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 removal to an Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES) by school personnel.

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, out-of-school suspension is a 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.[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. In fact, being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out.[5,6]

Schools and districts can improve school climate and discipline by setting high expectations for student behavior, using tiered supports based on student needs, providing professional development focused on engaging instruction and promoting positive behavior, and developing and enforcing disciplinary policies that ensure the equitable, appropriate, and limited use of suspensions.[7]

During the 2013-2014 school year in Rhode Island, 30,790 disciplinary actions were attributed to 11,848 students. In Rhode Island during the 2013-2014 school year, 9% of the student population was suspended at least once. The total number of disciplinary actions is two and a half times the number of students disciplined because some students were disciplined multiple times.[8]

Of all disciplinary actions during the 2013-2014 school year, 10% (3,013) involved elementary school students (pre-kindergarten through 5th grade), 39% (11,911) involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 52% (15,866) involved high school students (9th-12th grades). Kindergartners received 197 disciplinary actions, including 184 out-of-school suspensions.[9]

Out-of-School Suspensions, Rhode Island Public Schools, 2013-2014

BY TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	BY TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Insubordination/Disrespect	4,927	31%	Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	718	5%
Disorderly Conduct	3,290	21%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	412	3%
Fighting	2,233	14%	Weapon Possession	206	1%
Assault of Student or Teacher	1,275	8%	Communications/Electronic Devices	186	1%
Obscene/Abusive Language	1,169	7%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	1,030	7%	Other Offenses	317	2%
			Total	15,763	

*Harassment offenses include hazing and hate crimes. Assault offenses include sexual assault. Examples of other offenses include cheating/plagiarism, fire regulation violations, sexual misconduct, trespassing, forgery, as well as disciplinary actions where the infraction is missing or not specified.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2013-2014 school year. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

◆ Since the 2008-2009 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions in Rhode Island has decreased by 37%.[10] However, during the 2013-2014 school year, out-of-school suspensions still accounted for 51% of disciplinary actions.[11]

◆ More than one-half of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses, such as insubordination or disrespect (31%) and disorderly conduct (21%).[12]

◆ In 2012, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that prohibits schools from using a student's absenteeism as the sole basis for an out-of-school suspension.[13] During the 2013-2014 school year, there were 3,697 disciplinary actions in Rhode Island public schools for attendance-related infractions, and all resulted in in-school suspensions.[14]

Disparities in School Discipline

◆ Minority and low-income students receive more school suspensions and disproportionately severe disciplinary actions compared with their White and higher-income peers.[15] In Rhode Island during the 2013-2014 school year, minority students made up 39% of the student population, but received 57% (17,572) of all disciplinary actions. Less than one-third (29%) of Rhode Island students were enrolled in the four core city districts, but students in these districts received 51% of the disciplinary actions.[16,17]

◆ While 15% of Rhode Island students received special education services in 2013-2014, they accounted for 30% of the disciplinary actions and 26% of students disciplined.[18,19]

Table 52.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2013-2014

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	SUSPENDED IN-SCHOOL	SUSPENDED OUT-OF-SCHOOL	TOTAL DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS	ACTIONS PER 100 STUDENTS
Barrington	3,237	*	60	67	2
Bristol Warren	3,395	583	408	991	29
Burrillville	2,379	85	230	315	13
Central Falls	2,692	455	108	563	21
Chariho	3,383	441	292	733	22
Coventry	4,769	745	156	901	19
Cranston	10,177	1,435	1,437	2,884	28
Cumberland	4,490	90	449	539	12
East Greenwich	2,360	20	38	58	2
East Providence	5,265	0	701	701	13
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,582	15	129	144	9
Foster	284	0	0	0	0
Foster-Glocester	1,148	175	98	273	24
Glocester	499	*	0	*	<1
Jamestown	492	*	0	*	<1
Johnston	2,991	30	70	100	3
Lincoln	3,095	*	241	246	8
Little Compton	257	0	0	0	0
Middletown	2,267	373	128	501	22
Narragansett	1,366	176	125	301	22
New Shoreham	117	*	0	*	<1
Newport	1,994	74	399	473	24
North Kingstown	3,948	478	90	568	14
North Providence	3,459	759	597	1,356	39
North Smithfield	1,724	*	53	55	3
Pawtucket	8,750	12	905	917	10
Portsmouth	2,628	260	109	369	14
Providence	23,799	2,022	6,296	8,318	35
Scituate	1,403	46	*	53	4
Smithfield	2,343	55	99	154	7
South Kingstown	3,333	339	137	476	14
Tiverton	1,796	35	179	214	12
Warwick	9,061	480	763	1,243	14
West Warwick	3,348	173	235	412	12
Westerly	3,010	41	188	229	8
Woonsocket	5,649	5,076	687	5,763	102
Charter Schools	*4,952*	*187*	*277*	*464*	*9*
State-Operated Schools	*1,773*	*330*	*23*	*353*	*20*
UCAP	*138*	*0*	*49*	*50*	*36*
Four Core Cities	*40,889*	*7,565*	*7,996*	*15,561*	*38*
Remainder of State	*91,600*	*6,928*	*7,418*	*14,362*	*16*
Rhode Island	*139,353*	*15,010*	*15,763*	*30,790*	*22*

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2013-2014 school year.

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.

*Only 17 removals to an Interim Alternative Education Setting (IAES) by school personnel were reported because new guidance from the Rhode Island Department of Education defined in-school suspensions more broadly than in the past. These removals are counted in district, four core city, remainder of state, and Rhode Island totals.

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, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, Segue Institute for Learning, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, 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.

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