

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.¹² 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, developmentally appropriate, and limited use of suspensions.⁸

In Rhode Island and nationally, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, 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, boys and students with disabilities also are more likely to be suspended than their peers.^{9,10,11}

Of all disciplinary actions during the 2021-2022 school year, 7% (1,358) involved elementary school students (kindergarten-5th grade), 42% (7,648) involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 50% (9,225) involved high school students (9th-12th grades). For elementary school students, 76% of disciplinary actions were out-of-school suspensions. Kindergarteners received 121 disciplinary actions, including 109 out-of-school suspensions.¹²



Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2021-2022

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Fighting	2,048	22%	Obscene/Abusive Language	426	4%
Insubordination/Disrespect	1,641	17%	Weapon Possession	278	3%
Disorderly Conduct	1,370	14%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	235	2%
Assault of Student or Teacher	1,259	13%	Electronic Devices/Technology	127	1%
Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	1,231	13%	Other Offenses	79	1%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	817	9%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
			Total	9,511	

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022 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 During the 2021-2022 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions was back up to close to the 2018-2019 number (9,981) after declines during the COVID-19 pandemic when many students were distance learning and not in school buildings. More than half (54%) of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses.^{14,15}



Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2021-2022

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students Receiving Special Education Services	16%	30%
Asian/Pacific Islander Students [†]	3%	1%
Black Students	9%	12%
Hispanic Students	29%	32%
Multiracial Students	5%	8%
Native American Students	1%	1%
White Students	53%	45%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022 school year. % suspensions includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. [†]Data for Asian and Pacific Islander students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. [‡]National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups. Detailed data by district is available at www.ride.ri.gov

◆ During the 2020-2021 school year, Rhode Island students receiving special education services represented 16% of the student population but represented 30% of suspensions. Historically, Students of Color are more likely to be suspended than their white peers.¹⁶

Table 52.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2021-2022

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	3,366	24	*	<1	25	1
Bristol Warren	2,909	331	242	8	573	20
Burrillville	2,099	28	180	9	208	10
Central Falls	2,690	*	223	8	224	8
Chariho	3,128	83	67	2	150	5
Coventry	4,280	913	225	5	1,138	27
Cranston	10,253	620	642	6	1,262	12
Cumberland	4,676	449	205	4	654	14
East Greenwich	2,534	39	21	1	60	2
East Providence	4,951	*	564	11	566	11
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,521	16	23	2	39	3
Foster	215	0	*	2	*	2
Foster-Glocester	1,381	144	46	3	190	14
Glocester	560	*	0	0	*	<1
Jamestown	435	*	0	0	*	<1
Johnston	3,063	130	159	5	289	9
Lincoln	3,239	*	150	5	151	5
Little Compton	198	*	*	3	*	4
Middletown	2,042	160	84	4	244	12
Narragansett	1,212	76	73	6	149	12
New Shoreham	129	*	*	1	*	3
Newport	1,963	0	275	14	275	14
North Kingstown	3,845	305	160	4	465	12
North Providence	3,458	898	240	7	1,138	33
North Smithfield	1,592	67	122	8	189	12
Pawtucket	8,099	*	767	9	776	10
Portsmouth	2,218	29	41	2	70	3
Providence	21,774	153	1,790	8	1,943	9
Scituate	1,190	*	18	2	27	2
Smithfield	2,405	88	91	4	179	7
South Kingstown	2,589	128	94	4	222	9
Tiverton	1,666	20	114	7	134	8
Warwick	8,099	475	568	7	1,043	13
West Warwick	3,502	509	390	11	899	26
Westerly	2,345	76	147	6	223	10
Woonsocket	5,606	2,760	1,064	19	3,824	68
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>10,519</i>	<i>167</i>	<i>576</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>743</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,821</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>124</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>UCAP</i>	<i>127</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>38,169</i>	<i>2,923</i>	<i>3,844</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>6,767</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>87,062</i>	<i>5,628</i>	<i>4,964</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>10,592</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>137,697</i>	<i>8,720</i>	<i>9,511</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>18,231</i>	<i>13</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022 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 reporting suspensions 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, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School, Providence Prep Mayoral Academy, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and The Village Green Virtual Public Charter School. State-operated schools reporting suspensions include William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School and Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

(References are on page 191)