

Suspensions

DEFINITION

Suspensions is the number of disciplinary actions per 100 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in Rhode Island public schools. Students can receive more than one disciplinary action during the school year. Disciplinary actions include in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions.

SIGNIFICANCE

Effective school disciplinary practices promote a safe and respectful school climate, support learning, and address the causes of student misbehavior. Punitive disciplinary practices, including “zero tolerance” policies, are largely ineffective and even counterproductive.^{1,2} Despite this evidence, suspension is a widely used disciplinary technique, both nationally and in Rhode Island. Suspensions are used for minor offenses, such as use of electronics, and for more serious offenses, such as weapon possession.^{3,4}

Suspension usually does not deter students from misbehaving and may actually reinforce negative behavior patterns. Suspended students are more likely than their peers to experience academic failure, juvenile justice system involvement, disengagement from school, isolation from teachers and peers, and dropping out of school. Being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out.^{5,6} Suspended students are

also at greater risk of criminal victimization, criminal activity, and incarceration as adults.⁷

Schools and districts can improve school climate and discipline by developing and enforcing disciplinary policies that set high expectations for student behavior, providing clear, appropriate, and consistent consequences for misbehavior, encouraging the use of alternative disciplinary approaches, such as restorative justice, and ensuring the equitable, appropriate, and limited use of suspensions.⁸

In Rhode Island and nationally, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are more likely to be suspended than their White peers despite the fact that there is no evidence that these students have more serious patterns of rule breaking. In Rhode Island and nationally, students with disabilities also are more likely to be suspended than their peers.^{9,10,11}

Of all disciplinary actions during the 2018-2019 school year, 15% (1,515) involved elementary school students (kindergarten-5th grade), 42% (4,193) involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 43% (4,273) involved high school students (9th-12th grades). For elementary school students, 74% of disciplinary actions were out-of-school suspensions. Kindergarteners received 133 disciplinary actions, including 110 out-of-school suspensions.¹²



Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2018-2019

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Insubordination/Disrespect	1,820	18%	Obscene/Abusive Language	539	5%
Fighting	2,072	21%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	231	2%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	1,054	11%	Weapon Possession	178	2%
Disorderly Conduct	1,415	14%	Electronic Devices/Technology	103	1%
Assault of Student or Teacher	1,422	14%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	993	10%	Other Offenses	154	2%
Total			9,981		

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018-2019 school year.

*Harassment offenses include hazing and hate crimes. Assault offenses include sexual assault.

◆ In 2016, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that restricts the use of out-of-school suspensions to situations when a child’s behavior poses a demonstrable threat that cannot be dealt with by other means.¹³ From the 2017-2018 school year to the 2018-2019 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions decreased by 16%. More than half of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses, such as insubordination/disrespect, disorderly conduct, obscene/abusive language, alcohol/drug/tobacco offenses, and electronic devices/technology offenses.^{14,15}



Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2018-2019

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students With Disabilities	15%	31%
White Students	57%	44%
Hispanic Students	26%	34%
Black Students	9%	12%
Asian Students	3%	2%
Native American Students	1%	2%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018-2019 school year. % suspensions includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Detailed data by district is available at www.ride.ri.gov

◆ During the 2018-2019 school year, Rhode Island students with disabilities were suspended disproportionately. Students with disabilities represent 15% of the student population but represented 31% of suspensions.¹⁶ In 2016, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that requires school districts to identify any racial, ethnic, or special education disparities and to develop a plan to reduce such disparities.¹⁷

Table 53.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2018-2019

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED IN-SCHOOL	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED OUT-OF-SCHOOL	OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS PER 100 STUDENTS	TOTAL DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS	ACTIONS PER 100 STUDENTS
Barrington	3,339	*	54	2	61	2
Bristol Warren	3,207	410	379	12	789	25
Burrillville	2,270	34	189	8	223	10
Central Falls	2,737	0	162	6	162	6
Chariho	3,174	271	158	5	429	14
Coventry	4,634	693	146	3	839	18
Cranston	10,399	2,851	750	7	3,601	35
Cumberland	4,635	343	73	2	416	9
East Greenwich	2,522	11	31	1	42	2
East Providence	5,262	214	545	10	759	14
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,605	*	29	2	38	2
Foster	256	*	0	0	9	4
Foster-Glocester	1,290	69	58	4	127	10
Glocester	529	*	0	0	1	0
Jamestown	499	0	0	0	0	0
Johnston	3,210	188	103	3	291	9
Lincoln	3,100	0	91	3	91	3
Little Compton	234	*	*	0	2	1
Middletown	2,152	151	54	3	205	10
Narragansett	1,273	27	43	3	70	5
New Shoreham	133	*	*	1	9	7
Newport	2,144	0	321	15	321	15
North Kingstown	3,939	200	158	4	358	9
North Providence	3,524	1,018	180	5	1,198	34
North Smithfield	1,648	36	102	6	138	8
Pawtucket	8,783	87	858	10	945	11
Portsmouth	2,410	304	63	3	367	15
Providence	23,981	691	2,364	10	3,055	13
Scituate	1,221	63	25	2	88	7
Smithfield	2,405	100	42	2	142	6
South Kingstown	2,931	281	135	5	416	14
Tiverton	1,755	34	82	5	116	7
Warwick	8,712	320	776	9	1,096	13
West Warwick	3,568	383	350	10	733	21
Westerly	2,683	161	219	8	380	14
Woonsocket	6,027	2,336	955	16	3,291	55
Charter Schools	8,428	269	387	5	656	8
State-Operated Schools	1,780	*	57	3	58	3
UCAP	137	0	40	29	40	29
Four Core Cities	41,527	3,114	4,339	10	7,453	18
Remainder of State	90,665	8,197	5,158	6	13,355	15
Rhode Island	142,537	11,581	9,981	7	21,562	15

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018-2019 school year.

The out-of-school suspension rate per 100 students is the total number of out-of-school suspensions for the school district at all grade levels (Pre-K through 12th grade), multiplied by 100, and divided by the student enrollment ("average daily membership").

The disciplinary actions rate per 100 students is the total disciplinary actions for the school district at all grade levels (Pre-K through 12th grade), multiplied by 100, and divided by the student enrollment ("average daily membership").

Schools and districts only report suspensions of one day or longer. If an incident involves more than one infraction, schools and districts are asked to code the incident as the most serious type of infraction (e.g., violent offenses involving weapons and offenses involving drugs and alcohol are considered more serious than other offenses). The type of infraction resulting in disciplinary action varies according to school district policy. The type of disciplinary action used for each type of infraction also varies according to school district policy.

*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These numbers are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state total.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Charter schools include: Achievement First Rhode Island, Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, Blackstone Academy, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, Charette Charter School, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, Hope Academy, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, SouthSide Charter School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and The Village Green Virtual Public Charter School. State-operated schools include: William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School, DCYF Schools, Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, and Rhode Island School for the Deaf. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

(References are on page 188)