



**Short-Term Suspensions;
Long-Term Consequences;
Real Life Solutions**

February 2007



*Working to make North Carolina
the best place to be and raise a child*

Action for Children is a leading independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to make North Carolina the best place to be and raise a child.

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Executive Summary

Every child in North Carolina is constitutionally guaranteed an opportunity to a sound, basic education. Research repeatedly demonstrates, and common sense supports, that children who have positive school experiences, do well in school and go on to graduate are more likely to succeed as adults. Having access to quality education is an essential element for a child to become a productive, contributing adult.

School systems juggle many obligations to provide strong educational opportunities to all students. Just as qualified teachers and administrators are essential to successful schools, so are policies and programs that support students' progress in school.

However, on any given school day in North Carolina, more than 1,600 students are not with their classmates actively learning because of suspensions. Are some school or school district policies and practices keeping students out of the classroom too often, in numbers too large, for too long?

In 2005, Action for Children North Carolina released *One Out of Ten: The Growing Suspension Crisis in North Carolina*, noting that more than 1-out-of-every-10 students in North Carolina are suspended from school, a rate 45 percent higher than the national average.

This report, *Short-Term Suspensions; Long-Term Consequences; Real Life Solutions*, delves deeper into school district data and policies regarding short-term suspensions. The findings of this report may be surprising to some:

- Many school district suspension policies are working to keep far too many children out of the classroom.
- Statewide, there are 216 suspensions for every 1,000 students enrolled. However, suspension rates in North Carolina range from 25 per 1,000 students to more than 600 per 1,000 students.
- There is wide variation in short-term suspension rates by district, by race and by gender.
- Suspensions double between fifth and sixth grade, peaking in ninth grade.
- More than 3,300 pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students were suspended in 2005.
- Disparate school suspension policies most affect black and American Indian students.
- School districts most likely to suspend are often located in the Eastern part of the state and have high poverty rates.
- Simple steps can be taken by schools to reduce the number of suspensions.



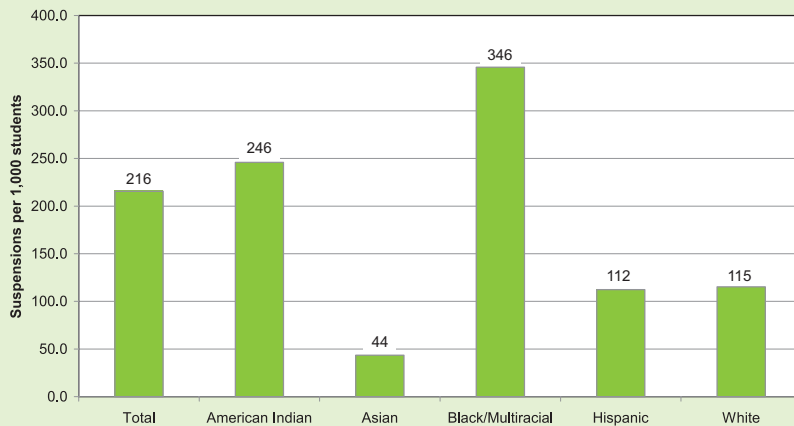
This extreme level of variation indicates that local policies and practices are key in determining suspension rates.

This extreme level of variation indicates that local policies and practices are key in determining suspension rates. Many factors—such as resource availability, access to special services, teacher training, number of class changes during a school day and district leadership—all contribute to the wide variation in suspension rates.

Deliberate action on the part of school leadership, teachers and parents can make a tremendous difference in reducing suspensions and improving student achievement.

Many school districts have worked diligently to reduce suspensions, resulting in notable declines in suspension rates. While the exact methods have varied, school districts have focused on the reasons for and reactions to specific behaviors, and have worked hard to provide students, teachers and staff with needed support. Examples of successful practices across

**Rate of Short-term Suspensions in North Carolina,
by Race and Ethnicity, 2004-2005**



Data calculations by Action for Children North Carolina using data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's *Annual Report of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2004-2005*.

Deliberate action on the part of school leadership, teachers and parents can make a tremendous difference in reducing suspensions and improving student achievement.

North Carolina, as described in *Short-Term Suspensions; Long-Term Consequences; Real Life Solutions*, include:

- 4 Using data to drive decisions and accountability;
- Altering class change schedules during the school day;
- Implementing Positive Behavioral Supports throughout the school;
- Creating Ninth Grade Academies to help students with the transition to high school;
- Drawing on existing community resources and supports to ensure students' needs are being met;
- Changing policies so that suspensions are not the "first course" of action; and
- Linking troubled students with physical and mental health services.

Clearly, many school districts are leading the way. With concentrated attention from each school district, suspension trends can improve. As short-term suspensions are reduced, it is likely that long-term suspensions and the school drop-out rate will decline over time. More students will be in school learning, and our workforce will be better prepared for the demands of the 21st century.

Introduction

Every child in North Carolina is constitutionally guaranteed an opportunity to a sound, basic education. Research repeatedly demonstrates, and common sense supports, that children who have positive school experiences, do well in school and go on to graduate are more likely to succeed as adults. Having access to quality education is an essential element for a child to become a productive, contributing adult.

School systems juggle many obligations to provide strong educational opportunities to all students. Just as qualified teachers and administrators are part of successful schools, so are policies and programs that support students' progress in school.

On any given school day in North Carolina, however, more than 1,600 students are not with their classmates actively learning because of suspensions.

Obviously, removing a dangerous student is crucial to maintaining a school climate in which other students are safe and able to learn. Non-threatening students, however, are also being suspended and for reasons from the trivial to severe misconduct. Indeed, the courts have recognized the ability of schools to suspend or expel students who violate a school's code of conduct. At the same time, though, the courts have repeatedly ruled that the state has a legal obligation to provide all students with an opportunity to a sound, basic education.

Data Are By Number of Suspensions, Not Number of Students

It is important to note that one student may be suspended multiple times throughout the school year. Indeed, on a statewide basis (2005), there are almost twice as many short-term suspensions (291,000) as there are students who are suspended (148,000). This means that, on average, suspended students are suspended approximately two times each. Thus, if a district reports 333 suspensions for every 1,000 students, it does **not** mean that one-third of the student body was suspended.

The data in this report focus on the number of **suspensions** per school district; **not** the number of students suspended. Please see **Data and Limitations** for more information.

Is Race A Factor?

Disparate policies in North Carolina seem to most affect black and American Indian students. Overall, school policies result in Asian students being suspended the least often, white and Hispanic students being suspended roughly equally, American Indian students suspended twice as often and black students suspended three times as often as white or Hispanic students.

In 2005, Action for Children North Carolina released *One Out of Ten: The Growing Suspension Crisis in North Carolina*, noting that more than 1-out-of-every-10 students in North Carolina are suspended from school, a rate 45 percent higher than the national average.

These findings caused Action for Children to delve deeper into what school districts are doing in terms of rates of suspension, policies regarding suspensions and programs to reduce suspensions. The findings may be surprising to some:

- Many school district suspension policies are working to keep far too many children out of the classroom.
- Suspension rates in North Carolina range from 25 per 1,000 students to more than 600 per 1,000 students.
- Suspensions double between fifth and sixth grade, peaking in ninth grade.
- More than 3,300 pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students were suspended in 2005.
- Disparate school suspension policies most affect black and American Indian students.
- School districts most likely to suspend are often located in the Eastern part of the state and have high poverty rates.
- Simple steps can be taken by schools to reduce the number of suspensions.

School suspensions must receive continued, focused attention so that all of North Carolina's children can receive the opportunity to the sound, basic education guaranteed by our state constitution. Students in North Carolina deserve no less.

Short-Term Suspensions:

The Pipeline to Long-Term Suspensions and School Failure

There is no standard state Code of Conduct in North Carolina; rather each school district is responsible for setting its own policies for the circumstances necessary to suspend students from the classroom. Whenever and wherever suspensions occur, research demonstrates that students are more likely to suffer other academic problems and may go on to drop out of school completely.

How do short-term suspensions operate? Short-term suspensions last for 10 days or less and generally occur for fairly minor infractions. Short-term suspensions may be used for such infractions as insubordination, chronic tardiness, truancy, leaving the school grounds without permission or remaining on school grounds after school hours.

Principals have the authority to suspend students short-term without approval or intervention from the local superintendent. When schools suspend students for the short-term, students may be ejected from school or placed in “in-school” suspension in a special classroom at the discretion of the principal.

What constitutes behavior sufficient for suspension varies widely by school and school district. Indeed, the data confirm that school districts with very similar student bodies may suspend students at very different rates. For example, the Weldon City School District suspends students at half the rate of the Halifax County School District. Weldon City is in Halifax County and the districts share similar demographics.¹

Why focus on short-term suspensions? Many North Carolina education experts agree that it is rare for a student to be suspended long-term or expelled without first experiencing multiple short-term suspensions. Research shows that suspensions are correlated with poor academic performance, being less connected to and engaged in school and suffering from poor health (especially mental health).¹ National studies also reveal that students who are suspended from school are three

¹ Halifax County has 5,139 students; 89 percent are black; 5 percent are white; and 7 percent are another race or ethnicity (largely American Indian). Weldon City Schools have 1,058 students; 97 percent are black; 2 percent are white; and 1 percent is another race or ethnicity.

times more likely to drop out of school than other students.ⁱⁱ

By reducing short-term suspensions, it is likely that, over time, long-term suspensions will be reduced as well. Also, far more students experience short-term suspensions than long-term suspensions. (In academic year 2005, schools in North Carolina enacted short-term suspensions more than 290,000 times. In contrast, schools used long-term suspensions just over 3,100 times.)

Long-term suspensions and expulsions

When students are suspended for more than 10 days, the suspension is considered long-term. Long-term suspensions last an average of 77 days but can last for the entire school year. Students may participate (but often do not) in Alternative Learning Programs during long-term suspensions. (Districts may not offer Alternative Learning Programs and/or may not have appropriate openings available.)

Approximately one-third of long-term suspensions are for “misconduct,” such as rule violations or truancy, and another one-third for drugs, alcohol or aggressive behavior. In 2005, there were just over 3,100 long-term suspensions.

Expulsions occur when a student is removed from the school and cannot return to a school in that district again (with a few exceptions). In 2005, 68 students were expelled. This is down sharply from more than 200 students each of the preceding three years.

Quick Facts

- ⊙ During the 2004-2005 school year, there were more than 290,000 short-term suspensions from North Carolina schools.*
- ⊙ Overall, approximately 148,000 students were suspended at least one time.
- ⊙ Statewide, there were 216 suspensions for every 1,000 students.
- ⊙ There were 297 suspensions for every 1,000 high school students. There were 141 suspensions for every 1,000 students in kindergarten through eighth grade.
- ⊙ Short-term suspensions last 10 days or less. On average, they last for three days.
- ⊙ Long-term suspensions extend for more than 10 days.

* The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reports 252,000 total suspensions. Problems affected the data for Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, causing an estimated 37,000 suspensions to be omitted from the Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2004-2005.

The Data

The State

Schools in North Carolina are resorting to suspensions at a rate far higher than the national average.ⁱⁱⁱ Statewide, schools suspend 1-out-of-10 students each year.

Transition Years Are Key Time for Suspensions: The statewide data reveal that the transition into middle school and high school appear to be a time of particular vulnerability when school systems need to focus on policies that support students so they can stay in school and learn. Specifically, suspensions in North Carolina double between fifth and sixth grade and peak in ninth grade. However, suspensions may, and do, occur as early as kindergarten, with more than 3,300 pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students suspended in 2005.

Males Suspended More Than Two-and-a-Half Times as Often as Females: Every school district in the state suspends males more frequently than females, often up to three times more. Statewide, there are 105 suspensions for every 1,000 female students enrolled, compared to 267 suspensions for every 1,000 male students.

Suspensions Can Decline: Some school districts have actively crafted policies aimed at reducing the number of school suspensions. Other school districts should take note of policies and practices they have put in place to affect this decline and to see clear, measurable improvement.

School Districts

While the state numbers tell an important story, they mask the disparity among school districts statewide. Some school districts appear to enact suspensions far more frequently than others.

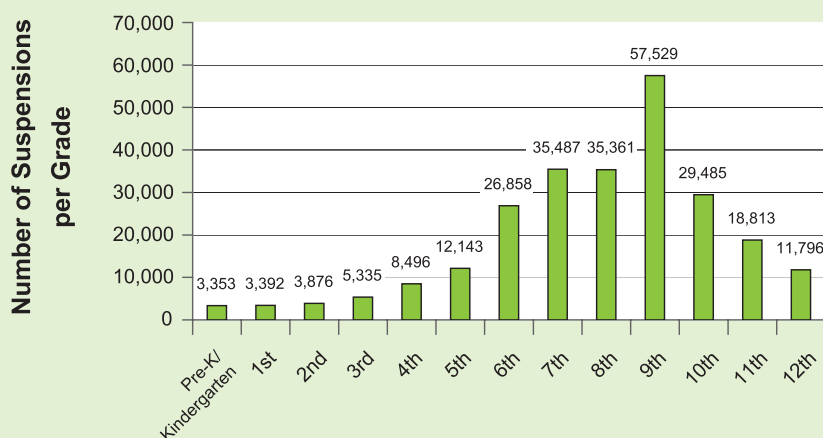
School districts, and some individual schools, each have their own standards of conduct and what behavior constitutes cause for suspension. It is not unheard of that young students have been suspended for standing out of line, or older students for rolling their eyes. While such instances are likely to be rare, they highlight how much is determined locally. Thus, local school districts and individual schools have tremendous influence and ability to improve suspension rates and keep children learning in the classroom.

[L]ocal, focused attention to limiting suspensions can be one of the most effective solutions to reduce suspensions, keep more students in the classroom and improve the likelihood that all students will receive a sound, basic education.

Across North Carolina, schools average 216 suspensions for every 1,000 students enrolled. Yet, Bladen County had 23 suspensions per 1,000 students enrolled, and Graham County had fewer than three. At the other end of the spectrum, Vance County had more than 600 suspensions for every 1,000 students enrolled in 2004-2005.

While each school district (indeed each teacher) faces a unique set of challenges, this extreme level of variation suggests that students in some districts are far more likely to be suspended, probably for similar behavior, than children in other districts. It is highly unlikely that students in Vance County are 26 times more likely to misbehave than students in Bladen County. Obviously, local policies and practices play a key role. Indeed, local, focused attention to limiting suspensions can be one of the most effective solutions to reduce suspensions, keep more students in the classroom and improve the likelihood that all students will receive a sound, basic education.

Suspensions Increase in Transition Years (6th and 9th Grades)



Trends

Even with local variation, there appear to be some overall trends. School districts most likely to suspend are often in the Eastern part of the state and have high poverty rates. However, Bladen County, which is also in the Eastern part of North Carolina and has one of the 10 worst child poverty rates in the state, is one of the districts least likely to suspend. Graham County (in Western North Carolina) also has high poverty but low suspension rates.

In short, demographics are not destiny. Rather, other factors—such as resource availability, access to special services, teacher training, number of class changes during the school day and school district leadership—contribute to the wide variation in suspension rates. Thus, deliberate action on the part of school leadership, teachers and parents can make a tremendous difference in reducing suspensions and improving student achievement.

School Districts Most Likely to Suspend

North Carolina must ensure that all children, regardless of where they live, have an equal chance to stay on track in school. However, the data show that some school districts seem far more likely to turn to suspensions than others.

Looking at three years of data, 10 school districts consistently have more than 300 suspensions for every 1,000 students enrolled. Of those, four (Vance, Edgecombe, Hertford and Pitt) have had more than 400 suspensions per 1,000 students each of the past three years.² Many of the counties suspending the greatest rate of students have child poverty rates 25 percent or higher.^{iv} (The state average is 19 percent.)

School Districts with More Than 300 Suspensions for Every 1,000 Students Enrolled in 2003, 2004 and 2005

Anson County	Lexington City
Edgecombe County	Pitt County
Elizabeth City–Pasquotank	Scotland County
Greene County	Vance County
Hertford County	Washington County

² In academic year 2005, Vance County had 614 suspensions for every 1,000 students; Edgecombe: 541; Hertford: 453; and Pitt: 441.



School Districts Least Likely to Suspend

In contrast, 20 school districts have consistently had 100 or fewer suspensions per 1,000 students. These districts are geographically diverse, stretching from Cherokee in the west to Dare in the east; Ashe, Alleghany and Stokes in the north to Transylvania, Polk and Bladen in the south. Two of these districts—Graham and Bladen—have child poverty rates of more than 25 percent.

School Districts with Fewer Than 100 Suspensions for Every 1,000 Students Enrolled in 2003, 2004 and 2005

Alleghany County	Elkin City
Ashe County	Graham County
Avery County	McDowell County
Bladen County	Mount Airy City
Catawba County	Polk County
Chapel Hill–Carrboro	Randolph County
Cherokee County	Stokes County
Clay County	Transylvania County
Dare County	Watauga County
Davie County	Yadkin County

Every School District is Unique

As further evidence that local policies and practice have a substantial impact on suspension levels, virtually every school district can be differentiated on some measure. Some districts seem to have policies that result in average or low suspension rates, but high levels of racial disparity. For example, Wake and Guilford Counties are both close to the state average when it comes to suspension rates, but have

Technical Issues Contributing to Data Variation

What “counts” as a suspension: School districts count suspensions differently. For example, long-term suspended students are often referred to Alternative Learning Programs. Some districts may code that student as “suspended” or “expelled” while others may consider that student “enrolled” in an Alternative Learning Program. Anecdotally, it appears that some school districts code kindergartners who have been dismissed from school for lack of appropriate vaccinations as suspended while others do not. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is working actively to better standardize what counts as a suspension.

Data cautions: N.C. DPI cautions against using any of DPI data to make comparisons among counties, noting concerns about multiple data systems, discrepancies between data kept locally and reported to the state and lack of standardization. (See **Data and Limitations** section.) While the data may be imperfect because of self-reporting or other concerns, this is the official data collected, verified and reported every year by the DPI in its *Annual Study of Suspension and Expulsions*.

suspension rates for black students that are four to five times higher than the suspension rate for white students. Chapel Hill-Carrboro suspends black and Hispanic students at approximately one-third the state average. However, their short-term suspension rates for minority students compared to whites are much higher than the state average. Chapel Hill-Carrboro schools are twice as likely to suspend Hispanic students than white students, and more than six times as likely to suspend black students.

Furthermore, some school districts with almost identical school populations have widely different suspension rates trending in opposite directions. The Halifax County Local Education Agency is currently one of the school districts in the state suspending the highest rate of students, with 323 suspensions for every 1,000 students enrolled. Just two years ago, Halifax suspended students at almost half that rate (185). Weldon City, which is in Halifax County, has moved in the opposite direction, going from 333 suspensions per 1,000 students to 180 in the same time period.

Information about specific school districts is available in this report and can be accessed online at: <http://www.ncchild.org>. Click on Data and Statistics.

Racial Disparities

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction notes that its suspension data may be most useful for comparing subgroups within school districts—boys compared to girls, American Indians compared to Hispanics, etc. These data begin to document whether or not some specific schools or districts appear to advance or apply rules and policies in a way that affect certain student groups more than others. Suspension policies and practices may not be evenly applied to all children, resulting in wide variations.

Anecdotally, there are cases that existing policies are not applied evenly, that white students are reprimanded but black students are suspended for the same infraction. Professionals who work with students facing suspensions often express concerns that teachers or administrators may sometimes lack training in how to ameliorate certain behaviors or how to interpret cultural norms.

Research from the field of juvenile justice demonstrates that policies that may appear “race neutral” may indeed affect one group more strongly. Key front-line staff may lack needed cultural sensitivity.³ The same research shows that system improvements alone are often inadequate to address racial disparity; rather, specific policies and practices must be crafted to reduce disproportionate impacts on minority children and youth.⁴

Schools Suspend American Indian Students at Twice the Rate of White Students: Statewide, American Indian students are more than twice as likely to be suspended as white students. However, very few school districts (22) have more than 100 American Indian students. Among those, once again, it is largely the urban districts who suspend American Indian students at twice the rate of white students: Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Cumberland, Guilford, Robeson, Wake and Winston-Salem/Forsyth.⁴

³ For example, in Multnomah County, Oregon, criteria for less-restrictive community placement options were changed from determining the status of the nuclear family to looking at other adults in the child's life. In Sacramento, California, court workers thought that Asian youth were being disrespectful when they looked down, but for many Asians such behavior demonstrates submission to authority.

⁴ Many districts with fewer than 100 American Indian students enrolled also suspended American Indian students at twice the rate of white students. Following is a list of counties having between 20 and 100 American Indian students followed by two numbers in parentheses. The first number is how often American Indian students were suspended short-term and the second number is the total number of American Indian students enrolled in the school system: Bladen (2/56), Burke (11/23), Cleveland (14/20), Franklin (9/26), Iredell (12/39), Macon (17/20), Union (20/91) and Whiteville City (7/30).

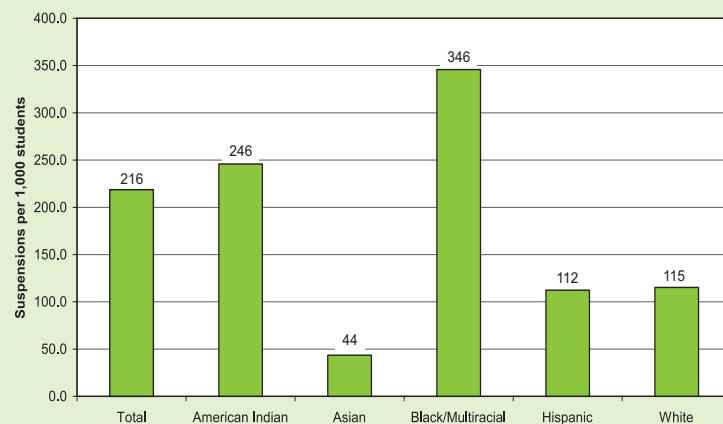
Schools Suspend Asian Students The Least: Asian students are the least likely to be suspended of all the races/ethnicities. There were only 1,202 suspensions of Asian students in academic year 2005. Overall, Asian students were about one-third as likely to be suspended as white students. Of the small handful of counties that suspended Asian students at a rate marginally greater than white students, only four had Asian populations greater than 100 (Cleveland: 130; Robeson: 113; Davidson: 161; Nash/Rocky Mount: 223).

Schools Suspend Black Students More Than All Groups and at a Rate Three Times Higher Than White Students: Statewide, school systems are almost three times more likely to resort to suspensions for black students than for white or Hispanic students. A few districts suspend black students at four times or more the rate they suspend white students. These districts are largely urban: Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, Guilford, Lenoir, New Hanover, Pitt, Tyrrell, Wake, Wilson and Winston-Salem/Forsyth.⁵ Chapel Hill-Carrboro is of particular interest since it suspends black students at one-third the state rate overall, but seems six times more likely to resort to suspension for black students than for white students. Statewide, there are 346 suspensions for every 1,000 black students enrolled.

Schools Suspend Hispanic and White Students at Similar Rates: Statewide, school districts use suspensions approximately 115 or fewer times for every 1,000 white or Hispanic students. (Specifically, 112 suspensions per 1,000 Hispanic students enrolled, compared

⁵ Cherokee County and Elkin City schools also fall into this category. Cherokee has 125 black students and 26 suspensions of black students, compared to 174 suspensions among 3,388 white students. Elkin City schools had 11 suspensions among 64 black students, compared to 28 suspensions among 971 white students. While Tyrrell is small, it had 122 suspensions among 265 black students, compared to 25 suspensions among 312 white students.

Rate of Short-term Suspensions in North Carolina, by Race and Ethnicity, 2004-2005



Data calculations by Action for Children North Carolina using data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Annual Report of Suspensions and Expulsions 2004-2005.

to 115 suspensions for every 1,000 white students enrolled.) However, individual school districts may vary substantially from that average. Indeed, a handful of school districts are at least 50 percent more likely to resort to suspensions for Hispanic students than white students: Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, Greene, Moore, Richmond, Wake, Winston-Salem/Forsyth, Wilkes and Yadkin.⁶

Schools Suspend White Students at a Rate Far Lower than the Overall State Average: A small number of school districts (Alleghany, Ashe, Jackson, McDowell, Polk and Yancey Counties) have slightly higher suspension rates for white students than for black students. Statewide, school districts suspend approximately 115 white students for every 1,000 white students enrolled.

⁶ Four smaller districts also suspended Hispanic students at 1.5 times the rate of white students. However, once again the total number of Hispanic students in the school was relatively low, which may skew comparison data unfairly. Following is a list of counties followed by two numbers in parentheses. The first number is how often Hispanic students were suspended short-term and the second number is the total number of Hispanic students enrolled in the school system: Anson (16/65); Cherokee (6/61); Clay (1/6); Halifax (12/50); Hyde (11/43); and Mooresville City (33/144).

Conclusion: In North Carolina, there is tremendous variation in suspension rates among school districts and among races and ethnicities within school districts. Revamping local practices and adopting policies to reduce suspensions overall will help keep more children of all races and ethnicities in the classroom learning. However, the lessons from other fields of research suggest that while the “rising tide may lift all boats,” it will not lift them equally unless school districts also explicitly focus on policies and practices to reduce the current racial disparities in suspension rates.

[S]ystem improvements alone are often inadequate to address racial disparity; rather, specific policies and practices must be crafted to reduce disproportionate impacts on minority children and youth.



Many North Carolina school districts have begun work targeted at reducing school suspensions. Their policies and practices serve as models for other districts seeking to ensure that more students stay on track and have access to a sound, basic education.

Durham County: Focusing on Data and Training; Implementing Positive Behavioral Support

Durham County schools experienced a steep drop in suspension rates between 2004 and 2005. Durham is a largely urban county. In 2005, Durham's school population was 27 percent white, 59 percent black and 12 percent Hispanic.

Data-Driven Decisions and Accountability

Initially, school district leadership from the Superintendent's office focused on researching suspensions using detailed school-level discipline and infraction data. School officials met monthly with principals and assistant principals of each school to discuss their individual discipline problems and practices anecdotally and statistically. Durham Public Schools' principals and assistant principals then became directly responsible for completing and approving final suspension reports and meeting quarterly disciplinary benchmarks.

School administrators also developed a comprehensive tracking system which assisted leadership in determining the number of suspensions and disciplinary infractions and more specifically, during *what times of day* and *where* within the schools such incidents occurred. Using these data, school

personnel noticed that quite a few disciplinary infractions occurred during class changes, when students had more opportunity to intermingle. To solve this, administrators assigned more teachers and staff to hallway monitoring to increase their visibility which, in turn, decreased the number of hallway confrontations among students. This more expansive tracking system also allowed school officials to identify specific students who were at-risk for academic failure and disciplinary action earlier, before the student failed academically and/or was recommended for suspension.

Support and Training for Teachers and Staff

Durham Public Schools implemented the nationally-recognized Whole School Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) Program. The Positive Behavioral Support Program provides a whole school process for teaching students socially appropriate behaviors to ensure that each student is academically successful. Recognizing that "students don't care about what you know until they know you care about them," school administrators equipped staff with every available resource to assist them in establishing and maintaining positive relationships with students.

Another program that Durham uses is Capturing Kids' Hearts. It is a three-day training that educates teachers and administrators on how to successfully energize, reorganize and more effectively manage classrooms, and motivate students. This comprehensive training includes techniques on building trusting relationships with students and parents as well as on behavior management techniques. Durham officials report this approach was a key component to their successful efforts to decrease suspensions.

Positive Behavioral Support:^{vi} Involving the Whole School to Improve Behavior

One key element of Durham's success was the inclusion of PBS whole-school training. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has worked with 296 schools in 66 school districts to implement PBS on a local level. (Most schools receiving this training did not start PBS until academic year 2006 and thus will not be reflected in the data for academic year 2005 in this report. The school districts in the table on page 12 each had a substantial percentage of schools using PBS by 2005.)

The PBS initiative is part of the North Carolina State Improvement Program funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and administered by the Exceptional Children Department within DPI. PBS is a “whole-school” approach that involves the entire school staff in a team-based system. Approaches to types of discipline are proactive, instructional and outcome-based.

DPI data show that this model is remarkably successful at reducing suspensions. It also results in other positive outcomes for students, teachers and administrators. Most districts with a substantial portion of schools using PBS have seen substantial decreases in short-term suspensions. (See table below.) Since behavioral problems decrease, students have more time to learn, teachers have more time to teach and administrators have more time to devote to school improvement. Test scores also improve. Some examples from individual schools:

- Secondary schools adopting PBS in Durham County had 500 fewer suspensions and gained almost 4,000 hours of instructional time, with black students gaining the most instructional time.
- Between 2003 and 2005, one elementary school in Brunswick County reduced office disciplinary referrals by 66 percent and experienced an 8 percent increase in students scoring at or above proficient on End-of-Grade tests.
- An elementary school in Yancey County decreased its in-school suspensions by 72 percent, increased reading scores by 7 percent and gained four days of administrative time after implementing PBS.
- An elementary school in Davidson County experienced a 20 percent decrease in office referrals, a 49 percent decrease in out-of-school suspensions and a 9 percent increase in students scoring at or above proficient on End-of-Grade tests.

School Districts with Plans to Implement PBS for the Entire School System

- Brunswick County Schools
- Durham County Public Schools
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
- Gaston County Schools
- Iredell/Statesville Schools
- Nash/Rocky-Mount Schools
- Pender County Schools
- Wake County Schools
- Warren County Schools

To date, a substantial portion of schools that have implemented PBS are elementary schools. This focus can help establish more young children on a positive path toward school success. However, in the short-run, since most suspensions occur in high school, statewide suspension data may not immediately begin to fully reflect the effects of PBS.

Ninth Grade Academies: Helping with the Transition to High School

Ninth grade is a time of particular transition for students, moving from middle school to high school. Ninth graders alone accounted for 23 percent of all short-term suspensions in 2005. Ninth grade is also the year during which most drop-outs occur, accounting for one-third of all drop-outs.^{vii}

District	Percent of Schools Participating in PBS in 2006	2005 Rate of Suspensions Per 1,000 Students Enrolled	Change in Rate of Suspensions from 2004 to 2005
Asheboro City	88%	130	- 10%
Durham County	72%	207	- 35%
Perquimans County	100%	226	- 31%
Warren County	100%	231	28%
Weldon City	66%	180	- 45%
North Carolina	12%	202	- 14%

In recognition of this fact, many school districts across North Carolina operate some version of a Ninth Grade Academy. Judge Howard Manning, in writing about high schools, declared that “focusing on ninth graders is absolutely critical to their future high school success and drop-out prevention.” He goes on to note: “It is a fact and common knowledge among competent educators that when ninth graders come to high school they must be properly channeled and provided with focused instruction so they can succeed. Those that do not receive such focused instruction and attention run a great risk of being distracted, losing interest, doing poorly and thus, are launched on a path to mediocrity or failure in their high school careers.” He adds that “a high school principal...would have a difficult time justifying the non-existence of an effective Ninth Grade Academy.”^{viii}

While the exact structure of Ninth Grade Academies varies, they tend to provide services that “wrap around” the incoming high school students—often at-risk students—and provide special supports. Ninth Grade Academies vary in focus to include suspension reduction, academic achievement or mastery of basic subjects, etc.

In these academies, a core group of teachers generally works with the same set of students. These teachers may have a common planning time and work together to set goals, monitor the needs of students, craft solutions and track progress. Emphasis may be placed on attendance to help establish a strong foundation for coming to school and staying in school. Activities in the first term may be structured to provide students with concrete goals and tools with which to make wise choices during the last three years of high school. Assessments of Ninth Grade Academies document reduced suspensions, improved attendance, improved promotion and improved academic achievement.^{ix}

ReSET Project: Identifying Local Needs and Strengths with Help from DJJDP

Using lessons learned from previous research on alternatives to suspension, the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Center for the Prevention of School Violence (DJJDP - Center) launched the ReSET Project (Response to Suspension and Expulsion Trends) in 27 school districts.



This DJJDP project partners with school districts to identify local needs and strengths and helps them implement promising strategies to reduce suspensions. DJJDP is quick to point out that promising strategies must be based on the specific needs facing each school and the existing infrastructure supports: “There is no one answer for schools to reduce suspensions and expulsions. However, schools completing self-assessments, utilizing school and community resources, and selecting strong driven leaders have the process of reducing their suspension and expulsion rates in hand.”^x

The North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has identified six promising strategies that enhance efforts already being employed by participating school districts. These strategies could also be classified as helpful elements to reduce problem behaviors that can lead to suspensions.^{xi}

Leadership: Leadership, particularly from administrators, is critical for the implementation of any strategy to reduce suspensions. Administrators from participating school districts can help to identify strengths and weaknesses of current efforts, take action to address weaknesses and serve as role models. They also empower others, such as assistant principals or student support staff, to act to reduce suspensions.

Staff Development: Targeted staff training helps school personnel develop the necessary skills to promote the success of students and prevent behaviors that may lead to disciplinary action. Examples of training topics may include conflict management, bullying prevention, gang awareness and prevention and the effects of poverty on behavior.

Community Involvement: As students and schools are part of the larger community, it is imperative to have community involvement. School districts can partner with community leaders and organizations to provide career exploration programs, job shadowing and other options for students who are at risk of being suspended.

Parental Involvement: Research shows that parental involvement in school contributes to student success and achievement. Schools can promote efforts to improve involvement in a variety of ways, including home-visits and newsletters.

Alternative Placement: Alternative placement programs offer students with less severe behavioral issues an opportunity to continue their education. Examples of alternative placement programs include in-school suspension, alternative schools, day reporting centers, community programs and Saturday academies.

School Climate: School climate can affect student behaviors and attitudes. Schools can improve their climate through positive recognition programs, rewards and student engagement.

Wayne County: Linking Troubled Students with Physical and Mental Health Services

Wayne County is located in Eastern North Carolina. The child poverty rate is 21 percent, 11 percent worse than the state average. The student population is 47 percent white, 43 percent black and 8 percent Hispanic. As a high poverty Eastern county, one would expect Wayne County to be one of the school districts in the state suspending students at one of the highest rates statewide. However, at 241 suspensions per 1,000 students, it does not approach the 400 suspensions per 1,000 students experienced by some demographically-similar school districts.

As a response to concerns about health care accessibility (not suspensions), Wayne County leaders established Wayne Initiative for School Health (WISH)



centers by setting up medical centers in four county middle schools. Organizations represented on the planning team included Wayne County Public Schools, the Wayne County Health Department, Goldsboro Pediatrics, Wayne Memorial Hospital, Communities In Schools, Wayne County Community College, the Department of Social Services and Wayne County Mental Health. Community partner organizations provide most of the staffing for the centers, including a registered nurse, health educators, nutritionists and mental health counselors.^{xii}

By using existing health insurance dollars to pay private professionals to provide mental health services in the schools, Wayne County has been able to link more troubled youth with the specialized services they need. In North Carolina, Medicaid and Health Choice, as well as private plans, will reimburse professionals for mental health services provided in the schools. Parents can be directly involved and present at the school for mental health sessions involving their children. Children receive the services they need, and suspensions can be reduced. The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health has noted that children who commit acts that lead to suspension are often depressed, mentally ill or victims of abuse. Furthermore, the suspension itself may lead to isolation, suicidal ideation and substance abuse.^{xiii} The Wayne County approach of addressing physical and mental health needs seems to be a promising practice for reducing suspensions.

However, the primary intent of the Wayne County effort is not suspension reduction but health improvement. Documented success of the WISH

centers includes a 75 percent decrease in teen pregnancy and a decrease in emergency room visits by adolescents. Additionally, as more children receive needed behavioral support, it appears that overall behavior improves and learning can be enhanced for all students. The WISH centers have also demonstrated a 4 percent improvement in school attendance and improved performance on standardized testing.^{xiv}

21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing Academic Enrichment Opportunities

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLCs) are focused on improving academic achievement of at-risk students. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, test data and anecdotal reports indicate positive trends for participating students in test scores and attendance rates as well as decreases in discipline issues.^{xv} Indeed, two of the longest running CCLCs (Bladen County and Chapel Hill-Carrboro) are among the school districts with the lowest suspension rates.^{xvi}

Overall, the 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant funds programs that provide academic enrichment opportunities to students from Title 1 and high poverty rate schools. These federal funds are administered by the Department of Public Instruction and can be granted to school districts, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and Institutions of Higher Education to operate before-school, after-school, weekend and summer services for K-12 youth. In North Carolina, 21st CCLCs target students who perform at low levels on End-of-Grade tests or otherwise demonstrate behaviors that place them at-risk for dropping out of school. Many of the programs are sponsored by or partner with community-based organizations such as Communities In Schools and the YMCA. The program's primary focus is to increase the students' academic achievement, especially in the areas of reading and math. Other activities range from science exploration to physical fitness to cultural and performing arts. These 21st Century Community Learning Centers also emphasize the importance of parental involvement and offer educational opportunities to the families of participating students.^{xvii}

More information on 21st CCLCs can be found at: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/alternative/21ccl/>.

More Resources

General Data

N.C. DPI reports on suspensions, school enrollment and demographics, testing results and other data: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org>. The *Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions*, is available online at: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/alternative/reports/>.

Link Between Suspensions and Negative Outcomes for Students

In 2005, Action for Children (then, the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute) issued a report analyzing statewide 2004 suspension data. *One Out of Ten: The Growing Suspension Crisis in North Carolina* is available online at: http://www.ncchild.org/images/stories/PDFs/Suspension_Report,_September_2005.pdf.

Positive Behavioral Supports

N.C. DPI has information on the PBS model, including an implementation evaluation, Q&A and explanation of training available online at: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/positivebehavior/>.

Ninth Grade Academics and High School Success

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools website has extensive research from around the nation about high school reform, available online at: <http://www.chccs.k12.nc.us> (to access click on high school reform).

More of What Works:

Promising Practices from Around the Nation

Enhancing the Learning Atmosphere in Schools

Supports In Schools (Communities In Schools)

Communities In Schools (CIS) is the nation's largest stay-in-school network. CIS operates in approximately one-third of North Carolina counties and is focusing expansion efforts in Eastern North Carolina. CIS brings caring adults into the schools and community sites to meet children's needs. Based on the premise that the solution to student underachievement and the drop-out problem requires a commitment from all community members—parents, social service providers, businesses, civic organizations, local government and educators—CIS brings resources, services, business partners, parents and volunteers into public schools and after-school sites. In Alaska, CIS focused specifically on four outcomes, including reducing suspensions, and documented that 97 percent of the at-risk students served by CIS had fewer suspensions, and 95 percent of tracked students had improved behavior.^{xviii}



In-House Mentoring for Teachers

To provide new teachers with more supports, some schools pair novice teachers with seasoned colleagues. This can improve and quicken mastery of classroom management skills. Research from Cleveland, Ohio, does not specifically address suspensions but does find that teachers without such supports were almost three times as likely to say they were considering leaving their jobs as did those who said they had received support.^{xxi xxii}

16 Class Changes

Limiting class changes during the school day—a strategy adopted by Durham County Schools—is effective at reducing the behavior that may result in suspensions. Anecdotally, education advocates report that most behavior leading to suspensions happens in the halls. Data from Ohio show specifically that limiting class changes (and thus time out of the classroom) reduces suspensions. Block scheduling with later lunch periods led to a 12 percent decline in suspensions among middle school students and a 9 percent decline for high school students.^{xix}

Small Learning Communities

Similar to Ninth Grade Academies, small learning communities have a specified group of teachers working with a specified group of students, often in defined parts of the school building. This again limits student movement and allows teachers and students more time to get to know and understand each other. Research shows this model improves student success. For example, Best Practices High School in Chicago boasts an 84 percent graduation rate (high above the citywide average of 67 percent), and more than 70 percent of its students are admitted to college. (The school is 76 percent low-income and serves mostly black and Hispanic students.)^{xx}

Alternatives to Short-term Suspensions

After-Hours School Time

Instead of keeping the student out of the classroom, school policies may be designed to keep students in class during the regular school day and also provide additional supports after school hours. After-school detentions may occur before school, after school or on Saturdays. Students may report to a specified school location and to a designated teacher to make up missed work or to receive specific instruction in behavior modification. Students are required to be on time and to bring reading, writing and study materials for the period assigned. School districts across the country have used this strategy successfully.^{xxiii} However, there are some concerns that this strategy places transportation hardships on families.

Require Community Service

Instead of being kept away from school, students may be required to do community service activities outside the school day (or during the time they would otherwise be at home or on the streets). One of North Carolina's alternative-to-suspension programs is

More of What Works *(continued)*

well-known and recognized as a model program. The B.A.T.S. (Burke Alternatives to Suspension) program is a school/community approach focused on combining volunteer work with successful completion of assigned schoolwork during short-term suspension. Students in grades six through twelve serve their suspension time while providing volunteer service at various county nonprofit agencies. For example, youth in the B.A.T.S. program work in nonprofit organizations assisting with office duties including answering phones, sorting mail, greeting guests, helping with inventory and a host of other duties. While time is set aside each day so that school work may be completed, the focus of the program is on behavior modification through volunteer activities. Students also receive credit for attendance and completed homework.^{xxiv}

Quality In-School Suspensions

Sometimes a student may need to be removed from the classroom, but not necessarily the school. At such times, high-quality in-school suspension may be in order. In-school suspensions must provide more than a room and teacher to be successful. Research from

Boston College identifies necessary characteristics: 1) ensuring an in-school suspension is appropriate based on the infraction; 2) limiting terms so that students are not suspended indefinitely; 3) providing problem-solving and/or mediation sessions, which result in written contracts that spell out future expectations; 4) ensuring students complete their academic assignments; 5) providing professionals to staff the program, such as a teacher who can assess students for unidentified learning difficulties and assist in assignment completion; and, 6) providing assessments by a counselor who can explore root causes of problems, refer students to community services and engage with parents. Schools that focused on quality in-school suspensions have seen dramatic declines in safety and discipline issues.^{xxv}

Conclusion

Action for Children North Carolina hopes this report will catalyze focused dialogue at the school, community, school district, county commission and state levels aimed at improving policies that keep students in school. Some of this dialogue may be best focused on reducing the overall number of suspensions. Other conversations may more appropriately concentrate on ways to equalize the suspension rates among various races and ethnicities.

The simple reality is that one unnecessary suspension is too many; *all* of North Carolina's children deserve a sound, basic education. The local debate should not just be about the numbers; it should be about what local strategies will work best in each community to keep students in the classroom and learning environments strong. Action for Children details many successful strategies from across the state and nation to support and inspire local action. It is up to advocates across North Carolina to apply these lessons to craft local policies and practices to ensure that children are in school and receiving a sound, basic education.



School District-Level Data

Short-term Suspension Rates (per 1,000)									
	Average Daily Membership	Short-Term Suspensions			Rates by Race/Ethnicity ¹				
	2004-2005	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	White	Black/ Multi-Racial ²	Hispanic	American Indian	Asian
North Carolina	1,347,177	213	234	202	115	346	112	246	44
Alamance-Burlington	21,614	227.37	291.3	213.2	154.5	381.5	160.4	142.9	10.1
Alexander County	5,680	138.27	131.1	143.0	136.0	285.7	143.4	-	37.2
Alleghany County	1,508	22.04	27.1	45.8	45.9	-	50.0	-	-
Anson County	4,382	486.44	388.8	531.3	165.1	753.0	246.2	-	85.7
Ashe County	3,208	59.25	45.7	94.8	93.8	57.7	121.5	-	-
Avery County	2,322	48.04	90.2	94.3	92.6	-	86.0	-	-
Beaufort County	7,224	270.26	344.4	343.4	174.1	593.9	112.2	-	-
Bertie County	3,349	132.82	97.9	106.0	49.3	115.8	-	-	-
Bladen County	5,726	46.55	26.8	22.7	17.8	26.6	23.8	35.7	-
Brunswick County	10,932	234.71	209.1	157.4	129.9	253.1	87.0	125.0	-
Buncombe County	25,255	147.17	161.5	130.9	114.3	308.8	97.4	218.5	16.1
Asheville City	3,883	345.66	356.3	260.9	134.1	430.2	106.1	-	-
Burke County	14,581	118.37	128.7	137.2	137.6	190.8	142.7	-	69.6
Cabarrus County	22,446	184.49	191.0	189.1	142.1	408.3	162.0	238.1	36.3
Kannapolis City	4,608	237.72	252.6	227.0	143.0	406.5	164.8	-	51.9
Caldwell County	13,029	104.22	122.6	112.4	97.1	281.5	79.9	-	38.8
Camden County	1,674	131.09	122.8	115.9	110.1	154.4	-	-	-
Carteret County	8,218	187.83	188.7	163.8	149.0	280.9	173.9	-	57.1
Caswell County	3,346	352	192	239	174	332	95	-	-
Catawba County	16,981	97	98	100	94	214	87	-	37
Hickory City	4,429	349	328	238	160	470	114	-	55
Newton Conover City	2,815	207	162	92	93	140	49	-	26
Chatham County	7,404	155	151	133	106	250	82	-	-
Cherokee County	3,641	66	58	57	51	226	98	55	-
Edenton/Chowan	2,436	193	227	184	99	278	-	-	-
Clay County	1,288	10	5	26	26	-	-	-	-
Cleveland County	17,250	-	-	302	224	482	198	-	231
Columbus County	6,917	139	146	183	106	295	61	157	-
Whiteville City	2,730	203	121	203	112	307	44	-	-
Craven County	14,635	227	267	292	164	526	133	-	52
Cumberland County	52,521	186	204	182	88	268	108	204	47
Currituck County	3,867	190	166	43	40	82	15	-	-
Dare County	4,889	75	72	74	71	161	53	-	-
Davidson County	19,608	198	176	178	176	273	105	150	217
Lexington City	3,092	471	304	386	399	514	125	-	262
Thomasville City	2,541	454	260	263	190	360	139	-	-
Davie County	6,229	76	68	77	66	182	74	-	-
Duplin County	8,887	358	372	293	191	477	222	-	-
Durham County	30,704	270	317	207	63	299	108	122	19
Edgecombe County	7,625	457	519	541	292	735	167	-	-
Winston-Salem/Forsyth County	48,299	275	310	185	77	343	148	233	34
Franklin County	7,916	161	258	227	139	354	174	-	-
Gaston County	31,695	282	324	239	194	428	156	153	46
Gates County	1,949	212	209	15	13	20	-	-	-
Graham County	1,221	4	81	3	3	-	-	0	-
Granville County	8,674	163	268	211	133	328	112	-	230
Greene County	3,179	323	401	317	126	479	200	-	-
Guilford County	67,130	204	196	192	81	331	87	232	47
Halifax County	5,139	185	262	323	133	343	-	196	-
Roanoke Rapids City	2,984	241	194	195	153	360	119	-	-
Weldon City	1,058	333	327	180	192	181	-	-	-
Harnett County	16,988	161	177	163	99	286	124	122	92
Haywood County	7,903	114	141	68	69	103	10	34	-
Henderson County	12,520	104	103	45	40	109	43	-	15
Hertford County	3,522	407	497	453	271	501	-	-	-
Hoke County	6,756	267	188	243	151	328	114	243	48
Hyde County	647	348	223	281	145	437	-	-	-
Iredell-Statesville	19,431	255	214	191	146	409	156	-	34
Mooresville City	4,452	181	287	226	156	560	229	-	33
Jackson County	3,594	122	175	121	112	71	89	216	-

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Short-term Suspension Rates (per 1,000) *continued*

	Average Daily Membership	Short-Term Suspensions			Rates by Race/Ethnicity ¹				
	2004-2005	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	White	Black/ Multi-Racial ²	Hispanic	American Indian	Asian
Johnston County	26,159	269	245	216	145	453	167	93	36
Jones County	1,367	69	168	173	133	207	-	-	-
Lee County	9,158	189	241	247	164	442	199	-	91
Lenoir County	9,864	299	275	321	125	514	106	-	-
Lincoln County	11,454	158	219	199	186	380	127	-	-
Macon County	4,177	64	86	178	180	306	47	-	-
Madison County	2,629	119	130	104	105	-	-	-	-
Martin County	4,443	271	346	333	132	502	50	-	-
McDowell County	6,503	83	37	42	44	40	19	-	0
Charlotte-Mecklenburg*	118,517	278	321	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mitchell County	2,296	469	41	52	54	-	18	-	-
Montgomery County	4,523	295	190	150	134	270	42	-	57
Moore County	12,002	93	134	126	77	263	117	33	363
Nash-Rocky Mount	18,233	205	231	247	111	360	112	113	184
New Hanover County	23,245	231	199	179	91	383	119	192	53
Northampton County	3,177	254	324	404	235	447	-	-	-
Onslow County	22,212	106	129	135	102	211	125	124	80
Orange County	6,672	173	129	136	98	274	21	-	53
Chapel Hill-Carrboro	10,719	41	55	44	22	136	44	-	6
Pamlico County	1,662	269	247	343	295	458	-	-	-
Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County	5,977	355	399	367	246	486	250	-	-
Pender County	7,160	231	307	274	202	471	155	-	-
Perquimans County	1,698	187	328	226	172	327	-	-	-
Person County	5,846	176	216	174	85	317	79	-	-
Pitt County	21,593	410	445	441	172	693	149	-	83
Polk County	2,436	87	92	46	47	45	29	-	-
Randolph County	18,287	70	62	68	67	98	50	73	28
Asheboro City	4,522	123	145	130	90	296	103	-	30
Richmond County	8,296	181	220	209	125	327	62	194	118
Robeson County	24,268	324	369	248	116	289	119	299	133
Rockingham County	14,667	196	223	243	199	375	132	-	18
Rowan-Salisbury	20,825	293	333	317	198	718	202	305	72
Rutherford County	9,990	142	180	158	129	298	105	-	-
Sampson County	8,287	187	217	326	259	503	222	231	-
Clinton City	2,815	46	423	96	59	146	30	56	-
Scotland County	6,823	369	429	474	250	686	313	380	33
Stanly County	9,693	274	320	298	227	701	147	-	136
Stokes County	7,316	93	79	94	92	144	24	-	-
Surry County	8,736	135	131	138	144	246	67	-	18
Elkin City	1,206	29	27	35	29	172	18	-	-
Mount Airy City	1,832	20	46	60	49	158	20	-	13
Swain County	1,794	129	128	59	64	-	-	48	-
Transylvania County	3,804	51	62	77	75	122	0	-	-
Tyrrell County	645	401	371	231	80	460	30	-	-
Union County	28,608	178	197	153	104	380	130	220	17
Vance County	8,134	448	470	614	353	768	174	-	-
Wake County	114,068	164	188	187	83	414	151	195	36
Warren County	3,081	212	181	231	171	252	141	216	-
Washington County	2,132	352	363	376	180	440	-	-	-
Watauga County	4,556	70	82	74	71	197	48	-	-
Wayne County	19,306	382	506	241	141	384	92	-	69
Wilkes County	10,077	59	95	124	116	181	195	-	42
Wilson County	12,557	251	300	374	139	580	190	-	98
Yadkin County	6,062	53	46	52	45	114	72	-	-
Yancey County	2,537	80	109	72	75	-	16	-	-

¹ All rate calculations by Action for Children. Rates for subpopulations with fewer than 50 students were omitted. Interpret rates based on subpopulations of fewer than 100 students with caution. Rates were calculated per 1,000 to ensure comparability. Some counties may not have 1,000 students in every subpopulation. Rate per 1,000 = (#suspensions/#students) x 1,000.

² The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction combines black and multi-racial students into one category.

Source Data: Average daily membership: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Statistical Profile 2005, Tables 10, 15 and 25. Suspension data from: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2004-2005, pages 62-98 (some data from the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 editions).

* See Data and Limitations

Data and Limitations

Sources: Unless otherwise noted, suspension data are from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI), *Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions*. The reports used were for academic years 2003, 2004 and 2005. Appendix B in the study reports the number of short-term and long-term suspensions and expulsions by gender and race by school district. Multi-racial children are classified as black. Enrollment figures for each year are from Table 10 of DPI's *Statistical Profile*. Data do not include charter or private schools.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) reported fewer than 6,000 suspensions to the Department of Public Instruction for inclusion in its *Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsion: 2004-2005*. As of February 2, 2007, Charlotte-Mecklenburg reported 43,309 suspensions for the 2004-2005 school year. Therefore, Action for Children added 37,457 to the state number of suspensions for calculations. However, Action for Children did not calculate the redistribution of the approximately 37,000 missing suspensions by race or gender, meaning that state averages for student subgroups (such as the rate at which suspensions are used for white students) are low. Suspension ratios reported for Charlotte-Mecklenburg are based on the data in the *Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsion: 2003-2004*.

To calculate suspension rates, Action for Children divided total suspensions into total average daily membership (ADM) for the full population or appropriate student subgroup. Suspensions without gender noted were coded as male. Suspensions without race noted were dropped.

Changes in computer systems: North Carolina is moving toward using N.C. WISE, a web-based data collection system, in all school districts. N.C. WISE collects data on a variety of school elements and is not designed expressly for tracking disciplinary data. Currently, it is estimated that not quite half of school districts use N.C. WISE.

Some schools transitioned to N.C. WISE by using the U.S. Disciplinary Data Collection (USDDC) system. Prior to that, school systems may have used a totally different data collection system. Indeed, many districts still use different systems to track suspensions (N.C. WISE, USDDC, and third party systems, such as DTS, DETRAct, SSP, School Link and Mercury). Additionally, many districts (even those that use N.C. WISE) keep their disciplinary data in a separate computer system, which may or not match what DPI reports in its *Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions*.

DPI moving toward greater standardization, more guidance and more verification for districts: DPI is actively working to standardize the rules regarding what counts as a suspension and how data are reported to the state. DPI staff is focused on ensuring that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have the tools they need to manage discipline issues at the local level while providing DPI with meaningful data. For the first time, DPI has provided local districts with express guidelines on how to count various suspension offenses. Additionally, new verification processes for suspensions have been put in place, including more review and verification at the local level. These new guidelines will begin to affect data collection in 2007.

Strains on DPI and district staff: Student population and DPI's reporting requirements (No Child Left Behind, Adequate Yearly Progress, etc.) have been increasing steadily while the DPI staff has been halved.^{xxvi} At the same time, the state has been phasing in the N.C. WISE computer system. Often, local staff entering the data may wear many hats and may or may not have data entry and interpretation expertise.

37,000 suspensions from Charlotte-Mecklenburg were missing in the Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions: The Department of Public Instruction records for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools went from more than 31,000 suspensions in academic years 2003 and 2004 to fewer than 6,000 suspensions in 2005. In February of 2007, Charlotte-Mecklenburg reported more than 43,000 short-term suspensions to Action for Children. Thus, it is likely that total statewide suspensions are "off" by 37,000 suspensions. For this analysis, Action for Children relied on the most recent data available from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and added more than 37,000 to the total number of suspensions to calculate state rates and added 18,500 students for reporting aggregate number of students suspended.

The Department of Public Instruction short-term suspension data are intended for student subgroup comparisons, not comparisons among districts: DPI cautions against using its data to compare suspensions across counties. It does note that comparisons within the same school district, such as the rate of suspensions for blacks compared to whites, is an intended use of their data. Specifically, the 2004-2005 *Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsion* says:

The aforementioned absence of a statewide Student Code of Conduct, the implementation of zero tolerance policies in the various forms in many LEAs (Local Education Agencies), and differing definitions of the term suspension across LEAs means that comparing counts or even

Data and Limitations *(continued)*

rates of suspensions between different LEAs will likely be an invalid measurement of the relative dispensation of disciplinary consequences. Therefore, the disaggregated LEA-level data in Appendix B are most useful for within-LEA comparisons of suspensions and expulsion rates between subgroups and should not be used to characterize the disciplinary environment of any LEA or set of LEAs against others....

It is also possible that even the verified LEA counts listed in Appendix B [of the DPI study] may differ slightly from the counts LEAs themselves report locally. LEAs often identify discrepancies

in the numbers reported in Appendix B but are not always able to fully reconcile them with their own numbers. Some school systems have multiple data collection mechanisms for gathering and reporting disciplinary information that may not produce exactly the same counts, and that may have contributed to those discrepancies. Training and standardization efforts have been underway over the past few years and are continuously ongoing in an effort to ameliorate these kinds of difficulties and to ensure that the data underlying this report are as accurate and complete as possible.

Endnotes

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