

# 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, out-of-school suspensions, and alternate program placements.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Effective school disciplinary practices promote a safe and respectful school climate for students and teachers, support learning, and address the causes of student misbehavior. Studies have shown that punitive disciplinary practices, including “zero tolerance” policies, are largely ineffective and even counterproductive.<sup>1</sup> Out-of-school suspension is the most widely used disciplinary technique, both nationally and in Rhode Island. Suspensions are used for minor offenses such as attendance infractions, and for more serious offenses such as weapon possession.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

Students who are suspended are more likely to have a history of poor behavior, academic achievement below grade level, grade repetition, mobility between schools, and attendance at schools with high rates of suspension than their peers.<sup>5</sup>

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 other students, and to drop out of school.<sup>6,7</sup>

During the 2008-2009 school year in Rhode Island, 42,714 disciplinary actions were attributed to 15,829 students.<sup>8</sup> The total number of disciplinary actions is almost three times the number of students disciplined because some students were disciplined multiple times.

Low-income and minority students are overrepresented in school suspensions and receive disproportionately severe disciplinary actions compared with their higher-income and White peers. In Rhode Island during the 2008-2009 school year, minority students received 46% (19,606) of all disciplinary actions but made up only 31% of the student population. One-third (32%) of Rhode Island students were enrolled in core city districts, but they received 49% of the disciplinary actions.<sup>9</sup>

Students with disabilities also are more likely than other students to be suspended. While 17% of Rhode Island students were in special education in 2008-2009, they accounted for 31% (13,272) of the disciplinary actions and 28% (4,450) of all students disciplined.<sup>10</sup>

## Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island Public Schools, 2008-2009

By Type of Infraction	#	%	By Type of Infraction	#	%
Attendance Offenses	14,405	34%	Assault of Student or Teacher	1,749	4%
Insubordination/Disrespect	6,881	16%	Communications/Electronic Devices	1,115	3%
Disorderly Conduct	6,786	16%	Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	858	2%
Fighting	2,630	6%	Arson/Larceny/Vandalism	723	2%
Obscene/Abusive Language	2,494	6%	Weapon Possession	326	1%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	1,915	4%	Other Offenses*	2,832	7%
			<i>Total</i>	<i>42,714</i>	

\*Examples of other offenses include forgery, trespassing, etc.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008-2009 school year. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- ◆ In Rhode Island during the 2008-2009 school year, 11% of the student population was suspended at least once. Approximately one-third (34%) of suspensions were for attendance-related offenses.<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ Of all disciplinary actions during the 2008-2009 school year, 6% involved elementary school students (preschool through 5th grade), 33% involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 60% involved high school students (9th-12th grades).<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ Out-of-school suspensions accounted for 59% of disciplinary actions in Rhode Island during the 2008-2009 school year, followed by in-school suspensions at 34% and alternate program placements at 7%.<sup>13</sup>

## Mental Health and School Discipline

- ◆ Students with mental health issues are more likely to be suspended than their peers. Elementary school students with mental health problems are suspended and expelled more than three times as often as their peers.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Approximately three-quarters of students in need of mental health services do not receive them. Students who are suspended or expelled are not routinely referred to mental health services.<sup>15,16,17</sup>

Table 49.

## Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2008-2009

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	TYPE OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION			TOTAL DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS	ACTIONS PER 100 STUDENTS
		SUSPENDED OUT-OF-SCHOOL	SUSPENDED IN-SCHOOL	ALTERNATE PROGRAM PLACEMENTS*		
Barrington	3,346	82	18	0	100	3
Bristol Warren	3,441	880	1,243	8	2,131	62
Burrillville	2,518	165	702	0	867	34
Central Falls	3,100	83	7	0	90	3
Chariho	3,517	319	0	10	329	9
Coventry	5,239	709	527	314	1,550	30
Cranston	10,336	2,154	0	13	2,167	21
Cumberland	4,830	340	21	0	361	7
East Greenwich	2,315	55	25	0	80	3
East Providence	5,666	791	0	0	791	14
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,866	252	0	0	252	14
Foster	238	0	0	0	0	0
Foster-Glocester	1,431	242	616	1	859	60
Glocester	584	0	0	0	0	0
Jamestown	464	5	7	0	12	3
Johnston	3,068	489	2	0	491	16
Lincoln	3,181	263	73	5	341	11
Little Compton	2,652	1	0	0	1	<1
Middletown	2,355	297	36	0	333	14
Narragansett	1,441	38	0	137	175	12
New Shoreham	132	19	2	0	21	16
Newport	2,066	509	214	0	723	35
North Kingstown	4,330	350	123	1	474	11
North Providence	3,113	1,038	629	0	1,667	54
North Smithfield	1,851	94	74	0	168	9
Pawtucket	8,539	2,387	791	0	3,178	37
Portsmouth	2,787	120	59	0	179	6
Providence	23,140	7,930	3,462	0	11,392	49
Scituate	1,648	69	0	341	410	25
Smithfield	2,471	220	253	0	473	19
South Kingstown	3,591	279	608	0	887	25
Tiverton	1,881	279	713	325	1,317	70
Warwick	10,374	1,853	1,274	0	3,127	30
West Warwick	3,475	466	703	10	1,179	34
Westerly	3,183	212	747	0	959	30
Woonsocket	5,958	1,437	1,393	1,971	4,801	81
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>2,021</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>159</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,641</i>	<i>620</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>623</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>UCAP</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Core Cities</i>	<i>46,279</i>	<i>12,812</i>	<i>6,570</i>	<i>1,981</i>	<i>21,363</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>93,851</i>	<i>11,615</i>	<i>7,752</i>	<i>1,155</i>	<i>20,522</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>143,932</i>	<i>25,160</i>	<i>14,394</i>	<i>3,160</i>	<i>42,714</i>	<i>30</i>

### Notes to Table

\*Alternate Program Placements (APPs) used for disciplinary reasons can consist of short-term or long-term academic placements in the student's home school or in an alternate setting. APPs provide students with explicit academic supports, unlike traditional in-school suspensions. The definition and use of APPs differs by district. Due to changes in how some districts categorize APPs, some of the data included in the in-school suspension and alternate program placement columns of this table may not be comparable to Factbooks prior to 2008.

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008-2009 school year.

The disciplinary actions rate per 100 students is the total number of 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").

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

Charter schools include: Beacon Charter School, Blackstone Academy Charter School, Compass School, Highlander Charter School, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community Charter School and Paul Cuffee Charter School. State-operated schools include: DCYF Schools, the Metropolitan Career & Technical Center, Rhode Island School for the Deaf, and Wm. M. Davies Jr. Career-Technical High School. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

The following independent charter and state-operated schools did not report any disciplinary actions in 2008-2009: Highlander Charter School, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community Charter School, and Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

### References for Suspensions

<sup>1</sup> *Fair and effective discipline for all students: Best practice strategies for educators* (Fact sheet). (2002). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

<sup>26</sup> Skiba, R. J. (2000). *Zero tolerance, zero evidence: An analysis of school disciplinary practice*. (Policy Research Report #SRS2). Bloomington, IN: Indiana Education Policy Center.

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