

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.^{1,2} 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 2019-2020 school year, 9% (1,230) involved elementary school students (kindergarten-5th grade), 37% (5,077) involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 54% (7,495) involved high school students (9th-12th grades). For elementary school students, 69% of disciplinary actions were out-of-school suspensions. Kindergarteners received 109 disciplinary actions, including 93 out-of-school suspensions.¹²



Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2019-2020

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Fighting	1,328	22%	Obscene/Abusive Language	266	4%
Insubordination/Disrespect	1,020	17%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	163	3%
Assault of Student or Teacher	941	15%	Weapon Possession	146	2%
Disorderly Conduct	834	14%	Other Offenses	93	2%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	646	11%	Electronic Devices/Technology	52	1%
Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	587	10%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
Total			6,076		

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2019-2020 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 From the 2018-2019 school year to the 2019-2020 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions decreased by 39%. Half of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses.^{14,15} Decreases in suspensions during the 2019-2020 school year may be attributed to decreased use or underreporting of disciplinary actions during distance learning.



Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2019-2020

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students Receiving Special Education Services	17%	33%
Asian/Pacific Islander Students+	3%	2%
Black Students	9%	12%
Hispanic Students	27%	33%
Multiracial	5%	6%
Native American Students	1%	1%
White Students	55%	46%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2019-2020 school year. % suspensions includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. +Data for Asian 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 2019-2020 school year, Rhode Island students with disabilities were suspended disproportionately. Students receiving special education services represent 17% of the student population but represented 33% of suspensions.¹⁶

Table 53.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2019-2020

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	3,403	*	16	<1	17	<1
Bristol Warren	3,130	297	164	5	461	15
Burrillville	2,230	30	113	5	143	6
Central Falls	2,836	0	235	8	235	8
Chariho	3,179	190	58	2	248	8
Coventry	4,501	525	126	3	651	14
Cranston	10,423	1,860	387	4	2,247	22
Cumberland	4,627	139	37	1	176	4
East Greenwich	2,563	15	23	1	38	1
East Providence	5,045	0	303	6	303	6
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,620	*	*	<1	8	<1
Foster	226	0	*	<1	1	<1
Foster-Glocester	1,347	37	25	2	62	5
Glocester	557	*	0	0	1	<1
Jamestown	478	*	*	<1	3	1
Johnston	3,192	136	112	4	248	8
Lincoln	3,189	0	86	3	86	3
Little Compton	230	*	*	<1	3	1
Middletown	2,144	0	*	<1	8	<1
Narragansett	1,276	*	35	3	44	3
New Shoreham	133	*	*	1	2	2
Newport	2,139	*	176	8	178	8
North Kingstown	3,780	141	119	3	260	7
North Providence	3,598	541	73	2	614	17
North Smithfield	1,649	16	23	1	39	2
Pawtucket	8,718	10	603	7	613	7
Portsmouth	2,413	179	70	3	249	10
Providence	23,818	490	1,257	5	1,747	7
Scituate	1,184	35	23	2	58	5
Smithfield	2,375	73	31	1	104	4
South Kingstown	2,853	127	80	3	207	7
Tiverton	1,751	58	39	2	97	6
Warwick	8,500	248	471	6	719	8
West Warwick	3,581	390	345	10	735	21
Westerly	2,593	93	98	4	191	7
Woonsocket	5,997	1,912	574	10	2,486	41
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>8,993</i>	<i>167</i>	<i>264</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>431</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,751</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>UCAP</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>41,369</i>	<i>2,412</i>	<i>2,669</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5,081</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>89,908</i>	<i>5,148</i>	<i>3,053</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8,201</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>142,156</i>	<i>7,727</i>	<i>6,076</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>13,803</i>	<i>10</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2019-2020 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 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, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, Sheila C. “Skip” Nowell Leadership Academy, SouthSide Charter School, 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.

(References are on page 189)