

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.³

Suspension usually does not deter students from misbehaving and may instead reinforce negative behavior patterns. Suspended students are more likely than their peers to experience academic failure, youth 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.^{4,5}

Even disciplinary referrals that do not lead to suspension can impact students by weakening trust in teachers and reducing

school engagement. Black students are more than twice as likely as their white peers to receive a disciplinary referral.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, developmentally appropriate, and limited use of suspensions.⁷

In Rhode Island and nationally, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, and Native American students are more likely to be suspended than their white peers although there is no evidence that these students have more serious patterns of rule breaking.⁸ The pandemic exacerbated student stress, trauma, and mental health challenges, making fair discipline practices even more crucial.⁹

Of all disciplinary actions during the 2023-2024 school year, 9% (1,724) involved elementary school students (kindergarten-5th grade), 42% (8,037) involved middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 49% (9,359) involved high school students (9th-12th grades). For elementary school students, 77% of disciplinary actions were out-of-school suspensions. Kindergarteners received 219 disciplinary actions, including 182 out-of-school suspensions.¹⁰



Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2023-2024

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Fighting	2,204	24%	Obscene/Abusive Language	386	4%
Disorderly Conduct	1,580	17%	Weapon Possession	244	3%
Insubordination/Disrespect	1,337	15%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	184	2%
Assault of Student or Teacher	1,274	14%	Electronic Devices/Technology	99	1%
Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	1,117	12%	Other Offenses	55	1%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	728	8%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2023-2024 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.¹¹ During the 2023-2024 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions (9,208) was lower than in the 2018-2019 school year (9,981), showing a modest decline. More than 5,014 (54%) of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses.^{12,13}



Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2023-2024

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students Receiving Special Education Services	18%	35%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander Students*	3%	2%
Black Students	9%	13%
Hispanic Students	31%	34%
Multiracial Students	5%	7%
White Students	50%	43%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2023-2024 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 2023-2024 school year, Rhode Island students receiving special education services represented 19% of the student population but represented 35% of suspensions. Historically, Students of Color are more likely to be suspended than their white peers.¹⁴

Table 50.

Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2023-2024

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	3,289	29	*	<1	36	1
Bristol Warren	2,760	161	123	4	284	10
Burrillville	2,002	56	165	8	221	11
Central Falls	2,599	*	138	5	141	5
Chariho	2,960	188	43	1	231	8
Coventry	4,103	966	171	4	1,137	28
Cranston	10,075	1,510	620	6	2,130	21
Cumberland	4,821	627	200	4	827	17
East Greenwich	2,500	24	18	1	42	2
East Providence	5,074	45	605	12	650	13
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,537	*	33	2	40	3
Foster	221	*	*	<1	3	1
Foster-Glocester	1,317	110	45	3	155	12
Glocester	554	*	0	0	2	<1
Jamestown	400	0	0	0	0	0
Johnston	3,093	82	209	7	291	9
Lincoln	3,256	0	186	6	186	6
Little Compton	210	*	*	1	9	4
Middletown	1,934	26	86	4	112	6
Narragansett	1,071	21	15	1	36	3
New Shoreham	124	0	0	0	0	0
Newport	1,837	*	355	19	356	19
North Kingstown	3,724	279	121	3	400	11
North Providence	3,524	840	127	4	967	27
North Smithfield	1,643	38	47	3	85	5
Pawtucket	7,831	18	665	8	683	9
Portsmouth	2,143	101	74	3	175	8
Providence	20,622	36	1,927	9	1,963	10
Scituate	1,170	*	*	<1	8	1
Smithfield	2,382	49	56	2	105	4
South Kingstown	2,323	202	65	3	267	11
Tiverton	1,543	*	51	3	58	4
Warwick	7,847	702	755	10	1,457	19
West Warwick	3,511	660	524	15	1,184	34
Westerly	2,183	88	105	5	193	9
Woonsocket	5,531	2,436	846	15	3,282	59
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>11,843</i>	<i>578</i>	<i>654</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>1,232</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,758</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Collaboratives</i>	<i>443</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>36,583</i>	<i>2,493</i>	<i>3,576</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>6,069</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>85,128</i>	<i>6,836</i>	<i>4,811</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>11,647</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>135,755</i>	<i>9,912</i>	<i>9,208</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>19,120</i>	<i>14</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2023-2024 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 the Achievement First Rhode Island and Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy Networks, Beacon Charter School, Blackstone Academy, Charette Charter, The Compass School, Excel Academy Rhode Island, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, The Hope Academy, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Providence Preparatory Charter, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, SouthSide Charter School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and Village Green Virtual.

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References

NA indicates that the school district does not serve students at that grade level. *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.

References for Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

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- ¹⁵ Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022, and 2023-2024 school year.

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Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Suspensions

State-operated includes Wm. M. Davies Jr. Career-Technical High School, Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center and Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

Collaboratives include Sheila "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy and Urban Collaborative (UCAP).

References for Suspensions

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