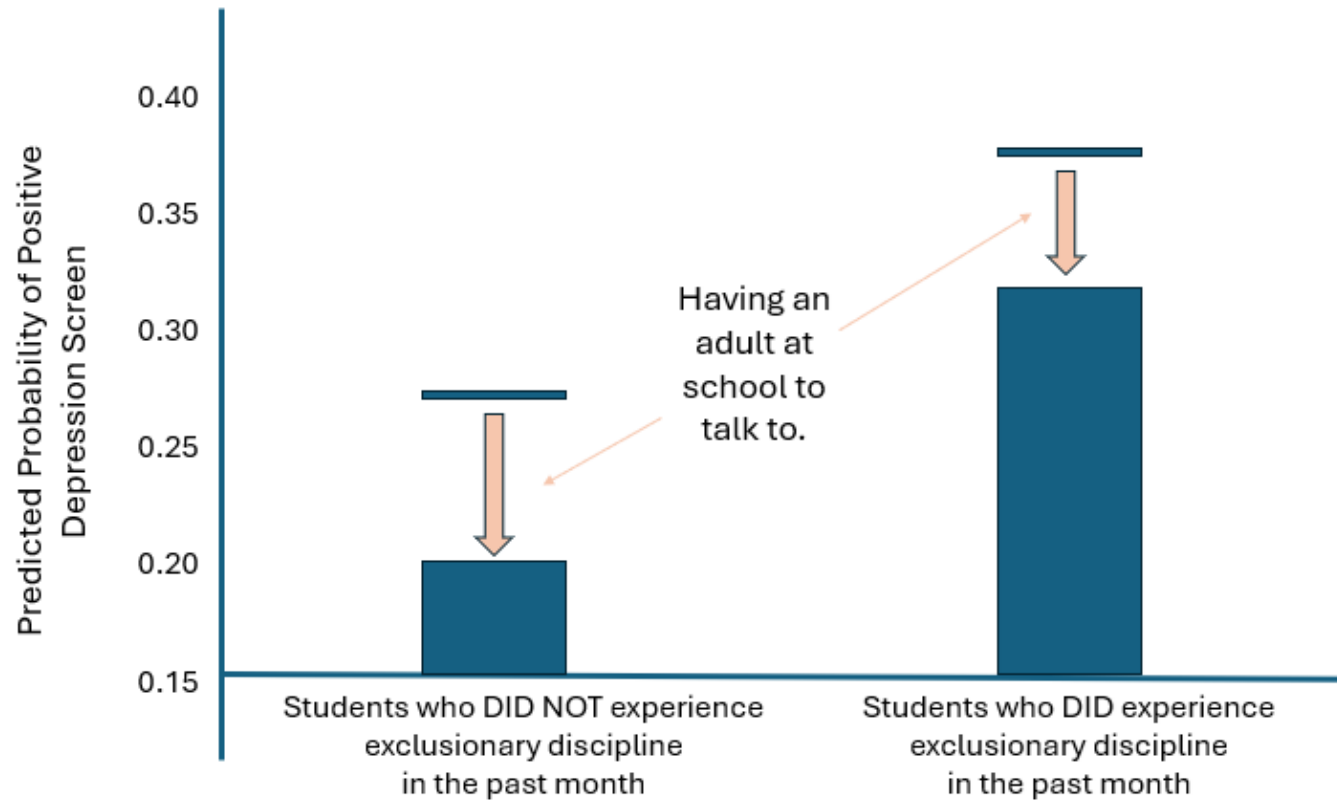
- having an adult at school to talk to
- teacher-student relationship quality
- feeling safe at school

# School Discipline, Health & *Protective Factors*



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## Health Care Settings

- Expanding the behavioral health workforce
- Increasing access to behavioral health services
- Supporting non-specialist care providers

## Educational Settings

- Bringing wellness into the classroom
- Nurturing a supportive campus culture
- Expanding access to school-linked care services

## Digital Environment

- Bringing behavioral health services online
- Preparing for the next-generation of digital supports

## Homes & Communities

- Enhancing community resilience
- Building a community-based workforce

**Elevating the Conversation,  
Holding Youth at the Center and Equity as Foundational.**

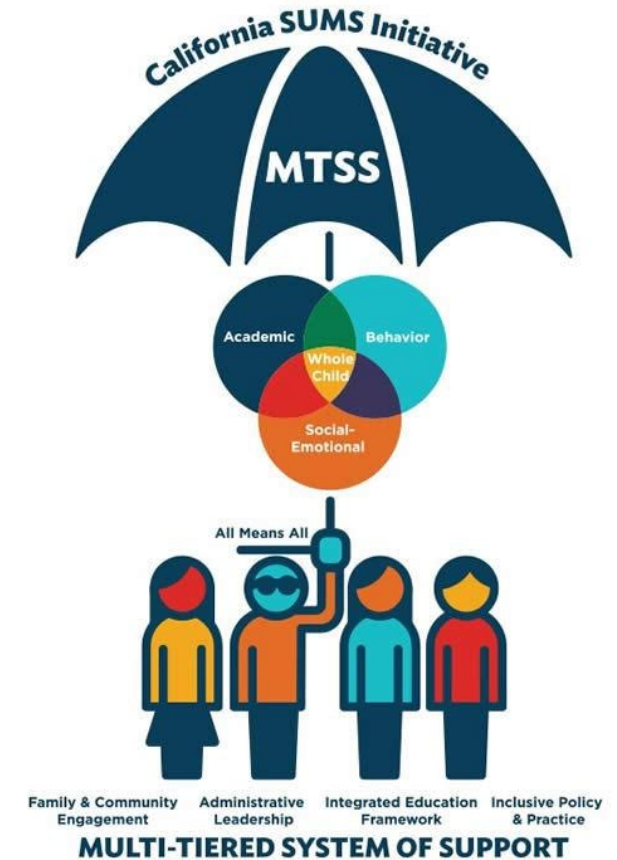
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*Transforming  
the way  
California  
supports  
children, youth  
and families*

# The shift toward restorative discipline is reshaping how schools respond to harm.

Schools leading this shift are embedding restorative strategies through five key approaches that prioritize connection over punishment.

- **Frameworks**
  - Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
  - Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS)
- **Student Centered Approaches**
  - Restorative Justice Practices (RJP / RP)
  - Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)
  - Culturally Responsive & Trauma-Informed Interventions & Personnel Training (ProDevo)



# It takes all of us engaging in deeper work to make a difference...

## Ongoing Learning and Shared Responsibility

Engage in ongoing learning about the impacts of exclusionary discipline, evidence-based restorative and behavioral health-aligned alternatives, and patterns of disproportionality. Reflect on how everyday decisions shape outcomes –and adjust practice accordingly.

## Continuous Improvement Through Transparent Data

Understand where discipline data lives and review suspension, expulsion, and absenteeism rates—disaggregated by race, ethnicity, SES, and disability—to identify disparities. Advocate for transparent reporting and equity-focused data in governance and program decisions.

## School Community and Family Engagement

Engage students, families, staff, educators, and community partners in ongoing dialogue about discipline policy and practice, and strengthen collaboration to ensure responses are restorative, culturally sustaining and aligned with student behavioral health needs.

# Case Study

## Leveraging LCFF Funding to Implement Comprehensive School Counseling: A Case Study of Livingston Union School District



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# Livingston USD Case Study



**Adriana Jaramillo Castillo**

*Research Analyst*

UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools

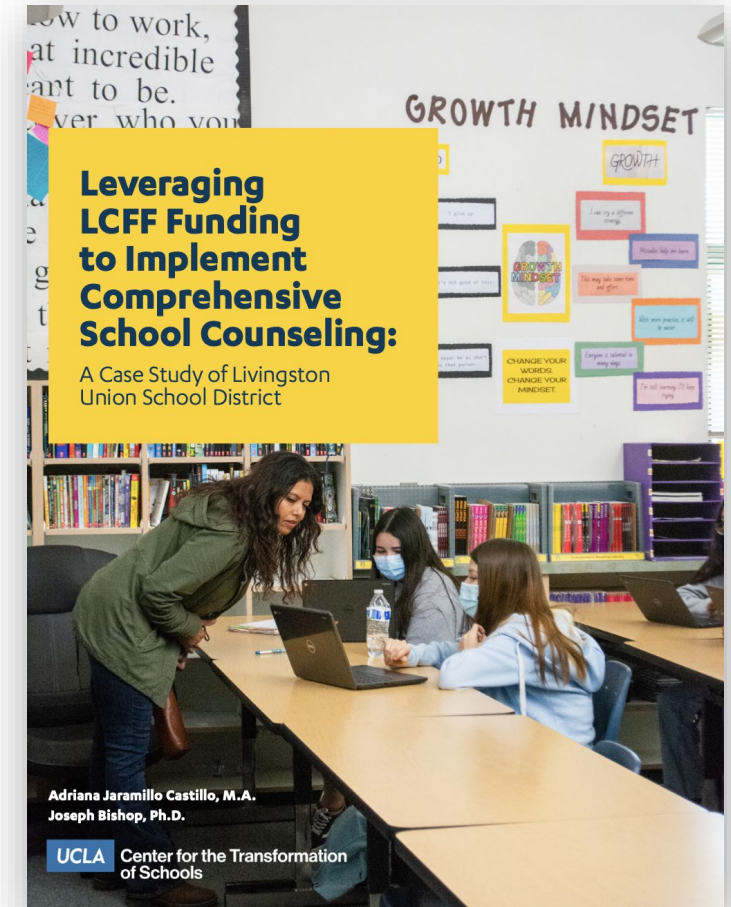
# LUSD & Why The ASCA Counseling Model Became a Central Resource

**Context:** Rural Central Valley district serving a predominantly Latine, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and English Learner student population.

**Challenge:** Post-pandemic increases in chronic absenteeism and student mental health needs signaled systemic barriers to engagement and belonging.

**Call to Action:** Leverage LCFF funds to implement the ASCA National Model with three key objectives:

1. *Reducing counselor-to-student ratios*
2. *Protect counselors' time for student services (<80%)*
3. *Use data-driven goal alignment to improve measurable student outcomes.*



Full brief available here: <https://transformschoools.ucla.edu/research/leveraging-lcff-funding-to-implement-comprehensive-school-counseling-a-case-study-of-livingston-union-school-district/>

# Chronic Absenteeism, School Climate & Self -Belonging: Impact on Student Mental Health in Schools

## The School-Mental Health Connection: Implications for Stakeholders

### Counseling as an Effective Strategy to Address Chronic Absenteeism

- **Increased from 4.9% (2019) to 18.3% (2023)**, disproportionately affecting ELL, Latine, low-income students, and students with disabilities.
- Through check-ins, group meetings, family collaboration, and targeted referrals, **chronic absenteeism declined to 14.2% by Spring 2024.**

### Counseling Impact on School Climate & Student Belonging

- **89% report a sense of belonging** despite national declines; however, 21–22% report persistent sadness, with **notable gender and racial/ethnic disparities.**
- **MTSS-Embedded Counseling response** strengthened Tier 1 supports + counselors delivered targeted Tier 2/3 interventions—**stabilizing school climate and rebuilding student connection.**

### Call to Action and Several Critical Points

- **Proactive Mental Health:** School counseling improves attendance & belonging.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Integrate counseling goals into LCAP & MTSS.
- **Data-Driven Refinement:** Monitor ratios, time, attendance, discipline, & climate data.

# Panel on Restorative Approaches to Supporting Students Without Exclusion



**Dr. Michael Corral**  
*REACH Network Project*  
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UCLA Center for the  
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**Dr. Kathy Do**  
*Asst. Project Scientist*  
CA Institute for Law,  
Neuroscience & Education  
+ UC|CSU Collaborative for  
Neuroscience, Diversity &  
Learning, UCLA



**Dr. Michael Massa**  
*Chief of Health Policy*  
*Division*  
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