

MOVEMENT BUILDING BLUEPRINT: *Statewide School Discipline Action Team*

From Moment to Movement: How Can We Build and Strengthen the Statewide Movement?

Over the past three years, there has been growing momentum for school discipline reform and to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline at both state and local levels.

The State has enacted several laws to promote alternatives to suspension and expulsion, reduce involuntary transfers, and limit school removals based on willful defiance—the most common and subjective grounds for harsh discipline. The State’s new Local Control Funding Formula expressly identifies reducing suspension and expulsions rates as one of the priority goals for the K-12 system, and the statewide Commission on Teacher Credentialing has adopted new standards for administrators and teachers that incorporate training in evidence-based alternatives. The California Department of Education now reports suspension and expulsion data disaggregated by subgroup to better address racial and other disparities. At the local level, Los Angeles, Oakland, Pasadena, and San Francisco school districts all have eliminated the use of willful defiance as grounds for suspension. Grassroots organizing and advocacy groups in each of these school districts have also been able to secure protections against the criminalization of school discipline by passing local policies that limit the role of police and enforcement of citations and arrests on campus.

As a result, suspension rates have declined 23 percent statewide since 2011-12. And in place of the criminalizing responses that were commonplace in schools 3-5 years ago, more students today benefit from healing centered restorative justice, positive behavior supports, and social-emotional learning.

Still, much more can be done to keep all students in school and learning. We first need to strengthen and expand the movement to dismantle the school-to-prison-pipeline in California. Social movements like this gain power when they are connected to, and driven by, their base. The imperative is clear: If we want our work to remain grounded in the experiences of the most impacted, then we must connect our efforts to those of the people, communities, organizations, and institutions most impacted. It is grassroots relationships that will fuel the movement.

We outline below our proposed process for strengthening our ties to grassroots groups throughout California—particularly in isolated and under-resourced regions, and to intentionally and collaboratively work to strengthen their local movement building capacity. This process will enable all of us to bring the movement to the next level, which includes addressing broad systemic and transformative changes that embody the long-term vision for our work: a) Eliminating racial and other structural disparities; b) Redefining public safety; c) Ending mass incarceration and criminalization; and d) Breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

1. Building a Movement that Reflects California

We’ve chosen to focus on the following three regions of California:

1) the Central Coast, 2) the Central Valley, and 3) the Inland Valley.

We chose these because they represent a diverse set of counties of varying size, demographics, and levels of mobilization. All three are under-resourced.

2. Develop Strong Regional Anchors: *Intentionally Connect and Build the Capacity of Base Building Groups in Under-Resourced Regions*

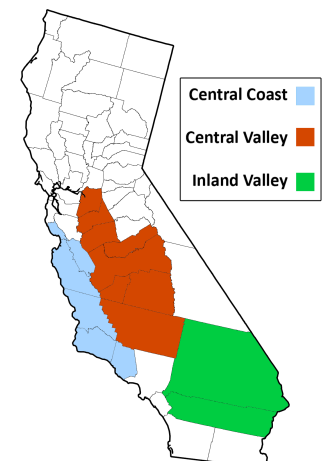
Within these regions we are committed to providing two broad categories of assistance:

Connecting: Within the three regions, we will focus on providing the appropriate level of support that connects each community together—locally and regionally, and to other regions in the state.

Capacity Building: The Statewide Action Team will work with local communities to collaboratively identify and strengthen key capacities to ensure their authentic participation in statewide movement building.

The Action Team has developed a **definition of effective “capacity building”:**

- ✓ Truly effective capacity building means that after the capacity builders leave, communities can do the work themselves without help.
- ✓ Capacity building develops resources – leadership, financial, network, technical assistance, and knowledge.



- ✓ Capacity building is not simply building an organization, although that is one of the most crucial elements, but builds up the impacted community and individuals living within that community and uses the group’s existing knowledge and experience to lead the way through sharing of best practices.
- ✓ Capacity building promotes the relationship form of leadership, is group centered and promotes networking, community identified leadership, collaboration, and participatory strategic planning.

The role of the Action Team will remain fluid and flexible so as to be as responsive, equitable, and respectful of the unique context of each place and the organic healing and movement building process required to truly work in collaboration internally and with our local and regional partners.

3. Criteria for Defining Movement Success

If we help build the right connections and capacity, it will lead to new policies, resources, and conditions in schools and communities across the state. Indicators of this success include:

First and foremost, we expect to see the development of new, homegrown leaders from the communities most impacted who take ownership of the struggle locally and exercise influence statewide.

Second, we expect to see concrete evidence that we are dismantling the existing, oppressive system that funnels children from school to prison.

Third, we expect that everyone involved in this work – from local grassroots organizers to statewide advocates and lawyers to all the families and students in California’s public school system – begin to see themselves as part of a larger movement connected by a shared vision and communication platform.

And finally, we hope that as a coalition we view success as strengthening the capacity and power of our communities, and ourselves, to do this work and move it to the next level.

Who is the Action Team?

The Statewide School Discipline Action Team (“Action Team”) is comprised of organizations (and in some cases individuals) playing key roles in bringing about systemic changes in school discipline policy and practice, through a constellation of strategies – grassroots parent and youth-led organizing, policy advocacy, youth development, research, communications, and alternative practice-building. The purpose of the Action Team is to facilitate the convening, coordination, and collaboration among thought leaders across California working locally, regionally, and on a statewide level to leverage school discipline reform into a movement for long-term systemic change. The Action Team has been meeting monthly by phone and face-to-face periodically since March 2012.

Why School Discipline?

School discipline is a particularly powerful vehicle for social change because it sits at the intersection of a number of the most pressing social problems of the past forty years. The rise of exclusionary school discipline is inextricably intertwined with both longer term trends like centuries of structural racism and explicit and implicit racial bias as well as more recent trends like the rise of increasing economic inequality, the decimation of the social safety net, mass incarceration, and increasing intergenerational poverty and educational inequity.

Action Team Members Represent 19 Organizations

ACLU :: Azusa High School :: Black Organizing Project :: Black Parallel School Board :: CADRE :: Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement :: Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice :: Dolores Huerta Foundation :: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *California* :: Gay-Straight Alliance Network :: Inland Congregations United for Change :: Motivating Individual Leadership for Public Advancement :: Movement Strategy Center :: Policy Link :: Public Counsel :: The California Endowment :: The Civil Rights Project at UCLA :: The Labor Community Strategy Center :: Youth Action Project