

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 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, 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 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, appropriate, and limited use of suspensions.⁷

In Rhode Island and nationally, Black, Hispanic, 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, students with disabilities also are more likely to be suspended than their peers.^{8,9,10}

Of all disciplinary actions during the 2015-2016 school year, 9% (2,276) involved elementary school students (kindergarten-5th grade), 40% (9,717) involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 51% (12,485) involved high school students (9th-12th grades). Kindergartners received 197 disciplinary actions, including 179 out-of-school suspensions.¹¹

Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2015-2016

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Insubordination/Disrespect	4,084	35%	Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	586	5%
Fighting	2,032	17%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	332	3%
Disorderly Conduct	1,335	11%	Weapon Possession	207	2%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	994	8%	Electronic Devices/Technology	190	2%
Assault of Student or Teacher	985	8%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
Obscene/Abusive Language	867	7%	Other Offenses	124	1%
Total			11,736		

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015-2016 school year. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
*Harassment offenses include hazing and hate crimes. Assault offenses include sexual assault.

◆ Since the 2010-2011 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions in Rhode Island has decreased by 52%. During the 2015-2016 school year, out-of-school suspensions accounted for just under half (48%) of disciplinary actions. More than half of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses, such as insubordination/disrespect, disorderly conduct, obscene/abusive language, alcohol/drug/tobacco offenses, and electronic devices/technology offenses.^{12,13}

Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2015-2016

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students With Disabilities	14%	28%
White Students	60%	46%
Asian Students	3%	1%
Black Students	8%	13%
Hispanic Students	24%	32%
Native American Students	1%	2%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015-2016 school year. % of suspensions includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Detailed data by district is available at www.ride.ri.gov

◆ 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 and requires school districts to identify any racial, ethnic, or special education disparities and to develop a plan to reduce such disparities.¹⁴

Table 53.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2015-2016

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	3,272	*	31	1	39	1
Bristol Warren	3,284	514	518	16	1,032	31
Burrillville	2,370	81	154	6	235	10
Central Falls	2,609	*	214	8	216	8
Charlho	3,187	286	183	6	469	15
Coventry	4,567	505	98	2	603	13
Cranston	10,121	1,322	1,127	11	2,449	24
Cumberland	4,508	342	161	4	503	11
East Greenwich	2,396	12	30	1	42	2
East Providence	5,238	0	624	12	624	12
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,604	23	116	7	139	9
Foster	280	*	*	1	*	2
Foster-Glocester	1,144	188	97	8	285	25
Glocester	556	0	0	0	0	0
Jamestown	489	*	17	3	19	4
Johnston	3,188	76	144	5	220	7
Lincoln	2,953	*	178	6	180	6
Little Compton	247	*	*	1	10	4
Middletown	2,269	465	142	6	607	27
Narragansett	1,291	44	87	7	131	10
New Shoreham	113	*	*	2	*	6
Newport	2,137	*	408	19	417	20
North Kingstown	3,973	282	73	2	355	9
North Providence	3,521	812	783	22	1,595	45
North Smithfield	1,722	*	65	4	66	4
Pawtucket	8,965	19	396	4	415	5
Portsmouth	2,458	360	215	9	575	23
Providence	24,106	1,668	3,488	14	5,156	21
Scituate	1,363	24	*	1	31	2
Smithfield	2,364	98	61	3	159	7
South Kingstown	3,207	509	96	3	605	19
Tiverton	1,806	0	97	5	97	5
Warwick	8,941	525	497	6	1,022	11
West Warwick	3,466	486	243	7	729	21
Westerly	2,845	57	149	5	206	7
Woonsocket	5,835	3,622	785	13	4,407	76
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>6,244</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>357</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>471</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,738</i>	<i>272</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>318</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>UCAP</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>41,515</i>	<i>5,311</i>	<i>4,883</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>10,194</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>90,879</i>	<i>7,047</i>	<i>6,409</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>13,456</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>140,513</i>	<i>12,744</i>	<i>11,736</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>24,480</i>	<i>17</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015-2016 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, 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.