

CAPITOL FACTS & FIGURES

● ● ● EDUCATION

Zero Tolerance Policies

What are zero tolerance policies?

- Zero tolerance policies, which began as a way to approach drug enforcement, were widely adopted by schools in the 1990s. They mandate certain punishments for infractions regardless of the circumstances.¹
- The most common reason for suspensions are fights, yet the majority of infractions are nonviolent, including:
 - Abusive language;
 - Attendance issues, such as tardiness;
 - Disobedience or disrespect; and
 - General classroom disruptions.²

Research is beginning to show there may be disparities in how zero tolerance policies are applied.

- Suspensions for students in kindergarten through the 12th grade have at least doubled since the 1970s for minority students.³
- Black students are more than three times more likely to be suspended than white students.⁴
- Looking at suspension data from 18 of the largest urban middle schools in 2002 and 2006, the greatest increase was among black females, which increased by more than 5 percent.
 - Black male suspensions increased by 1.7 percent.
 - Suspensions among white and Hispanic males and females either increased by less than half a percent or decreased.⁵
- In one study, 47 percent of elementary and middle school students, and 73 percent of high school students with emotional disabilities were suspended or expelled from school.⁶
- A Kansas study found that students with emotional disabilities were 12 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than all other students, including those with and without disabilities.⁷

Whether zero tolerance policies improve the school environment and allow increased academic achievement is debatable.

- Studies show there is no evidence that connects student suspensions, which are perceived to improve the learning environment for other students by removing



troublemakers, to improved academic outcomes for the school as a whole.⁸

- Students suspended in the sixth grade are more likely to receive suspensions in the eighth grade, indicating that suspensions are not a deterrent for future behavioral problems.
- A suspension is one of four indicators that point to an increased likelihood a student will not graduate from high school.⁹



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REFERENCES

¹Rausch, M. Karega, and Skiba, Russell J. "Discipline, Disability, and Race: Disproportionality in Indiana Schools." Center for Evaluation & Education Policy. Volume 4, Number 10, Fall 2006.

²Losen, Daniel J. and Skiba, Russell. "Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis." http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/Suspended_Education.pdf

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Center for Evaluation & Education Policy.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Rausch, M. Karega, and Skiba, Russell J. "The Academic Cost of Discipline: The Relationship Between Suspension/Expulsion and School Achievement." Center for Evaluation & Education Policy.

⁹American Youth Policy Forum. "Improving the Transition from Middle Grades to High Schools: The Role of Early Warning Indicators." Jan. 25, 2008. <http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/2008/tb012508.htm>

Racial/Gender Breakdown of Student Body and Percent Suspended by Race/Gender, 2006

| States | Asian/Pacific Islanders | | | | Hispanic | | | | Black | | | | White | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|--------|
| | Percent of Total School Population | | Percent of Suspensions | | Percent of Total School Population | | Percent of Suspension | | Percent of Total School Population | | Percent of Suspension | | Percent of Total School Population | | Percent of Suspensions | |
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Nation | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0.5 | 10 | 10 | 14 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 24 | 14 | 29 | 27 | 28 | 11 |
| Alabama | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0.5 | 18 | 17 | 41 | 23 | 31 | 29 | 25 | 9 |
| Alaska | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 29 | 27 | 32 | 11 |
| Arizona | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 21 | 20 | 32 | 12 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 23 | 22 | 26 | 8 |
| Arkansas | 1 | 1 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 11 | 11 | 31 | 15 | 35 | 33 | 35 | 12 |
| California | 6 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 25 | 24 | 36 | 15 | 4 | 4 | 12 | 6 | 16 | 15 | 18 | 6 |
| Colorado | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0.5 | 14 | 13 | 25 | 12 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 32 | 30 | 35 | 12 |
| Delaware | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0.1 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 16 | 16 | 36 | 22 | 28 | 26 | 22 | 10 |
| D.C. | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 41 | 41 | 53 | 38 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Florida | 1 | 1 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 13 | 12 | 13 | 6 | 12 | 12 | 27 | 17 | 25 | 23 | 25 | 11 |
| Georgia | 2 | 1 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 20 | 20 | 43 | 25 | 25 | 23 | 19 | 7 |
| Hawaii | 41 | 38 | 54 | 26 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 4 |
| Idaho | 1 | 1 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 7 | 7 | 14 | 5 | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.2 | 43 | 40 | 58 | 17 |
| Illinois | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0.3 | 10 | 10 | 13 | 6 | 11 | 11 | 30 | 19 | 28 | 26 | 23 | 9 |
| Indiana | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 18 | 11 | 41 | 39 | 46 | 18 |
| Iowa | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 13 | 8 | 44 | 42 | 50 | 21 |
| Kansas | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.4 | 7 | 6 | 11 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 15 | 9 | 39 | 36 | 42 | 14 |
| Kentucky | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 6 | 5 | 14 | 9 | 44 | 41 | 53 | 22 |
| Louisiana | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.4 | 23 | 22 | 40 | 24 | 26 | 24 | 24 | 10 |
| Maine | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 49 | 46 | 69 | 24 |
| Maryland | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0.5 | 4 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 19 | 19 | 27 | 16 | 25 | 23 | 27 | 12 |
| Massachusetts | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 16 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 10 | 6 | 38 | 36 | 38 | 18 |
| Michigan | 1 | 1 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 9 | 24 | 16 | 38 | 35 | 40 | 15 |
| Minnesota | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 20 | 12 | 41 | 38 | 38 | 13 |
| Mississippi | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.03 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.2 | 26 | 25 | 47 | 26 | 24 | 22 | 18 | 7 |
| Missouri | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 9 | 31 | 18 | 40 | 37 | 36 | 12 |
| Montana | 1 | 1 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.2 | 43 | 40 | 50 | 19 |
| Nebraska | 1 | 1 | 0.7 | 0.2 | 6 | 6 | 12 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 16 | 11 | 39 | 37 | 39 | 15 |
| Nevada | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 18 | 17 | 26 | 15 | 6 | 5 | 15 | 9 | 22 | 22 | 21 | 9 |
| New Hampshire | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 48 | 45 | 59 | 30 |
| New Jersey | 4 | 4 | 1 | 0.4 | 10 | 9 | 16 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 25 | 14 | 29 | 27 | 26 | 10 |
| New Mexico | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 28 | 27 | 37 | 19 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 16 | 15 | 17 | 7 |
| New York | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0.2 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 9 | 23 | 13 | 27 | 26 | 33 | 13 |
| North Carolina | 1 | 1 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 15 | 15 | 37 | 20 | 29 | 27 | 24 | 9 |
| North Dakota | 0.5 | 0.4 | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 45 | 42 | 43 | 16 |
| Ohio | 1 | 1 | 0.4 | 0.1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 25 | 15 | 41 | 38 | 41 | 17 |
| Oklahoma | 1 | 1 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 17 | 9 | 31 | 30 | 35 | 13 |
| Oregon | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0.6 | 8 | 8 | 13 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 38 | 36 | 53 | 18 |
| Pennsylvania | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 8 | 28 | 18 | 39 | 37 | 33 | 14 |
| Rhode Island | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 8 | 15 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 10 | 6 | 37 | 34 | 38 | 18 |
| South Carolina | 1 | 1 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 21 | 20 | 41 | 25 | 27 | 26 | 22 | 9 |
| South Dakota | 1 | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 43 | 40 | 44 | 15 |
| Tennessee | 1 | 1 | 0.4 | 0.1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 12 | 12 | 27 | 15 | 36 | 34 | 38 | 16 |
| Texas | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0.2 | 24 | 23 | 33 | 15 | 7 | 7 | 21 | 11 | 18 | 17 | 14 | 5 |
| Utah | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 19 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 42 | 39 | 46 | 16 |
| Vermont | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 49 | 46 | 67 | 28 |
| Virginia | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0.4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 14 | 14 | 34 | 20 | 30 | 28 | 27 | 11 |
| Washington | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 13 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 35 | 33 | 46 | 15 |
| West Virginia | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.1 | 0.03 | 0.5 | 0.4 | 1 | 0.3 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 48 | 45 | 62 | 27 |
| Wisconsin | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0.4 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 24 | 17 | 40 | 38 | 30 | 12 |
| Wyoming | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 45 | 41 | 62 | 20 |

Source: U.S. Department of Education. "2006 Civil Rights Data Collection." [www://ocrdata.ed.gov/Projections_2006.aspx](http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Projections_2006.aspx)