

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, 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 2016-2017 school year, 11% (2,201) involved elementary school students (kindergarten-fifth grade), 38% (7,511) involved middle school students (sixth-eighth grades), and 50% (9,884) involved high school students (ninth-twelfth grades). For elementary school students, 80% of disciplinary actions were out-of-school suspensions. Kindergarteners received 169 disciplinary actions, including 148 out-of-school suspensions.¹¹

Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2016-2017

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Insubordination/Disrespect	2,253	22%	Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	532	5%
Fighting	2,075	21%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	316	3%
Disorderly Conduct	1,586	16%	Weapon Possession	241	2%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	1,107	11%	Electronic Devices/Technology	127	1%
Assault of Student or Teacher	1,023	10%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
Obscene/Abusive Language	703	7%	Other Offenses	94	1%
Total			10,057		

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2016-2017 school year. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. *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.¹² From the 2015-2016 school year to the 2016-2017 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions decreased by 14%, but more than half of out-of-school suspensions were still for non-violent offenses, such as insubordination/disrespect, disorderly conduct, obscene/abusive language, alcohol/drug/tobacco offenses, and electronic devices/technology offenses.^{13,14}

Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2016-2017

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students With Disabilities	15%	31%
White Students	59%	47%
Hispanic Students	25%	31%
Black Students	8%	13%
Asian Students	3%	2%
Native American Students	1%	2%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2016-2017 school year. % suspensions includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Detailed data by district is available at www.ride.ri.gov

◆ During the 2016-2017 school year, Rhode Island students with disabilities were suspended disproportionately. Students with disabilities represent 15% of the student population but represented 31% of suspensions.¹⁵ In 2016, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that requires school districts to identify any racial, ethnic, or special education disparities and to develop a plan to reduce such disparities.¹⁶

Table 52.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2016-2017

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	3,337	*	42	1	49	1
Bristol Warren	3,172	498	424	13	922	29
Burrillville	2,310	26	160	7	186	8
Central Falls	2,641	41	494	19	535	20
Chariho	3,229	237	83	3	320	10
Coventry	4,652	611	133	3	744	16
Cranston	10,340	2,773	640	6	3,413	33
Cumberland	4,558	506	147	3	653	14
East Greenwich	2,484	32	27	1	59	2
East Providence	5,208	*	682	13	690	13
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,628	29	42	3	71	4
Foster	265	*	*	1	11	4
Foster-Glocester	1,160	112	56	5	168	14
Glocester	551	0	0	0	0	0
Jamestown	474	*	*	1	*	2
Johnston	3,165	132	117	4	249	8
Lincoln	2,979	0	239	8	239	8
Little Compton	245	*	*	<1	*	2
Middletown	2,185	407	60	3	467	21
Narragansett	1,302	56	62	5	118	9
New Shoreham	115	*	*	2	*	4
Newport	2,143	15	392	18	407	19
North Kingstown	3,972	258	86	2	344	9
North Providence	3,471	736	260	7	996	29
North Smithfield	1,690	20	37	2	57	3
Pawtucket	8,953	*	525	6	533	6
Portsmouth	2,454	313	121	5	434	18
Providence	24,092	1,327	2,715	11	4,042	17
Scituate	1,277	44	*	<1	47	4
Smithfield	2,384	89	33	1	122	5
South Kingstown	3,120	301	49	2	350	11
Tiverton	1,825	*	120	7	122	7
Warwick	9,045	301	623	7	924	10
West Warwick	3,415	317	176	5	493	14
Westerly	2,810	49	208	7	257	9
Woonsocket	5,862	0	853	15	853	15
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>6,987</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>340</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>514</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,738</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>163</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>UCAP</i>	<i>139</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>41,549</i>	<i>1,376</i>	<i>4,587</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>5,963</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>90,965</i>	<i>7,895</i>	<i>5,034</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>12,929</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>141,377</i>	<i>9,541</i>	<i>10,057</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>19,598</i>	<i>14</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2016-2017 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.