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other Law Enforcement Leaders, and Violence Survivors  
Preventing Crime and Violence

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## **California Law Enforcement Leaders Support Effective School Discipline Approaches to Cut Suspensions and Reduce Future Crime**

*"Classmates not Cellmates" shows front-end effort to improve classroom environment as more effective than suspensions, expulsions*

SAN FRANCISCO (September 11, 2012) — Members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* released a research report today highlighting excessive suspension and expulsion rates in California. The report, "***Classmates not Cellmates: Effective School Discipline Cuts Crime and Improves Student Success***," shows that California public schools issued approximately 700,000 suspensions during the 2010-2011 school year. Eleven suspensions were issued for every 100 students in California, the majority of which were for relatively minor, non-violent, non-drug related incidents.

"Effective school discipline policies will help ensure that teachers and administrators have the tools they need to provide all students a safe, constructive learning environment," said Sheriff Margaret Mims, Fresno County Sheriff's Office.

Maintaining safe and secure schools is top priority for FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* members and all law enforcement agencies. According to the report, teachers and school administrators need the ability to suspend and expel students who commit violent acts, bring weapons to school, sell or use drugs on campus or otherwise pose a serious safety concern. Yet schools are suspending or expelling a significant number of students for less threatening behavior such as talking back, disrupting class or otherwise defying authority.

Suspension rates vary considerably between districts. For example, Los Angeles Unified School District had 5 suspensions for every 100 students, compared to 10 suspensions per 100 students in San Diego Unified. Sacramento Unified School District's suspension rate (16 suspensions per 100 students) was three times higher than the rate in Los Angeles. Other school districts have even higher suspension rates.

Law enforcement leaders said that students must remain in school and off of the street to stay engaged in the classroom and steer clear of crime and delinquency. In many cases, punishing students with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions only exacerbates behavior issues as kids are granted an unsupervised vacation from school. One recent study in Texas found that suspended or expelled students were three times more likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system within one year compared to similar students with no suspensions and expulsions. Middle and high school students who had been suspended or expelled were also twice as likely to be held back in school and were at greater risk of dropout than their peers. FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* also cited an established correlation between dropping out of school and crime: high school dropouts are eight times more likely than graduates to be incarcerated in their lifetimes and nearly 70 percent of the nation's state prison population did not have a high school diploma when they entered prison.

Members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* are calling on policymakers to support evidence-based disciplinary approaches that address student behavior issues effectively. These approaches can ultimately improve students' behavior and academic outcomes, while maximizing time for classroom instruction and minimizing the use of unnecessary suspensions and expulsions. These approaches include:

- The Good Behavior Game;
- Incredible Years' Dinosaur School;
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS);
- Restorative justice; and
- Social-emotional skills curricula.

Alternative discipline strategies can also save school districts and localities money. Researchers found a return of \$31 for every dollar spent on the Good Behavior Game. Given the link between suspension and grade repetition, limiting the overuse of suspensions with proactive, preventative techniques could help districts avoid paying for extra years of schooling. Similarly, some schools, such as Pioneer High School in Woodland, Calif., have seen increased revenue through reduced suspensions and increased Average Daily Attendance after implementing PBIS.

Local data on suspension and expulsion rates in each of California's 58 counties is available. To obtain a copy of the full report, or to reach a local law enforcement official for comment, please contact Meghan Moroney, ph: 415-450-1913, email: [mmoroney@calfightcrime.org](mailto:mmoroney@calfightcrime.org).

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*FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, is a national crime prevention organization of more than 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, state attorneys general and violence survivors, including more than 425 members in California.*