

Suspensions

DEFINITION

Suspensions is the rate of infractions and disciplinary actions per 100 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in Rhode Island public schools. Disciplinary actions include in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and alternative program placements. Data are for the 2002-2003 school year.

SIGNIFICANCE

Effective school disciplinary practices ensure the safety and dignity of students and educators, preserve the integrity of the learning environment, and address the causes of a student's misbehavior in order to encourage positive behavior and improve long-term outcomes.¹ Out-of-school suspension is the most widely used disciplinary technique, both nationally and in Rhode Island. Suspension may be used for relatively minor offenses, such as attendance infractions and disrespect, as well as for the most serious and dangerous offenses, such as drug-related offenses, weapon possession, and assault.^{2,3}

Research has called into question the effectiveness and long-term outcomes of excluding students from school. Suspension often does not deter students from repeating negative behaviors. Studies show that up to 40% of school suspensions are due to repeat

offenders and that, for at-risk students, suspension is a predictor of further suspension.⁴ Suspended students are also more likely to have poor academic performance and to drop out of school.^{5,6} The psychological and behavioral consequences of exclusion from school include the student's further disempowerment and alienation from peers and teachers, anti-social behavior and feelings of resentment in the student, and accelerated delinquency associated with the student's greater likelihood of socializing with deviant peers.^{7,8}

Low-income and minority students are at increased risk for school suspension and for disproportionately severe disciplinary action in response to relatively minor offenses.^{9,10} In 2002, the Rhode Island Task Force on Racial Bias and School Discipline concluded that as many as one-third of Rhode Island school districts show an over-representation of minorities in suspension data.¹¹

During the 2002-2003 school year in Rhode Island, 44,474 suspensions were attributed to 17,398 students at a rate of 2.6 suspensions per student.¹² Of these suspensions, 14,444 (33%) were due to attendance infractions. Drug offenses and weapon possession accounted for 817 (2%) disciplinary actions.¹³



Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island Public Schools, 2002-2003

By Type of Infraction	Number	Percent
Attendance Offenses	8,274	19%
Cut/Skipped Detention/Tardy	6,170	14%
Insubordination/Disrespect	5,995	13%
Disorderly Conduct	6,217	14%
Other Offenses*	5,087	11%
Fighting	3,284	7%
Assault	2,506	6%
Obscene /Abusive Language	2,396	5%
Tobacco/Alcohol Offenses	1,039	2%
Threat/Intimidation	983	2%
Larceny/Theft/Vandalism/Arson	990	2%
Harassment	716	2%
Drug Offenses	549	1%
Weapon Possession	268	<1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>44,474</i>	<i>100%</i>

*Examples of other offenses include forgery, trespassing and communication/electronic devices.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002-2003 school year.

- ◆ During the 2002-2003 school year, 58% of suspensions were to high school students (grades 9-12), 36% were to middle school students (grades 6-8), and 6% were to elementary students (grades k-5).¹⁴
- ◆ Of the 44,474 suspensions to Rhode Island public school students of all grades, 62% were out-of-school suspensions, 36% were in-school suspensions and 2% were alternate program placements.¹⁵
- ◆ During the 2002-2003 school year, 31% of the disciplinary actions in Rhode Island public schools were attributed to students enrolled in special education.¹⁶
- ◆ 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.¹⁷

Table 34.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2002-2003

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	TYPE OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION				MISSING	TOTAL DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS	RATE PER 100 STUDENTS
		SUSPENDED OUT-OF-SCHOOL	SUSPENDED IN-SCHOOL	ALTERNATE PROGRAM PLACEMENT				
Barrington	3,241	121	29	0	0	150	5	
Bristol Warren	3,658	734	1,000	0	4	1,738	48	
Burrillville	2,557	282	661	11	1	955	37	
Central Falls	3,596	851	794	1	0	1,646	46	
Chariho	3,688	706	0	2	0	708	19	
Coventry	5,663	758	36	609	0	1,403	25	
Cranston	10,798	1,965	0	0	0	1,965	18	
Cumberland	5,220	699	5	0	0	704	13	
East Greenwich	2,363	140	244	0	0	384	16	
East Providence	6,200	609	0	0	0	609	10	
Exeter-West Greenwich	2,111	1	0	1	0	2	0	
Foster	364	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Foster-Glocester	1,687	376	0	0	0	376	22	
Glocester	722	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Jamestown	552	2	0	0	0	2	0	
Johnston	3,194	808	1,057	4	0	1,869	59	
Lincoln	3,576	640	177	55	0	872	24	
Little Compton	324	6	0	0	0	6	2	
Middletown	2,787	220	1,639	2	0	1,861	67	
Narragansett	1,702	165	195	3	0	363	21	
New Shoreham	135	4	2	0	0	6	4	
Newport	2,886	1,016	8	1	0	1,025	36	
North Kingstown	4,476	239	62	0	0	301	7	
North Providence	3,347	508	643	0	0	1,151	34	
North Smithfield	1,837	300	0	0	0	300	16	
Pawtucket	9,480	1,836	3	0	0	1,839	19	
Portsmouth	2,902	148	925	7	0	1,080	37	
Providence	27,481	7,440	2,769	6	0	10,215	37	
Scituate	1,728	50	174	0	0	224	13	
Smithfield	2,642	297	2	0	0	299	11	
South Kingstown	4,103	777	33	1	0	811	20	
Tiverton	2,160	243	533	90	0	866	40	
Warwick	11,677	2,000	2,037	2	0	4,039	35	
West Warwick	3,701	707	677	0	1	1,385	37	
Westerly	3,659	252	8	1	0	261	7	
Woonsocket	6,569	2,377	2,393	1	0	4,771	73	
State-Operated	1,184	215	6	0	0	221	19	
Charter Schools	421	39	28	0	0	67	16	
Core Cities	53,713	14,227	6,644	9	1	20,881	39	
Remainder of State	99,073	13,050	9,462	788	5	23,305	24	
Rhode Island	154,391	27,531	16,140	797	6	44,474	29	

Notes to Table

Because of a change in methodology, Suspensions cannot be compared with previous Factbooks. This year's suspension rate per 100 students is based on the total disciplinary actions for the school district at all grade levels divided by the "average daily membership," as of June 2003. Past suspension rates were based on the total disciplinary actions for the school district at all grade levels divided by total enrollment as of October of the given year. This calculation did not account for the mobility of students throughout the course of the academic year. Using "average daily membership" in the denominator is a more accurate reflection of this mobility.

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002-2003 school year.

The denominator (number of students in kindergarten through 12th grade) is the "average daily membership" as calculated by the RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

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

See Methodology, page 134

References for Indicator

- ¹ *Fair and Effective Discipline Factsheet*. (2002). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- ^{2,4,6,8,10} Skiba, R. (August 2000). *Zero Tolerance, Zero Evidence: An Analysis of School Disciplinary Practice*. Policy Research Report #SRS2. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Education Policy Center.
- ^{3,17} Sautner, B. Rethinking the Effectiveness of Suspensions. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 9:4, 210-214.
- ^{12,14,15,16} Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002-2003 school year.
- ^{5,7} Breunlin, D., et al. (July/August 2002). Conflict Resolution Training as an Alternative to Suspension for Violent Behavior. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95:6, 349-357.
- ⁹ Skiba, R., et al. (June 2000). *The Color of Discipline: Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportionality in School Punishment*. Policy Research Report #SRS1. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Education Policy Center.
- ¹¹ *Rhode Island Racial Bias and School Discipline Task Force Report to Commissioner Peter McWalters*. (2002). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Secondary and Elementary Education.