

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 2022-2023 school year, 8% (1,767) involved elementary school students (kindergarten-5th grade), 38% (8,081) involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 52% (10,987) involved high school students (9th-12th grades). For elementary school students, 74% of disciplinary actions were out-of-school suspensions. Kindergarteners received 164 disciplinary actions, including 138 out-of-school suspensions.¹²



Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2022-2023

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Fighting	2,167	21%	Obscene/Abusive Language	507	5%
Insubordination/Disrespect	1,921	18%	Weapon Possession	315	3%
Disorderly Conduct	1,415	14%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	220	2%
Assault of Student or Teacher	1,351	13%	Electronic Devices/Technology	139	1%
Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	1,288	12%	Other Offenses	156	1%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	946	9%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
Total			10,425		

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2022-2023 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 During the 2022-2023 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions was higher than the 2018-2019 number (9,981) after declines during the COVID-19 pandemic when many students were distance learning and not in school buildings. More than half (54%) of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses.^{14,15}



Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2022-2023

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students Receiving Special Education Services	17%	33%
Asian/Pacific Islander Students ⁺	3%	<1%
Black Students	9%	13%
Hispanic Students	30%	34%
Multiracial Students	5%	8%
Native American Students	1%	3%
White Students	51%	43%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2022-2023 school year. % suspensions includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. +Data for Asian and Pacific Islander 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 2022-2023 school year, Rhode Island students receiving special education services represented 17% of the student population but represented 33% of suspensions. Historically, Students of Color are more likely to be suspended than their white peers.¹⁶

Table 53.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2022-2023

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	TOTAL # OF IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	TOTAL # OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS PER 100 STUDENTS	TOTAL DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS	ACTIONS PER 100 STUDENTS
Barrington	3,366	64	0	0	64	2
Bristol Warren	2,882	416	159	6	575	20
Burrillville	2,031	35	168	8	203	10
Central Falls	2,619	21	150	6	171	7
Charlho	3,026	169	104	3	273	9
Coventry	4,172	855	190	5	1,045	25
Cranston	10,216	1,443	635	6	2,078	20
Cumberland	4,742	573	272	6	845	18
East Greenwich	2,525	30	27	1	57	2
East Providence	5,123	25	580	11	605	12
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,507	29	40	3	69	5
Foster	212	*	*	<1	*	1
Foster-Glocester	1,351	132	42	3	174	13
Glocester	577	*	*	<1	*	1
Jamestown	407	*	*	<1	*	<1
Johnston	3,092	176	173	6	349	11
Lincoln	3,269	0	198	6	198	6
Little Compton	205	*	*	4	16	8
Middletown	1,969	52	38	2	90	5
Narragansett	1,135	44	49	4	93	8
New Shoreham	132	*	*	1	*	2
Newport	1,885	0	329	17	329	17
North Kingstown	3,777	429	274	7	703	19
North Providence	3,494	788	319	9	1,107	32
North Smithfield	1,608	24	89	6	113	7
Pawtucket	7,955	33	1092	14	1,125	14
Portsmouth	2,168	99	55	3	154	7
Providence	21,023	75	2095	10	2,170	10
Scituate	1,183	0	23	2	23	2
Smithfield	2,440	47	47	2	94	4
South Kingstown	2,491	169	68	3	237	10
Tiverton	1,629	0	118	7	118	7
Warwick	7,974	446	730	9	1,176	15
West Warwick	3,476	640	446	13	1,086	31
Westerly	2,262	78	150	7	228	10
Woonsocket	5,612	3,237	878	16	4,115	73
Charter Schools	11,286	338	724	6	1,062	9
State-Operated Schools	1,772	0	129	7	129	7
UCAP	127	94	*	3	98	77
YouthBuild	79	0	17	22	17	22
Four Core Cities	37,209	3,366	4,215	11	7,581	20
Remainder of State	86,325	6,776	5,336	6	12,112	14
Rhode Island	136,797	10,574	10,425	8	20,999	15

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2022-2023 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 reporting suspensions 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, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School, Providence Prep Mayoral Academy, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and The Village Green Virtual Public Charter School. State-operated schools reporting suspensions include William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School and Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center.

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