

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 2001-2002 school year.

SIGNIFICANCE

Effective school discipline strategies focus on ensuring the safety of students and staff, encouraging responsible behavior, and creating an environment conducive to learning.¹ During the 2001-2002 school year, 17,836 of Rhode Island's 158,046 students were suspended for 44,127 infractions. This is a rate of 28 disciplinary actions per 100 students.² The most common discipline problems in schools involve non-criminal student behavior that is disruptive of the learning environment.³ More than one third of the 44,127 infractions resulting in disciplinary action in Rhode Island were attendance infractions, including skipping class, skipping detention and tardiness.⁴ Possession of drugs or weapons accounted for 729 disciplinary actions, 2% of all infractions.⁵

Schools may take any number of actions when a student is disruptive, interferes with the learning of other

students, or affects the safety of others. Research shows that the best approach to school discipline is a balance between clearly communicated and consistently enforced rules and a climate of concern for students as individuals. Smaller schools – or larger schools divided into “schools within schools” – are better able to address the individual needs of students.⁶ Students who dislike school, do poorly academically, and have limited career objectives are more likely to be disruptive.^{7,8} Students with discipline problems have lower test scores. Students who have discipline problems are more likely to drop out of school.^{9,10}

During the 2001-2002 school year, 28% of the suspensions in Rhode Island public schools involved students enrolled in special education.¹¹ Minority children and poor children in Rhode Island are also more likely to be suspended.¹² The Task Force on Racial Bias and School Discipline concluded in its report that there is evidence that both race and economic status are factors in school suspensions. The Task Force reported that as many as one-third of Rhode Island school districts show an over-representation of minorities in suspension data.¹³

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island Public Schools, 2001-2002

By Type of Infraction	Number	Percent
Attendance Offenses	9,771	22%
Cut/Skipped Detention/Tardy	6,626	15%
Insubordination/Disrespect	6,166	14%
Disorderly Conduct	6,393	14%
Other Offenses*	3,836	9%
Fighting	3,000	7%
Assault	2,138	5%
Obscene /Abusive Language	2,077	5%
Harassment	742	2%
Larceny/Theft/Vandalism/Arson	782	2%
Threat/Intimidation	941	2%
Tobacco/Alcohol Offenses	926	2%
Drug Offenses	418	1%
Weapon Possession	311	1%
Total	44,127	100%

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

◆ During the 2001-2002 school year, there were 44,127 incidents in which a Rhode Island public school student received a suspension or alternative program placement. The 44,127 suspensions can be attributed to 17,836 students.

◆ In Rhode Island public schools, high school students are more likely to be suspended than elementary and middle school students. During the 2001-2002 school year, 60% of suspensions were to high school students (grades 9-12), 34% were to middle school students (grades 6-8), and 6% were to elementary students (grades K-5).

◆ Of the 44,127 suspensions to Rhode Island public school students of all grades, 58% were out-of-school suspensions, 34% were in-school suspensions and 8% were alternate program placements.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 school year.

Table 34.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2001-2002

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	TYPE OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION			TOTAL DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS	RATE PER 100 STUDENTS
		SUSPENDED OUT-OF-SCHOOL	SUSPENDED IN-SCHOOL	ALTERNATE PROGRAM PLACEMENT		
Barrington	3,286	136	8	0	144	4
Bristol-Warren	3,810	751	1,037	0	1,788	47
Burrillville	2,749	268	808	25	1,101	40
Central Falls	3,638	990	806	3	1,799	49
Charlho	3,887	345	984	54	1,383	36
Coventry	5,785	821	828	20	1,669	29
Cranston	11,155	2,364	0	0	2,364	21
Cumberland	5,373	449	32	2	483	9
East Greenwich	2,440	93	56	1	150	6
East Providence	6,566	470	4	0	474	7
Exeter-W. Greenwich	2,152	383	17	1	401	19
Foster	402	0	0	0	0	0
Foster-Glocester	1,632	449	0	0	449	28
Glocester	802	2	2	0	4	1
Jamestown	588	0	0	0	0	0
Johnston	3,381	714	445	1	1,160	34
Lincoln	3,706	582	4	61	647	17
Little Compton	350	3	0	0	3	1
Middletown	2,856	235	1,087	0	1,322	46
Narragansett	1,742	164	174	2	340	20
New Shoreham	130	0	1	0	1	1
Newport	2,937	961	200	11	1,172	40
North Kingstown	4,501	340	116	0	456	10
North Providence	3,476	490	546	0	1,036	30
North Smithfield	1,861	295	0	0	295	16
Pawtucket	9,833	1,465	15	2	1,482	15
Portsmouth	2,888	92	30	711	833	29
Providence	27,159	5,863	2,961	5	8,829	33
Scituate	1,772	162	334	0	496	28
Smithfield	2,733	201	534	0	735	27
South Kingstown	4,344	747	81	1	829	19
Tiverton	2,222	265	988	15	1,268	57
Warwick	12,222	2,063	17	2,391	4,471	37
West Warwick	3,795	434	591	0	1,025	27
Westerly	3,691	326	1	0	327	9
Woonsocket	6,760	2,234	1,867	16	4,117	61
<i>State-Operated / Charter</i>	<i>1,422</i>	<i>629</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>1,073</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Core Cities</i>	<i>54,122</i>	<i>11,947</i>	<i>6,440</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>18,424</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>103,924</i>	<i>13,839</i>	<i>8,472</i>	<i>3,391</i>	<i>25,702</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>158,046</i>	<i>25,786</i>	<i>14,912</i>	<i>3,428</i>	<i>44,126</i>	<i>28</i>

Notes to Table

Suspension rate per 100 students is based on the total disciplinary actions for the school district at all grade levels. The denominator is the total number of students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade in the school district.

Total disciplinary actions is the number of incidents resulting in suspension - either in-school or out-of-school, or placement of the student in an alternate program. It does not reflect the total number of students disciplined because each student can receive more than one disciplinary action during the school year. The difference between the total number of suspensions by districts and suspensions by type of infraction is "missing" or invalid cases.

Expulsion can no longer be reported as a separate category because under Rhode Island law schools cannot expel students. Therefore, expulsions are included in the out-of-school suspension category.

Suspension policies vary by district. 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.

State operated and charter schools includes data for the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, Davies Career Technical School, and Metropolitan Career Technical Center, Area Career Technical Schools, the Paul Cuffee Charter School and the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 school year.

References for Indicator

- ^{1,3,6,7} Gaustad, J. (1992). *School Discipline*. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, ERIC Digest, Number 78.
- ^{2,4,5,11,12} Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000-2001 school year.
- ^{8,10} *Order in the Classroom* (October 1998). Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Center, Policy Information Center, Research Division.
- ⁹ The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: *Student Life: School, Home and Community*. (2002). New York, NY: MetLife, Inc.
- ^{12,13} *Rhode Island Racial Bias and School Discipline Task Force Report to Commissioner Peter McWalters* (2002). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.