

# 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.<sup>1,2</sup> Despite this evidence, suspension remains widely used nationally and in Rhode Island.<sup>1</sup>

Suspension usually does not deter students from misbehaving and may instead reinforce negative behavior patterns. Suspended students are more likely to experience academic failure, youth justice involvement, disengagement from school, isolation from teachers and peers, and school dropout. Being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out.<sup>1,3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> In urban districts, 40% of Black boys and 15% of Black girls receive a suspension or expulsion by age nine.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> In 2025, Presidential Executive Orders were issued that promote stricter school discipline and ban racial impact analyses.<sup>7</sup>

Of all disciplinary actions during the 2024-2025 school year, 15% (1,172) involved elementary school students (Pre-K-5th grade), 42% (3,186) middle school students (6th-8th grades), and 44% (3,290) high school students (9th-12th grades). Kindergartners received 138 disciplinary actions, including 123 out-of-school suspensions.<sup>8</sup> Suspensions in early childhood are often related to typical developmental behaviors and difficulties with self-regulating emotions.<sup>5</sup>



## Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2024-2025

TYPE OF INFRACTION*	#	%	TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Fighting	1,802	24%	Obscene/Abusive Language	276	4%
Disorderly Conduct	1,398	18%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	201	3%
Assault of Student or Teacher	1,274	17%	Weapon Possession	173	2%
Insubordination/Disrespect	953	12%	Electronic Devices/Technology	100	1%
Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	854	11%	Other Offenses	55	1%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	562	7%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2024-2025 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.<sup>9</sup> During the 2024-2025 school year, the number of out-of-school suspensions (7,648) was 23% lower than in the 2018-2019 school year (9,981). However, more than half (4,018 or 53%) of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses.<sup>8,10</sup>



## Disparities in School Discipline by Special Education Status and Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2024-2025

	% OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	% OF SUSPENSIONS
Students Receiving Special Education Services	20%	36%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander Students <sup>+</sup>	3%	1%
Black Students	9%	14%
Hispanic Students	32%	34%
Multiracial Students	5%	7%
White Students	49%	42%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2024-2025 school year. % suspensions includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. <sup>+</sup>Data for Asian and Pacific Islander students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. <sup>+</sup>National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups. Detailed data by district is available at [www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov)

◆ During the 2024-2025 school year, Rhode Island students receiving special education services represented 20% of the student population but represented 36% of suspensions. Historically, Students of Color are more likely to be suspended than their white peers.<sup>8</sup>

Table 51.

## Disciplinary Actions, Rhode Island School Districts, 2024-2025 School Year

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	3,258	16	*	0	24	1
Bristol Warren	2,655	220	72	3	292	11
Burrillville	1,963	87	103	5	190	10
Central Falls	2,534	*	92	4	96	4
Chariho	2,892	117	33	1	150	5
Coventry	3,988	728	133	3	861	22
Cranston	9,922	1,610	390	4	2,000	20
Cumberland	4,819	615	149	3	764	16
East Greenwich	2,462	25	16	1	41	2
East Providence	5,020	53	447	9	500	10
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,524	14	24	2	38	2
Foster	234	*	13	6	16	7
Foster-Glocester	1,268	105	21	2	126	10
Glocester	560	*	*	0	3	1
Jamestown	395	0	0	0	0	0
Johnston	3,094	70	177	6	247	8
Lincoln	3,220	0	151	5	151	5
Little Compton	213	13	13	6	26	12
Middletown	1,826	30	56	3	86	5
Narragansett	985	25	*	1	33	3
New Shoreham	120	0	*	2	2	2
Newport	1,765	0	271	15	271	15
North Kingstown	3,738	199	121	3	320	9
North Providence	3,466	534	168	5	702	20
North Smithfield	1,614	13	70	4	83	5
Pawtucket	7,642	44	787	10	831	11
Portsmouth	2,128	81	66	3	147	7
Providence	20,236	34	1,297	6	1,331	7
Scituate	1,185	*	46	4	49	4
Smithfield	2,359	17	56	2	73	3
South Kingstown	2,239	204	39	2	243	11
Tiverton	1,510	173	80	5	253	17
Warwick	7,803	497	666	9	1,163	15
West Warwick	3,405	437	380	11	817	24
Westerly	2,097	50	127	6	177	8
Woonsocket	5,492	1,508	718	13	2,226	41
Charter Schools	12,629	461	730	6	1,191	9
State-Operated Schools	1,957	*	91	5	93	5
Collaboratives	247	0	26	11	26	11
Five Core Cities	37,668	1,590	3,165	8	4,755	13
Remainder of State	81,963	5,941	3,636	4	9,577	12
Rhode Island	134,465	7,994	7,648	6	15,642	12

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2024-2025 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 five core cities, remainder of the state, and state total.

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, 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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## Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

\*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 five core cities, remainder of the state, and state total.

## References for Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

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- <sup>4</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2016). *The relationship between school attendance and health: Health policy snapshot*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED592870.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council. (2026). *Chronic absenteeism in Rhode Island significant gains but uneven results across the state*. [https://ripec.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2026\\_Chronic\\_Absenteeism\\_in\\_RI.pdf](https://ripec.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2026_Chronic_Absenteeism_in_RI.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education. (2026). *2024-2025 school year*.
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- <sup>9</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education. (2019). *2019 RI school accountability technical report*. <https://reportcard.ride.ri.gov/2019AccountabilityTechnicalManual.pdf>

- <sup>10</sup> Quintero, D., & Hansen, M. (2020, January 27). *We should be focusing on absenteeism among teachers, not just students*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/we-should-be-focusing-on-absenteeism-among-teachers-not-just-students/>

- <sup>11</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education. (2022). *2021-2022 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, Sheila "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, and Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

Collaboratives include Urban Collaborative (UCAP) and YouthBuild Preparatory Academy.

## References for Suspensions

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- <sup>2</sup> Losen, D. J. (2011). *Discipline policies, successful schools, and racial justice*. National Education Policy Center.
- <sup>3</sup> Losen, D. J. & Martinez, T. E. (2013). *Out of school & off track: The overuse of suspensions in American middle and high schools*. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies.
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2018). *K-12 education: Discipline disparities for Black students, boys, and students with disabilities GAO-18-258*.
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## References for College Preparation and Access

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