

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 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. 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, appropriate, and limited use of suspensions.⁸

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.^{9,10,11}

Of all disciplinary actions during the 2017-2018 school year, 14% (2,954) involved elementary school students (kindergarten-5th grade), 33% (7,108) involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 53% (11,297) involved high school students (9th-12th grades). For elementary school students, 76% of disciplinary actions were out-of-school suspensions. Kindergarteners received 284 disciplinary actions, including 249 out-of-school suspensions.¹²

Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2017-2018

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Insubordination/Disrespect	2,633	22%	Obscene/Abusive Language	723	6%
Fighting	2,390	20%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	278	2%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	1,559	13%	Weapon Possession	205	2%
Disorderly Conduct	1,530	13%	Electronic Devices/Technology	140	1%
Assault of Student or Teacher	1,374	12%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	948	8%	Other Offenses	142	1%
			Total	11,922	

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2017-2018 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 2016-2017 school year to the 2017-2018 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions increased by 19%. 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.^{14,15}

Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2017-2018

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students With Disabilities	15%	32%
White Students	58%	46%
Hispanic Students	25%	32%
Black Students	9%	13%
Asian Students	5%	1%
Native American Students	1%	2%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2017-2018 school year. % suspensions includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Detailed data by district is available at www.ride.ri.gov

◆ During the 2017-2018 school year, Rhode Island students with disabilities were suspended disproportionately. Students with disabilities represent 15% of the student population but represented 32% of suspensions.¹⁶ In 2016, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that requires school districts to identify any racial, ethnic, or special education disparities in suspension rates and to develop a plan to reduce such disparities.¹⁷

Table 53.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2017-2018

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	3,359	10	54	2	64	2
Bristol Warren	3,195	452	496	16	948	30
Burrillville	2,250	26	195	9	221	10
Central Falls	2,705	246	185	7	431	16
Chariho	3,159	227	124	4	351	11
Coventry	4,686	719	110	2	829	18
Cranston	10,362	2,770	732	7	3,502	34
Cumberland	4,613	469	160	3	629	14
East Greenwich	2,462	*	*	<1	13	1
East Providence	5,255	29	953	18	982	19
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,634	34	30	2	64	4
Foster	277	*	*	1	*	3
Foster-Glocester	1,255	76	88	7	164	13
Glocester	535	*	0	0	*	<1
Jamestown	483	*	*	1	*	1
Johnston	3,251	167	143	4	310	10
Lincoln	3,064	0	243	8	243	8
Little Compton	243	0	*	<1	*	<1
Middletown	2,169	350	119	5	469	22
Narragansett	1,296	116	107	8	223	17
New Shoreham	119	*	*	1	*	2
Newport	2,194	16	290	13	306	14
North Kingstown	3,891	278	106	3	384	10
North Providence	3,587	759	261	7	1,020	28
North Smithfield	1,705	24	41	2	65	4
Pawtucket	8,814	38	735	8	773	9
Portsmouth	2,407	330	50	2	380	16
Providence	24,201	690	3,200	13	3,890	16
Scituate	1,275	42	14	1	56	4
Smithfield	2,380	81	45	2	126	5
South Kingstown	3,042	285	75	2	360	12
Tiverton	1,820	27	191	10	218	12
Warwick	8,879	212	814	9	1,026	12
West Warwick	3,562	557	329	9	886	25
Westerly	2,740	27	260	9	287	10
Woonsocket	5,956	0	919	15	919	15
<i>Charter Schools</i>	7,776	362	633	8	995	13
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	1,733	*	162	9	166	10
<i>UCAP</i>	134	*	42	31	43	32
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	41,676	974	5,039	12	6,013	14
<i>Remainder of State</i>	91,149	8,098	6,046	7	14,144	16
<i>Rhode Island</i>	142,469	9,439	11,922	8	21,361	15

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2017-2018 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)