



District of Columbia  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

# STATE OF DISCIPLINE

**2019-20 School Year**

February 2021

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# Executive Summary

This report reflects the Office of the State Superintendent of Education’s (OSSE) commitment to supporting equitable discipline policies and practices. OSSE aims to assist students, administrators, teachers, and parents in ensuring a positive and safe school environment in order to promote learning and limit missed instructional days due to exclusionary discipline practices.

Through this report, OSSE fulfills local reporting requirements and provides the public with transparent data on school discipline. The data included in this report satisfies local reporting requirements, specifically the Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act of 2015 and the Student Fair Access to School Act Amendment of 2018. Please note that due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, which led to remote instruction across the District, this report includes data through March 13, 2020. This report explores the comparative rates of exclusion for different student groups, so it is not impacted by the smaller number of overall incidents due to a shorter data collection period.

## ***School discipline remains inequitably distributed across District students.***

Black or African American students, at-risk students, and male students were disproportionately disciplined in each of the last four years. During this time, Black or African American students have consistently accounted for more than 90 percent of disciplined students despite making up 65 percent of the student population. Notably, Black or African American students accounted for 87 percent of expulsions in the 2019-20 school year. Addressing and improving discipline practices that continue to impact disproportionately students who are Black or African American, at-risk, and male continues to be a priority for OSSE.

## ***Students in grades six through nine account for the majority of all disciplinary incidents.***

One-quarter of District students are in grades six through nine, but that quarter represented 58 percent of all disciplinary incidents, 58 percent of expulsions, 59 percent of out-of-school suspensions, and 63 percent of in-school suspensions. In order to decrease exclusionary discipline rates, the District of Columbia should explore what supports are most beneficial to adolescent students, particularly in their transitions to middle school and high school.

## ***Disruptive/reckless behavior and fighting are the most frequent reasons for disciplinary actions.***

Disruptive/reckless behavior and fighting accounted for more than 59 percent of all disciplinary incidents. In 2019-20, disruptive/reckless behavior and fighting were responsible for:

- 57% of in-school suspensions
- 60% of out-of-school suspensions
- 43% of expulsions

Finally, this report examines two populations of students that experience disproportionate exclusionary discipline rates – students with disabilities and ninth-grade students. The analysis finds that among students with disabilities, those students whose primary disability is emotional disturbance are more likely to be suspended than other students with disabilities. Ninth grade represents a pivotal year in the educational trajectory of students in the District. Students who were suspended as ninth graders were 3.5 times less likely

to graduate than their ninth grade peers who did not receive any out-of-school suspensions. These findings support the need for added focus on these student groups.

# Discipline Landscape

## Impacts and COVID-19

COVID-19 has changed how school communities interact, and OSSE has supported LEAs with their discipline practices as they have transitioned to remote instruction. OSSE required all LEAs to submit [continuous education plans](#) detailing operational and instructional changes to promote student safety as well as to support students' social-emotional and mental health needs during the global health crisis. LEAs also outlined how they would monitor student behavior during remote instruction and comply with local and federal laws pertaining to exclusionary discipline.

OSSE has also continued to offer professional development for educators managing remote classrooms. In the 2019-20 school year, Restorative DC, which partners with OSSE to provide restorative justice training to schools and LEAs, provided supplemental technical assistance to 52 schools across 23 LEAs. Restorative DC also convened weekly "Circle Up" community meetings to support schools with their COVID-related response activities and to share how in-person restorative justice practices could translate to remote situations. In addition, OSSE created trainings for educators and families to set clear expectations and respond to behavior while in a remote posture, such as Positive Behavior Supports for the Virtual Classroom and Helping Families Use Positive Behavior Supports. These trainings recognize that managing student behavior looks different in a remote context and endeavor to support students and staff in navigating uncertain and unfamiliar circumstances.

## Legislative Overview

This section reviews the laws governing school discipline with which schools, local education agencies (LEAs), and OSSE comply.

## Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018

The Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018 aims to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline in District of Columbia. The law defines terms related to disciplinary actions,<sup>1</sup> and it requires LEAs, in consultation with schools and communities, to develop, publish, and use school discipline policies that include certain required components.<sup>2</sup> The law also limits out-of-school suspension for students in kindergarten through eighth grade except for serious safety incidents, and it bans out-of-school suspensions in high school for minor offenses. Furthermore, the law states that a suspension does not limit a student's right to continue access and complete appropriate academic work during a suspension.<sup>3</sup> The law also requires OSSE to establish a School Safety and Positive Climate Fund that is used to provide support for positive school

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<sup>1</sup> D.C. Code §38-236.01

<sup>2</sup> D.C. Code §38-236.03

<sup>3</sup> D.C. Code §38-236.04

climate and trauma-informed educational settings to LEAs and schools.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the law requires schools and LEAs to submit specific data on school discipline annually and requires OSSE to report on this data in an annual Discipline Report.<sup>5</sup>

## Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act of 2015

The Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act of 2015 prohibits the suspension or expulsion of a student of pre-kindergarten age from any publicly funded pre-kindergarten program. The law also establishes annual reporting requirements for each LEA to report to OSSE on all suspensions and expulsions that occurred during the previous school year.<sup>6</sup>

## Gun-Free Schools Act

The federal Gun-Free Schools Act requires states receiving federal education funds to have a state law that requires LEAs to expel students for no less than one year for bringing a firearm to school.<sup>7</sup> District of Columbia law requires such an expulsion on a case-by-case basis and a referral to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system.<sup>8</sup>

## Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)<sup>9</sup> provides several procedural safeguards that apply when a student with a disability (or a student who is suspected of having a disability) receives a suspension or expulsion that results in the student being removed from his or her current educational placement. A student with a disability who violates a code of student conduct may be removed from his or her current placement to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting, another setting, or suspension, for not more than ten school days.<sup>10</sup> If a student with a disability is removed from his or her current placement for more than ten school days (either consecutively or cumulatively totaling ten days), the LEA must conduct a meeting to determine if the behavior is a manifestation of the student's disability.<sup>11</sup>

However, schools are permitted to remove a student to an interim alternative educational setting for not more than 45 school days without regard to whether the behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the child's disability if a student:

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<sup>4</sup> D.C. Code §38-236.06

<sup>5</sup> D.C. Code §38-236.09

<sup>6</sup> D.C. Code § 38-273.03.

<sup>7</sup> 18 U.S.C §922, et. seq.

<sup>8</sup> D.C. Code §38-231 and §38-232.

<sup>9</sup> 20 U.S.C. §4200, et. seq.

<sup>10</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.530(b).

<sup>11</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.530(e).

- 1) Carries a weapon to or possesses a weapon at school, on school premises, or to or at a school function under the jurisdiction of OSSE or an LEA;
- 2) Knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs, or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of OSSE or an LEA; or
- 3) Has inflicted serious bodily injury upon another person while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of OSSE or an LEA.<sup>12</sup>

## Every Student Succeeds Act

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires state education agencies (SEAs) to develop report cards for the SEA and LEAs in their respective states.<sup>13</sup> ESSA requires states to publish data on school discipline, including rates of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, school-related arrests, referrals to law enforcement, and incidences of violence, including bullying and harassment. The discipline data reported on the report card is also available by student groups. OSSE released the 2019-20 DC School Report Card on December 3, 2020.<sup>14</sup> Please note that some metrics are unavailable for the 2020 Report Card due to the impact of COVID-19.

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<sup>12</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.530(d).

<sup>13</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 6311

<sup>14</sup> [www.dcschoolreportcard.org](http://www.dcschoolreportcard.org).



# Data Collection and Analysis

## Discipline Data Collection

By August 15<sup>th</sup> of each year, District of Columbia law requires each LEA to submit a student-level report to OSSE on all reported disciplinary incidents, including but not limited to in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and involuntary dismissals.<sup>15</sup>

OSSE produces and distributes the Student Discipline Data Collection Guidance<sup>16</sup> and a collection template in order to provide LEAs with the information they need to submit complete and accurate data on all disciplinary incidents. OSSE released guidance and documentation for the 2019-20 school year in September 2019 and provided data collection training for LEA personnel, as well as year-round technical assistance as requested. Discipline data for the 2019-20 school year include incidents through March 13, 2020 due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, which led to remote instruction across the District. This report compares exclusion across student groups, so the shorter data collection period and smaller number of incidents do not affect the validity of the analyses included here.

OSSE performs data validation checks after LEAs submit data. Appendix A explains these checks in more detail. OSSE also conducts quality control checks on the data that may reveal non-compliance or data inconsistencies and provides an opportunity for LEAs to address those inconsistencies or instances of non-compliance.

## Student Population included in 2019-20 Analysis

The student population for the 2019-20 school year discipline analysis consists of 98,650 students attending 63 LEAs and 239 schools. This population includes all students who were enrolled in a public LEA during the 2019-20 school year, ranging from grades pre-K3 to adult programs. Consistent with prior years, incidents that occur for students attending schools for incarcerated youth - Maya Angelou Academy at New Beginnings, Youth Services Center, and Inspiring Youth Program - are excluded from this report. OSSE does not collect discipline data from non-public schools, so students who only attended non-public schools during the 2019-20 school year are excluded. LEAs verified enrollment, demographics, and discipline records for the student population analyzed in this report as part of the comprehensive demographic verification process and metric calculation confirmation for the statewide school accountability system.

This report includes two main types of analyses: analyses at the disciplinary action level and analyses at the student-level. Analyses at the student-level are unique for each student and disciplinary action type. For example, a student counts once in the total number of students who receive out-of-school suspensions, irrespective of how many of those actions occurred. Analyses at the disciplinary action level include the total number of disciplinary actions for all students.

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<sup>15</sup> § 38-236.09 (b)

<sup>16</sup> [“Student Discipline Data Collection Guidance.”](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education. September 4, 2019.

# Out-of-School Suspensions

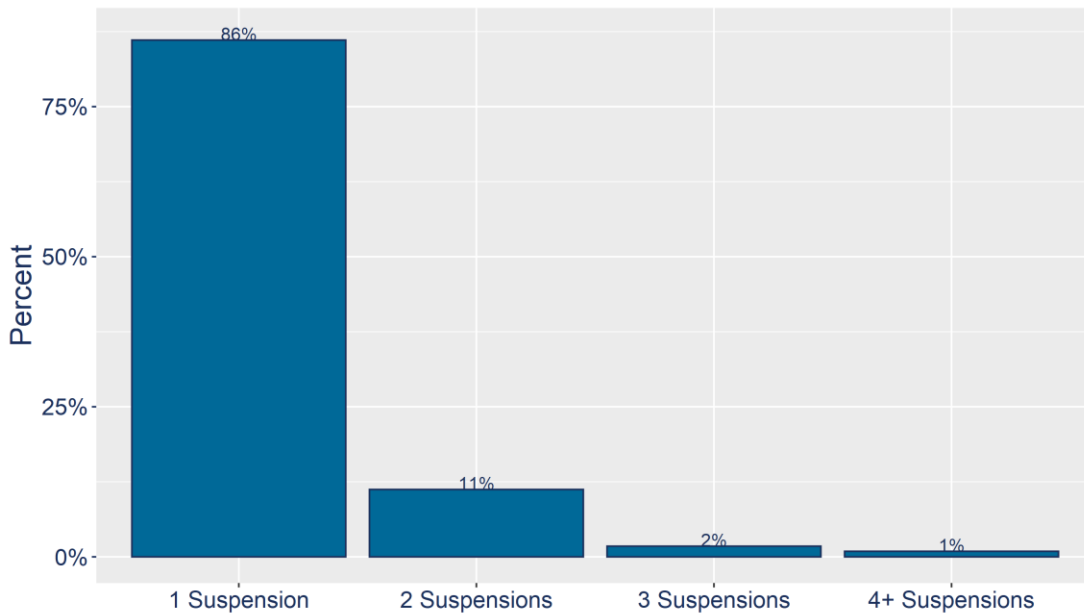
*Out-of-school suspensions are still the most frequently reported disciplinary action in the District of Columbia.*

During the 2019-20 school year, 3,605 students received a total of 5,213 out-of-school suspensions. That is, roughly 3.6 percent of the student population in the District of Columbia received an out-of-school suspension in the 2019-20 school year. These discipline incidents represented 47 LEAs and 181 schools. LEA- and school-level suspension rates are available on OSSE’s website.

*Fourteen percent of suspended students were suspended at least twice during the school year.*

The plot below shows that the majority of students who were suspended received one suspension. Eighty-six percent of suspended students were suspended once, compared with 11 percent who received two suspensions, two percent who received three suspensions, and one percent who received four or more suspensions.<sup>17</sup> Multiple suspensions in a given school year lead to lost instructional time and could adversely impact student outcomes.

*Figure 1: Proportion of Recurring Out-of-School Suspensions, 2019-20*



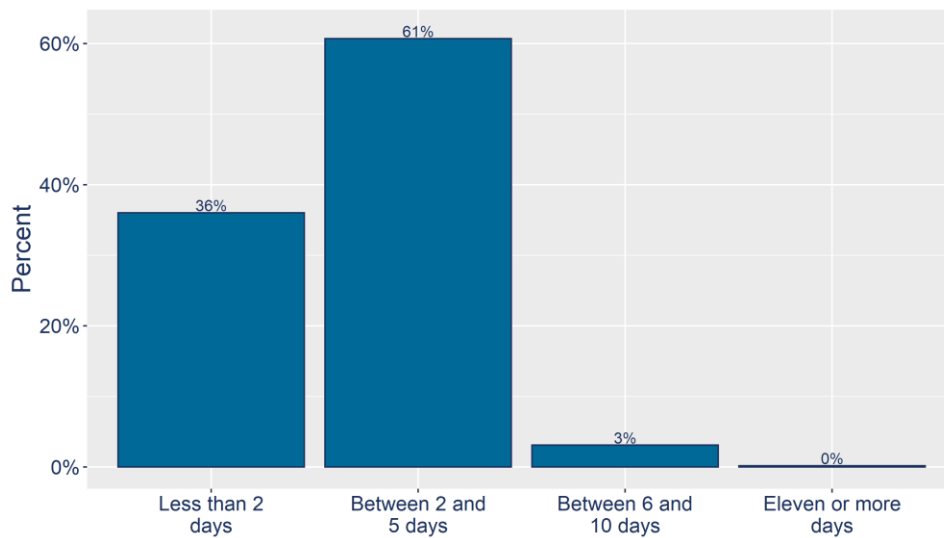
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<sup>17</sup> Totals may not add up to 100 percent as a result of rounding.

**Just over 60 percent of suspensions resulted in students missing between two and five instructional days.**

Sixty-one percent of students suspended during the school year missed between two and five days of instruction throughout the school year (Figure 2). Thirty-six percent of suspensions accounted for students missing fewer than two days. Less than one percent of all suspended students missed eleven days or more of school.<sup>18</sup>

*Figure 2: Number of Days Missed as a Result of Out-of-School Suspensions, 2019-20*



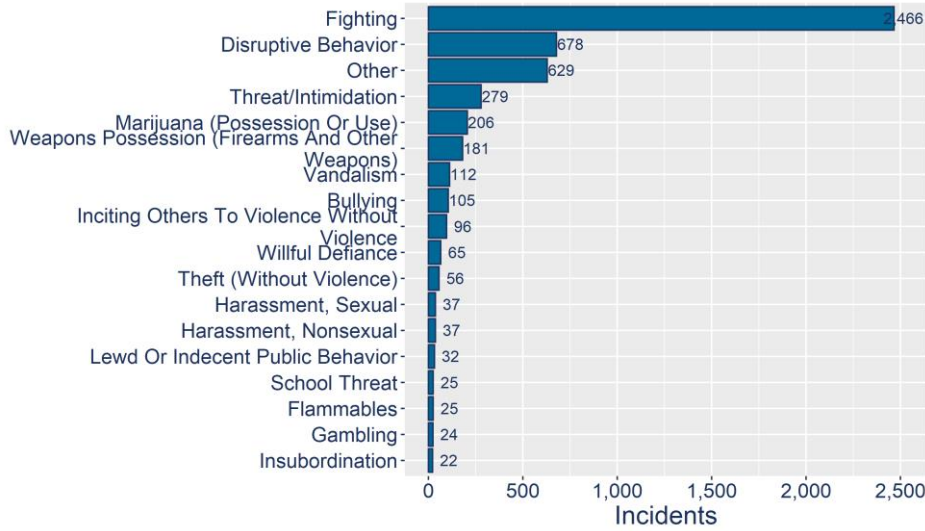
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<sup>18</sup> Instructional days missed represent the total number of days missed throughout the school year due to suspension. For students with multiple suspensions, the total number of days missed is represented in the figure.

**Two-thirds of out-of-school suspensions resulted from fighting or disruptive/reckless behavior.**

Fighting and disruptive behavior were the most common reasons for out-of-school suspensions, with 2,466 and 678 incidents, respectively (Figure 3). Collectively, these offenses accounted for more than 60 percent of all out-of-school suspensions. Note that each LEA sets its own policies to define disruptive behavior.

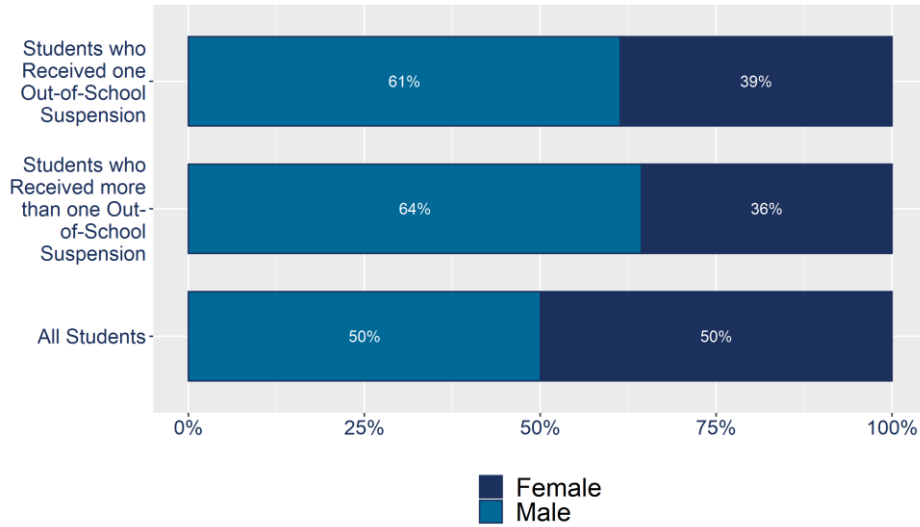
*Figure 3: Primary Reasons for Out-of-School Suspension, 2019-20<sup>19</sup>*



<sup>19</sup> This figure lists all primary reasons mapped from LEA discipline submissions for a disciplinary action to the simplified categories shown above. Note that this figure only includes reasons with at least 20 or more incidents, so the sum of the individual counts does not equal the total number of incidents.

Schools suspended male students more frequently than female students. Figure 4 shows the proportion of students who received at least one out-of-school suspension. Sixty-one percent of students who received a suspension were male; 64 percent of students who received more than one suspension were male.

Figure 4: Out-of-School Suspension Disproportionality by Gender, 2019-20



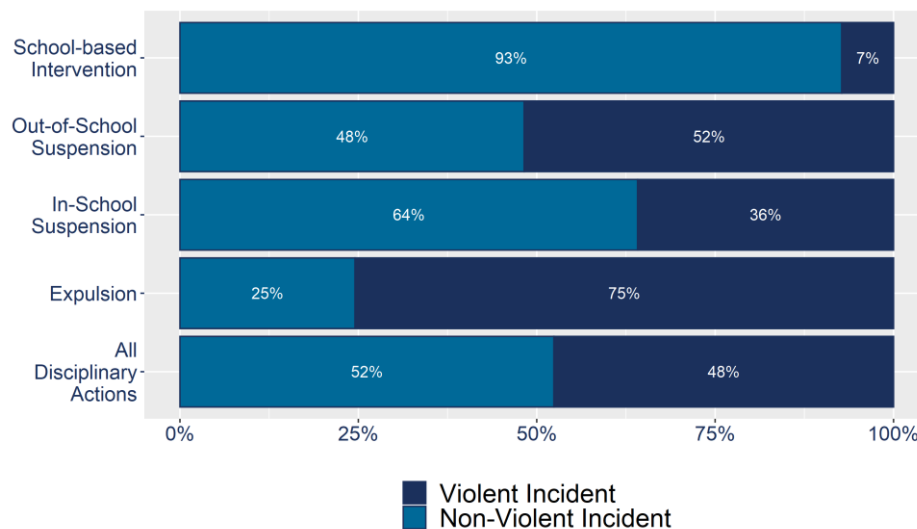
**Incidents of violence led to 48 percent of out-of-school suspensions and three-quarters of expulsions.**

According to the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), incidents of violence include the following behavioral offenses: sexual assault, robbery with and without a weapon, fight with and without a weapon, threats of physical attack with and without a weapon, possession of a firearm or explosive device, and use of a firearm or homicide.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 5 shows the percent of each type of disciplinary action that resulted from violent and non-violent offenses. Of all disciplinary actions, 48 percent were a result of a violent incident. Fifty-two percent of out-of-school suspensions resulted from violent offenses, while 36 percent of in-school suspensions and 75 percent of expulsions were a result of violent behavior. School-based interventions were primarily due to non-violent incidents; only seven percent of school-based interventions were related to violent offenses.

Violence and student safety continue to be challenges for schools in the District of Columbia and will require attention and redress to reduce the number of exclusionary discipline incidents while maintaining safe learning environments.

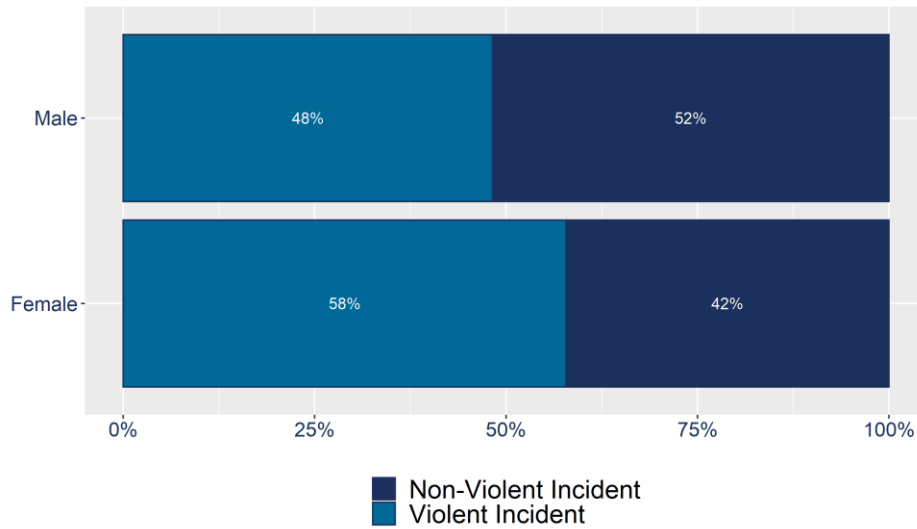
*Figure 5: Proportion of Disciplinary Actions by Violent and Non-Violent Incidents, 2019-20*



<sup>20</sup> Musu, L., Zhang, A., Wang, K., Zhang, J., & Oudekerk, B. A. (2019). Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2018. Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2018. U.S. Department of Education.

It is worth noting that while males received more total out-of-school suspensions than their female counterparts. 52 percent of those suspensions given to males were a result of non-violent incidents. Only 42 percent of out-of-school suspensions given to females were a result of non-violent incidents (Figure 6). This could suggest that males are perceived as more threatening than females even when they engage in non-violent behavior.

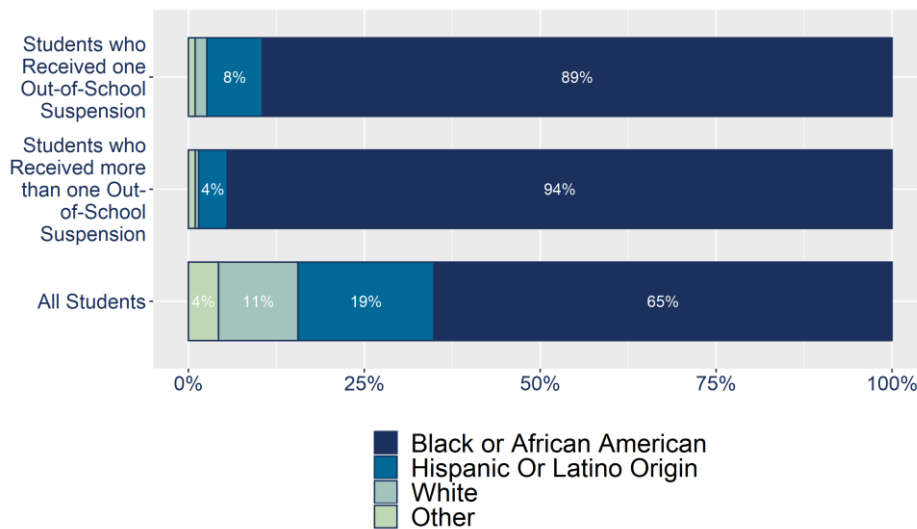
Figure 6. The Proportion of Violent and Non-Violent Out-of-School Suspensions by Gender, 2019-20



**Black or African American students were disproportionately represented among disciplined students, especially those receiving more than one out-of-school suspension.**

Black or African American students make up 65 percent of the District’s student population, but they accounted for 89 percent of students who received one out-of-school suspension and 94 percent of students who received at least two out-of-school suspensions (Figure 7). Controlling for all other student demographics, Black or African American students were four times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than White students in the District.<sup>21</sup> These data, unfortunately, are consistent with prior year findings.

Figure 7: Out-of-School Suspension Disproportionality by Race, 2019-20



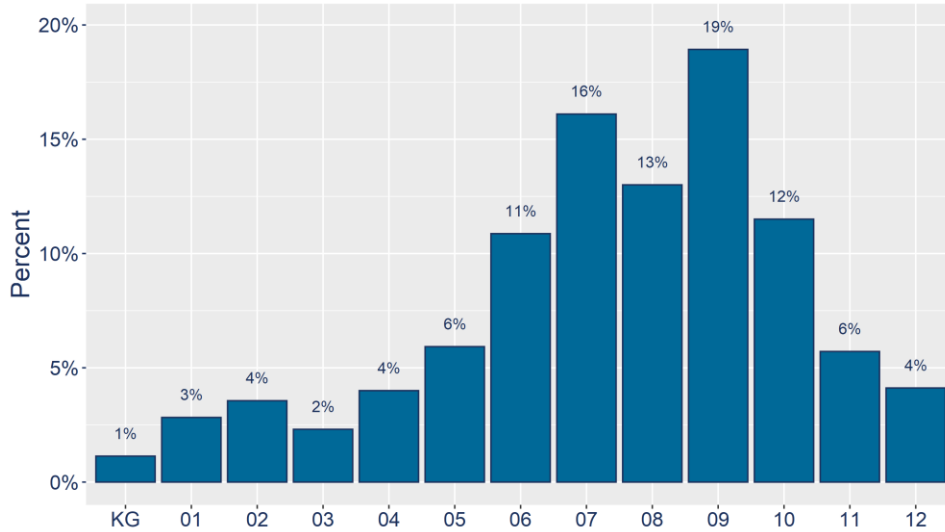
<sup>21</sup> Results derived from a logistic regression. Logistic regression is a type of regression analysis that is used when the outcome variable is binary (i.e., student received an out-of-school suspension [1] versus student did not receive an out-of-school suspension [0]). Other student demographics include: gender, at-risk status, English learner status, race/ethnicity, and grade band.



***Students in grades six through nine account for a majority of out-of-school suspensions.***

Students in grades six through nine made up 59 percent of the students receiving out-of-school suspensions despite representing one-quarter of the District student population (Figure 8). Kindergarten (1 percent) and first grade (3 percent) represented the lowest proportion of students who received an out-of-school suspension in the 2019-20 school year. Pre-Kindergarten students were not included because fewer than ten students in these grades received an out-of-school suspension. Unfortunately, these findings are consistent with prior years.

***Figure 8: Proportion of Out-of-School Suspensions by Grade, 2019-20***



***At-risk students are much more likely than their peers to receive an out-of-school suspension.***

In the 2019-20 school year, students identified as at-risk were 1.6 times more likely to receive at least one out-of-school suspension as students who were not at-risk when controlling for other student demographics.<sup>22</sup> Students who are at-risk were more likely to be suspended than their peers who are not at-risk even when controlling for the percentage of the student population within their school who meet the criteria for being designated as at-risk. Independent of whether a school serves many or few students who are at-risk, at-risk students within the school are more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension. Students who are at-risk are those who experienced homelessness in the 2019-20 school year, are in foster care, qualify for TANF or SNAP, or are high school students who are one year or older than then expected age for their grade.<sup>23</sup>

Students designated as at-risk made up 70 percent of the disciplined population but only 48 percent of the District of Columbia's student population (Figure 9). Furthermore, students who are at-risk are disproportionately represented among students who received more than one suspension; 76 percent of students who were suspended more than once were students who are considered at-risk.

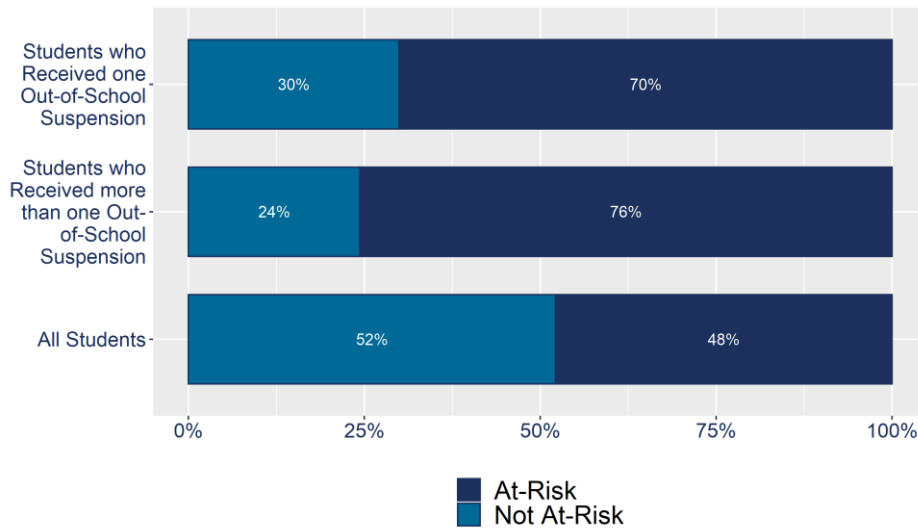
The disproportionate suspension of at-risk students highlights the challenge and necessity of supporting positive behavior supports for students who face significant obstacles like poverty or being overage for their grade.

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<sup>22</sup> Results derived from a logistic regression. Logistic regression is a type of regression analysis that is used when the outcome variable is binary (i.e., student received an out-of-school suspension [1] versus student did not receive an out-of-school suspension [0]). Other student demographics include: gender, at-risk status, English learner status, race/ethnicity, and grade band.

<sup>23</sup> Office of the State Superintendent of Education. (2018). DC School Report Card and Star Framework Technical Guide. DC School Report Card and STAR Framework Technical Guide. Retrieved from [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2018 DC School Report Card and STAR Framework Technical Guide.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2018%20DC%20School%20Report%20Card%20and%20STAR%20Framework%20Technical%20Guide.pdf)

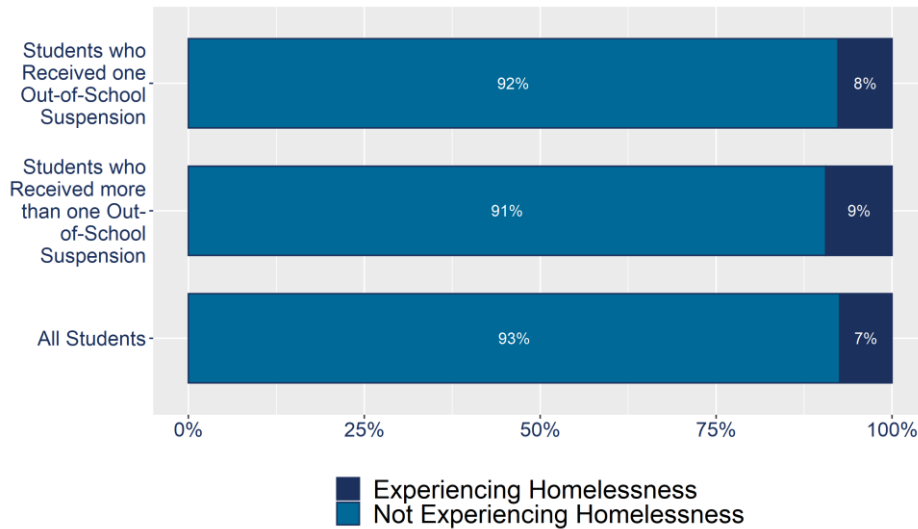
Figure 9: Out-of-School Suspension Disproportionality by At-Risk Status, 2019-20



**Students experiencing homelessness receive out-of-school suspensions at similar rates as their peers.**

Figure 10 shows the proportion of students enrolled during the 2019-20 school year who received at least one out-of-school suspension by their status as a homeless student. Students experiencing homelessness made up 7 percent of the total population, 8 percent of students who received one out-of-school suspension, and 9 percent of students who received two or more out-of-school suspensions. Despite the difficulty housing instability introduces to receiving an education, students experiencing homelessness are only marginally more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their peers who are not experiencing homelessness.

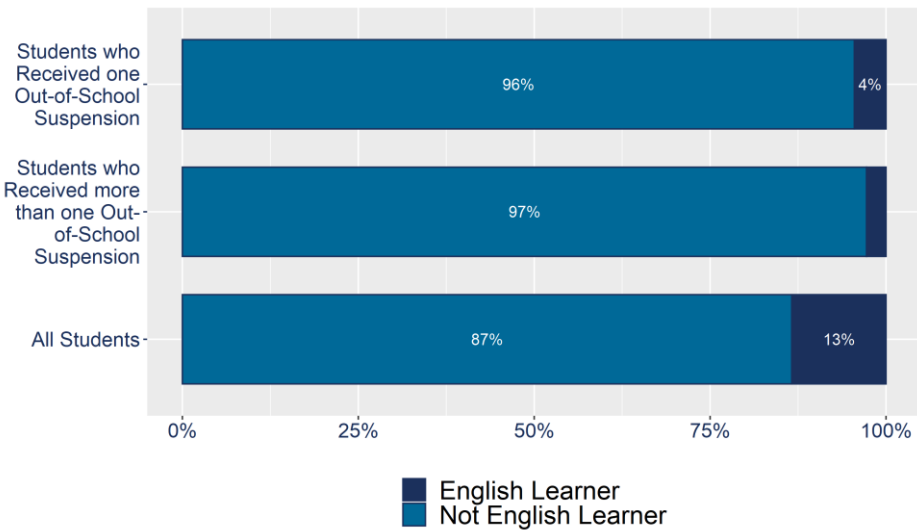
Figure 10: Out-of-School Suspension Disproportionality by Homeless Status, 2019-20



**English Learners students are less likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their peers.**

In the 2019-20 school year, English Learner students were less likely to receive at least one out-of-school suspension compared to students who were not English Learners.<sup>24</sup> Figure 11 shows the proportion of students who received at least one out-of-school suspension by their English Learner status. Students who were identified as English Learners made up 13 percent of the total student population but only 4 percent of students who received one out-of-school suspension and 3 percent of students who were suspended more than once.

*Figure 11: Out-of-School Suspension Disproportionality by English Learner Status, 2019-20*



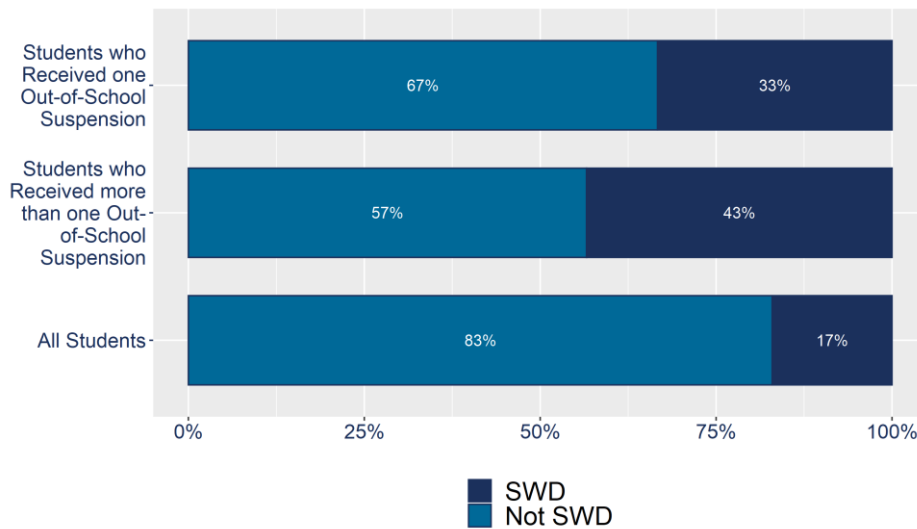
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<sup>24</sup> Results derived from a logistic regression. Logistic regression is a type of regression analysis that is used when the outcome variable is binary (i.e., student received an out-of-school suspension [1] versus student did not receive an out-of-school suspension [0]).

**Students with Disabilities were nearly twice as likely to receive out-of-school suspensions compared with peers without disabilities.**

In the 2019-20 school year, students with disabilities were nearly twice as likely to receive at least one out-of-school suspension as students who were not identified as having a disability, controlling for other student demographics.<sup>25</sup> Figure 12 shows the proportion of students enrolled during the 2019-20 school year who received at least one out-of-school suspension by their status as a student with a disability. Students with disabilities made up 33 percent of the suspended population; however, they represented 17 percent of the total student population. Figure 12 also shows that among students who were suspended more than once, 43 percent were students with a disability. These data, unfortunately, align with prior year findings.

Figure 12: Out-of-School Suspension Disproportionality by SWD Status, 2019-20



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<sup>25</sup> Results derived from a logistic regression. Logistic regression is a type of regression analysis that is used when the outcome variable is binary (i.e., student received an out-of-school suspension [1] versus student did not receive an out-of-school suspension [0]). Other student demographics include: gender, at-risk status, English learner status, race/ethnicity, and grade band.

# In-School Suspensions

Local law describes an in-school suspension as “temporarily removing a student from the student's regular class schedule as a disciplinary consequence, during which time the student remains on school grounds under the supervision of school personnel who are physically in the same location as the student.”<sup>26</sup> A total of 1,033 students received an in-school suspension during the 2019-20 school year. LEAs may use a variety of resources to reduce out-of-school suspension including in-school suspension, restorative practices, counseling, or school-based interventions.

Practices and policies related to in-school suspensions differ across LEAs. When LEAs report zero in-school suspensions, OSSE asks the LEA to confirm the accuracy of this information. Forty-seven LEAs (184 schools) reported zero in-school suspensions, of which all certified this reporting with OSSE during data collection. Zero-counts of in-school-suspensions may reflect that LEAs do not use in-school suspensions at all or that they use in-school suspensions but did not issue any.

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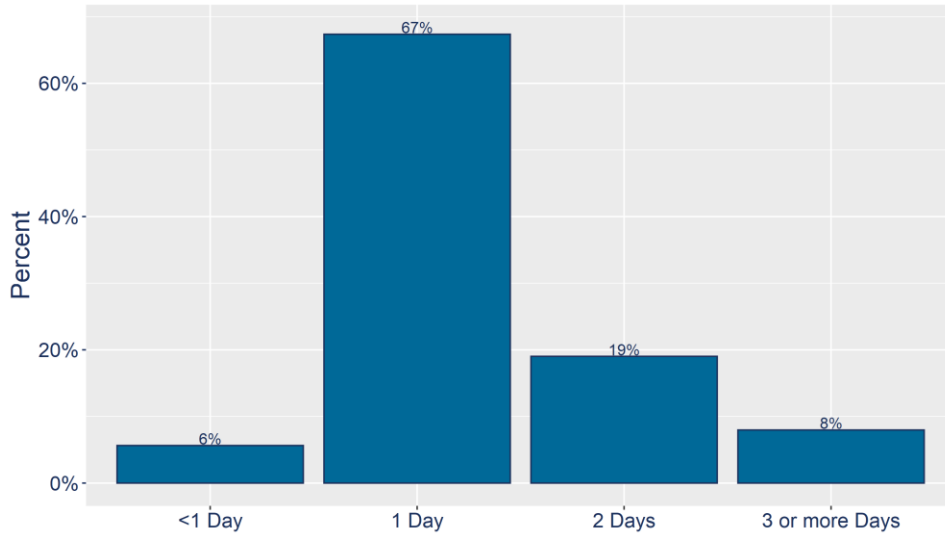
<sup>26</sup> D.C. Code §38-236.01

***Two-thirds of in-school suspensions lasted one day.***

109 schools in 21 LEAs reported in-school suspensions during the 2019-20 school year. Seventy two percent of in-school suspensions occurred at three LEAs. OSSE’s website includes detailed rates of in-school-suspension for each school and LEA.

The length of in-school suspensions varied from zero to ten days with one-day suspensions accounting for 67 percent of all in-school suspensions (Figure 13). In-school suspensions of two and three-days accounted for 19 percent and 8 percent of all in-school suspensions, respectively.

*Figure 13: Duration of In-School Suspensions, 2019-20*

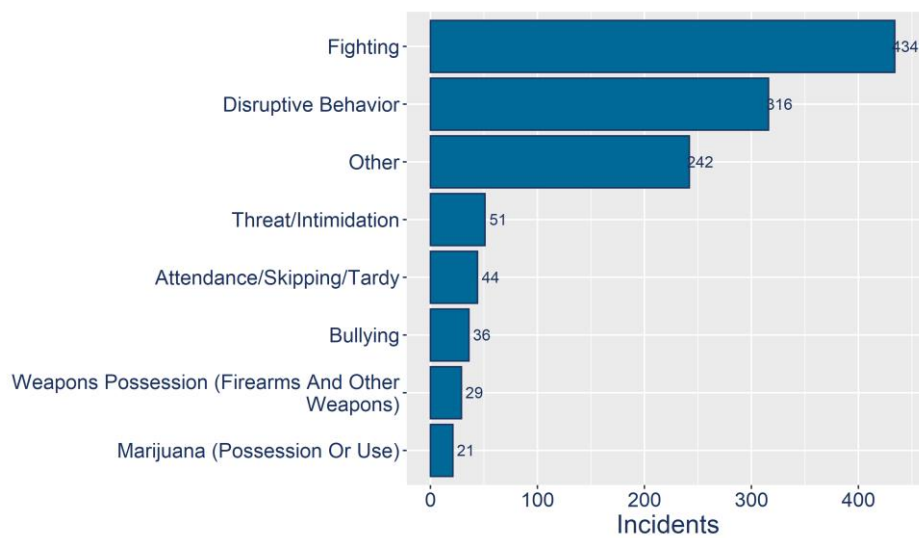


**More than half of in-school suspensions were a result of disruptive/reckless behavior or fighting.**

In 2019-20, there were 322 instances of disruptive/reckless behavior and 310 instances of fighting, which led to an in-school suspension (Figure 14). The category "Other," which resulted in 244 in-school suspensions, include a variety of behaviors, such as use of alcohol, gambling, forgery, hazing, or extortion. Disruptive/reckless behavior and fighting accounted for 24 percent and 23 percent of disciplinary incidents resulting in an in-school suspension, respectively.

Addressing fighting and disruptive/reckless behavior is essential in reducing exclusionary discipline practices as it makes up a significant portion of all disciplinary incidents across in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions.

Figure 14: Primary Reasons for In-School Suspensions, 2019-20

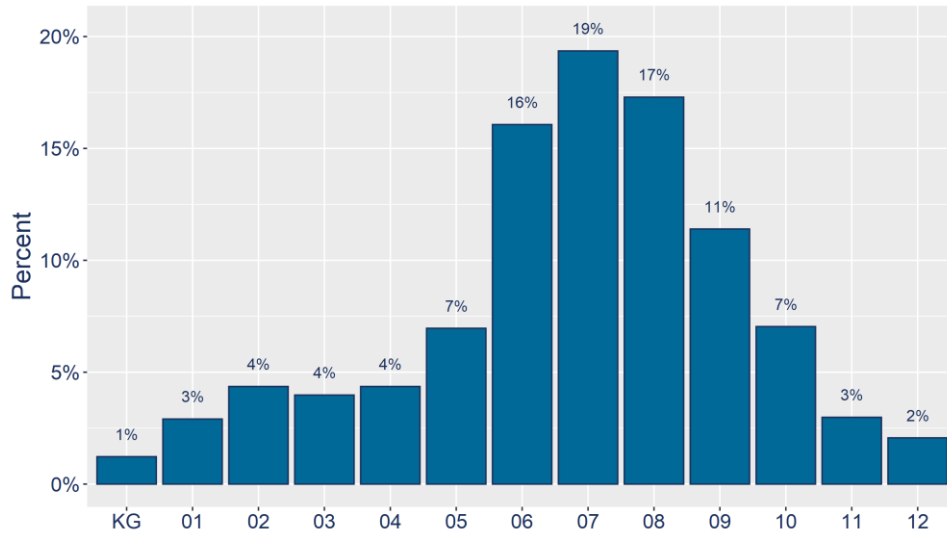




**Students in grades six through eight accounted for a majority of in-school suspensions.**

Students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades made up 52 percent of the students who received an in-school suspension in 2019-20 (Figure 15). Pre-K students are excluded from the figure below because fewer than ten students in each grade received an in-school suspension.

Figure 15: Percent of Students Receiving an In-School-Suspension by Grade, 2019-20

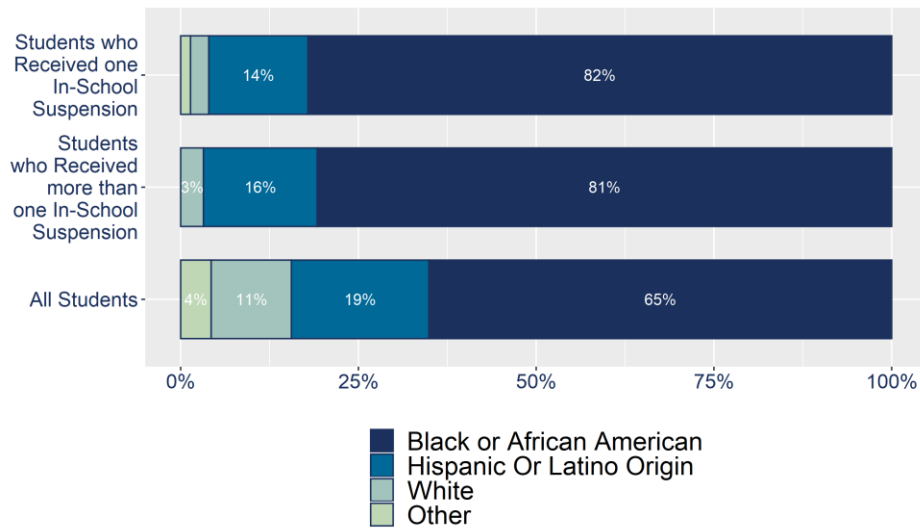


In-school suspensions of sixth through eighth-grade students have made up a substantial portion of all in-school suspensions over the past four years, and there has been a steady rise in the percent of in-school suspensions accounted for by students in these grades. Further research can examine which supports can ease the transition to middle and high school.

**Black or African American students are overrepresented among students receiving in-school suspensions.**

Black or African American students represented 82 percent of students who received an in-school suspension while making up only 65 percent of all District students (Figure 16). White students made up 11 percent of the student population but only 3 percent of students who received an in-school suspension.

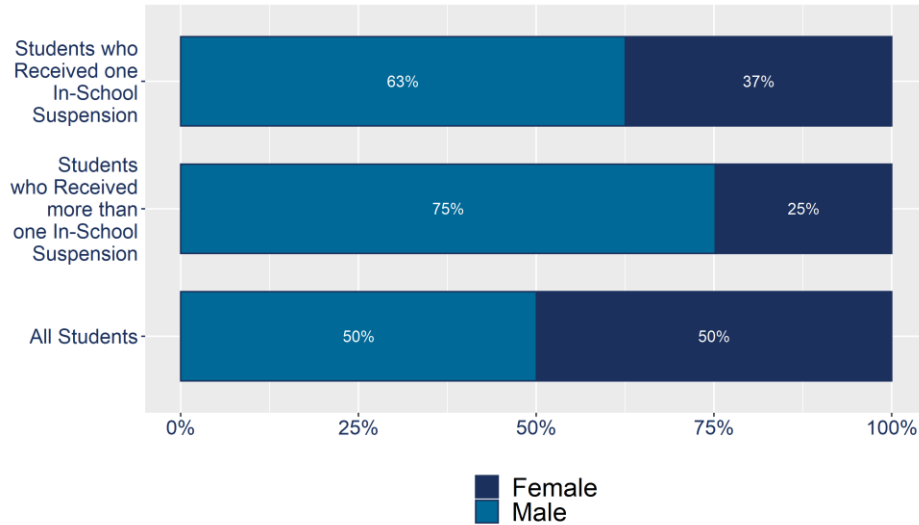
Figure 16: In-School Suspension Disproportionality by Race, 2019-20



**Male students accounted for three-quarters of students who received multiple in-school-suspensions.**

During the 2019-20 school year, male students were disproportionately represented in students receiving an in-school suspension. Male students make up half of the overall D.C. student population but accounted for 63 percent of students who received one in-school suspension and 75 percent of students who received two or more in-school suspensions (Figure 17). This suggests that in-school-suspension for male students is not supporting students in changing the behaviors that lead to them receiving an in-school-suspension.

Figure 17: In-School Suspension Disproportionality by Gender, 2019-20



## Involuntary Dismissals

Involuntary dismissal is defined as “removal of the student from school attendance for less than half of a school day for disciplinary reasons, during which time the student is not under the supervision of school personnel and is not allowed on school grounds.”<sup>27</sup> The 2019-20 school year was the second year in which OSSE collected data on involuntary dismissals. LEAs reported 160 instances of involuntary dismissals during the 2019-20 school year, which occurred at 23 schools across 5 LEAs.

Similar to other disciplinary actions, most involuntary dismissals resulted from disruptive/reckless behavior (61), minor physical altercation (33), fighting (22) and assault (12). Collectively, these offenses accounted for 80 percent of all involuntary dismissal incidences.

Black or African American students (98 percent), male students (74 percent), and at-risk students (76 percent) were over-represented in the students who received an involuntary dismissal during the 2019-20 school year.

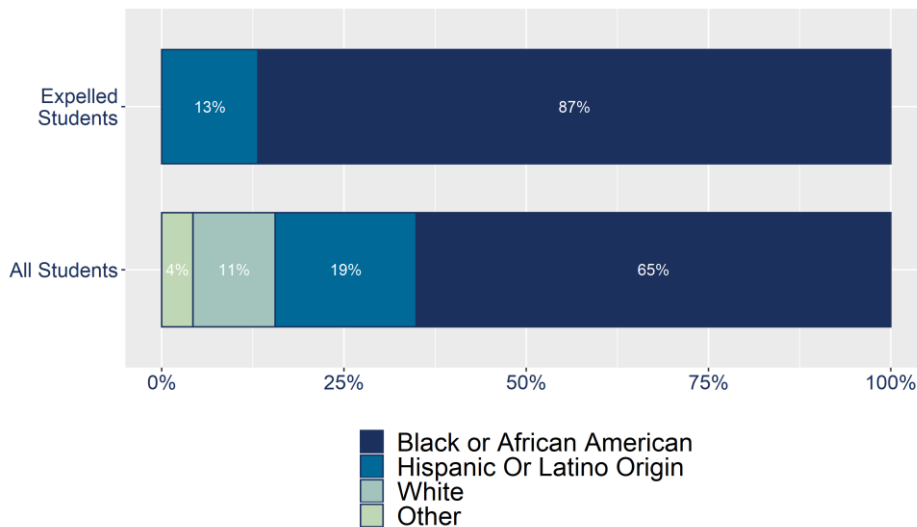
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<sup>27</sup> D.C. Code §38-236.01

# Expulsions

A total of 53 students were expelled across 16 LEAs and 24 schools during the 2019-20 school year. Black or African American, male, and at-risk students were expelled at disproportionate rates compared to their overall representation in the student population. Black or African American students accounted for 87 percent of expulsions in the 2019-20 but represent 65 percent of the total D.C. student population (Figure 18). Similarly, male students made up 68 percent of expulsions though they represented half of the District’s population in 2019-20. Students who were identified as at-risk received 62 percent of all expulsions, while only accounting for 46 percent of the total student population. Finally, high school students (grades 9 through 12) accounted for 68 percent of expulsions during the 2019-20 school year.

Figure 18: Expulsion Disproportionality by Race, 2019-20



**Weapons, fighting, assault, and threat/intimidation are the most frequent reasons reported for expulsions.**

During the 2019-20 school year, weapons (25 percent), threat/intimidation (15 percent), fighting (15 percent), and weapons (15 percent) were the most frequent expulsion reasons.

Seventy-five percent of expulsions were due to an incidence of violence during the 2019-20 school year. The non-violent cases that received an expulsion included, but were not limited to: minor physical altercation, non-sexual harassment, possession of marijuana, possession or use of other illicit drugs, disruptive behavior, and engaging in sexual acts. It is worth noting that only possession of a weapon or firearm is a federal requirement for expulsion among the reasons listed.

***Most students who are expelled re-enrolled in subsequent school years.***

An expulsion is a significant disciplinary action that removes a student from the school setting for a significant length of time; therefore, it is essential that once the period of expulsion ends, students are re-engaged into school. Four out of five students who were expelled in the 2016-17 school year re-enrolled in a District school the following school year; however, the school may not necessarily be the same one that expelled them. Furthermore, nearly 90 percent of those students remained enrolled the following year. Eighty-five percent of students who were expelled in the 2018-19 school year re-enrolled in the 2019-20 school year, and 81 percent of those students remained enrolled throughout the 2019-20 school year.

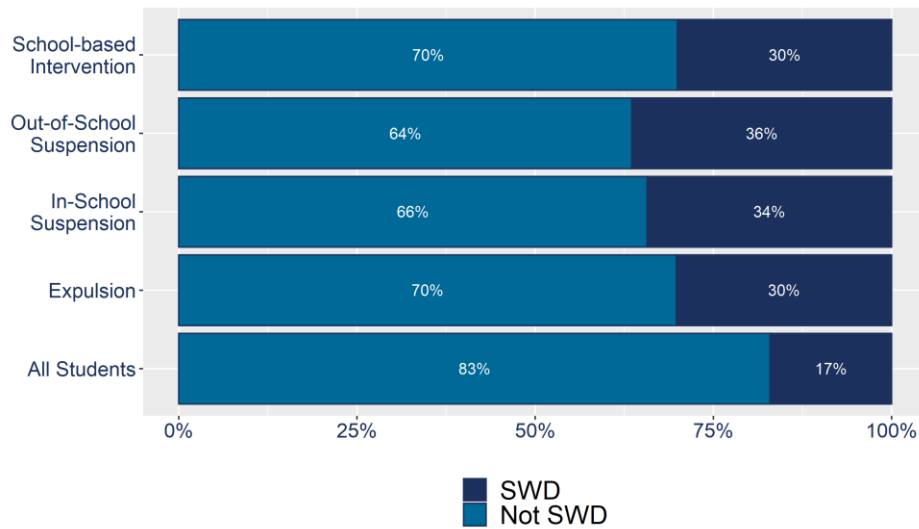
The data also suggest that students do not get expelled multiple times. None of the students who were expelled in 2016-17 or 2017-18 received an expulsion in the 2018-19 school year. Similarly, students who were expelled in 2018-19 did not receive an expulsion in the 2019-20 school year. It is encouraging to see that many students who have been expelled are successfully re-engaging in education after their expulsion. The District of Columbia should continue to encourage re-engagement in school after incidents of expulsion and other disruptions to education.

# Population in Focus – Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities were nearly twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as students without disabilities during the 2019-20 school year, when controlling for all other student demographics. Students with disabilities represented only 17 percent of the student population but 36 percent of students receiving at least one out-of-school suspension.

Overall, students with disabilities were overrepresented across each disciplinary action. They accounted for 34 percent of students who received an in-school suspension, 30 percent of expulsions, and 30 percent of involuntary dismissals in the 2019-20 school year (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Students with Disabilities Disproportionality Across All Disciplinary Actions, 2019-20

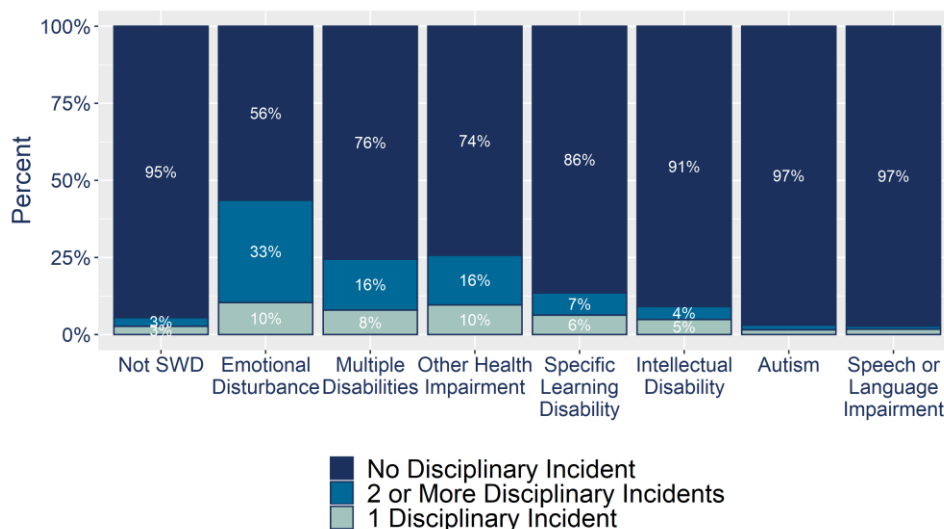


**Students whose primary disability is listed as Emotional Disturbance continue to be more likely to be suspended than other students with disabilities.**

In line with the findings in last year’s report, students designated with a primary disability of [Emotional Disturbance](#) (ED) are more frequently suspended compared to students with other primary disabilities. Among the population of students with disabilities, students with emotional disturbance are three times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension compared with students with other primary disabilities when controlling for all other student demographics.

Students with Emotional Disturbance as a primary disability reported the highest suspension rates, and Speech-Language Impairment students were found to have the lowest rates among students with disabilities (Figure 20). Forty-three percent of students with a primary disability of Emotional Disturbance were suspended at least once; 33 percent were suspended more than once.

Figure 20: Percent of Students with Recurring Disciplinary Incidents by SWD Category, 2019-20



\*Disability Categories with n<200 not displayed.

As part of OSSE’s strategic plan, it is committed to accelerating improved outcomes for students with disabilities. To learn more about students with disabilities in the District of Columbia, see [Students with Disabilities in the District of Columbia Landscape Analysis](#)<sup>28</sup>. Additionally, as part of OSSE’s work leading to the report on school discipline practices, OSSE is exploring challenges and best practices in supporting positive behavior amongst students with disabilities.

<sup>28</sup> <https://osse.dc.gov/page/students-disabilities-district-columbia-landscape-analysis>

## Population in Focus – Ninth Grade Students

Ninth grade is a pivotal transition year in the educational trajectory of students. Given the importance of student success in ninth grade, agencies across the District invest targeted resources in support of ninth grade students, from OSSE’s summer bridge program to ninth grade academies at select DCPS high schools. Despite the specific supports intended for this age, ninth grade students continue to have the highest levels of profound absenteeism and receive the highest share of out-of-school suspensions in the District.

***Ninth grade students received nearly 20 percent of out-of-school suspensions.***

Out of the 5,213 incidents that resulted in an out-of-school suspension, 19 percent involved ninth-grade students. These incidents were not evenly distributed across high schools in the District: more than half of all incidents that resulted in an out-of-school suspension for ninth grade students occurred in eight of the District’s high schools.<sup>29</sup>

***More than half of all out-of-school suspensions among ninth grade students were due to fighting or disruptive or reckless behavior.***

In line with the primary disciplinary reasons across all grade levels, the majority of ninth grade students with an out-of-school suspension were suspended due to fighting or disruptive or reckless behavior. More than one-third of all out-of-school incidents among ninth grade students were due to fighting. As the second most common reason, ninth graders’ disruptive or reckless behavior resulted in 179 out-of-school suspensions across 146 students. Altogether, out-of-school suspensions totaled a cumulative loss of 2,770 instructional days for ninth grade students in the District.

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<sup>29</sup> Cardozo Education Campus, Dunbar High School, Eastern High School, H.D. Woodson High School, KIPP DC – College Preparatory Academy, KIPP DC – Somerset College Preparatory Academy, Roosevelt High School, Thurgood Marshall Academy PCS.

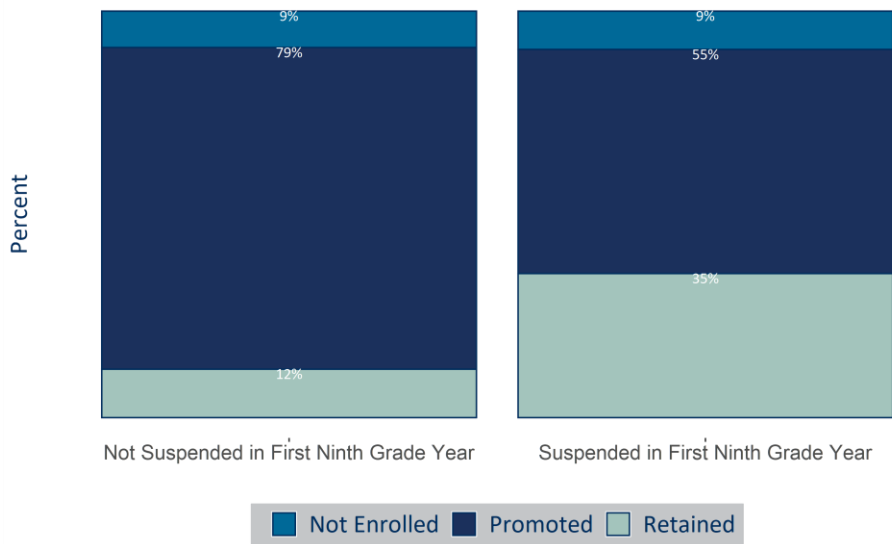


***Disciplinary incidents in ninth grade influence a student’s chances of graduation.***

Discipline incidents during the ninth grade year can have significant implications on a student’s educational trajectory. Thirty-five percent of students who received an out-of-school suspension during their first ninth grade year in 2018-19 were retained in the ninth grade during the 2019-20 school year, compared to 12 percent who did not receive an out-of-school suspension (see Figure 21).

Being retained in the ninth grade decreases the likelihood that a student will graduate from high school, which underscores the importance of addressing behavioral challenges leading up to and within students’ ninth grade year so that students are ready to succeed in high school and beyond. Students belonging to the cohort of students expected to graduate in 2020 were first time ninth graders in the 2016-17 school year. Within this cohort, students who received at least one out-of-school suspension as ninth graders in 2016-17 were 3.5 times less likely to graduate than their ninth grade peers who received no out-of-school suspensions.

*Figure 21: Grade Promotion for First Time Ninth Graders in 2018-19, by Out-of-School Suspension Status*



# Disciplinary Exclusions of LGBTQ Students

D.C. Code §38-236.09 requires this annual report on discipline. Further, the statute requires that the report shall include data drawn from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), school climate surveys, and any other sources on the exclusion of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning of the student's sexual orientation, transgender, gender nonconforming, or questioning of the student's gender identity or expression.

As a recipient of the PS-1807 grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the District administers the biennial YRBS, which informs how we support our adolescent students and remove health barriers to learning and instruction. Unique among all participating states and jurisdictions, the District's YRBS employs a census-level data collection methodology which generates a deep and broad data set that enables us to identify trends within and among specific groups of students. The most current YRBS data are provided in the 2019 YRBS Report, displaying findings from the survey conducted during the 2018-19-school year.

The DC YRBS asks the following questions pertaining to sexual and gender identity:

## **Middle and High School Question:**

Which of the following best describes you?

- A. Heterosexual (straight)
- B. Gay or lesbian
- C. Bisexual
- D. Not sure

## **Middle and High School Question:**

A person's appearance, style, dress, or the way they walk or talk may affect how people describe them. How do you think other people at school would describe you?

- A. Very feminine
- B. Mostly feminine
- C. Somewhat feminine
- D. Equally feminine and masculine
- E. Somewhat masculine
- F. Mostly masculine
- G. Very masculine

## **Middle School Question:**

A transgender person is someone who does not feel the same inside as the sex they were born with. Are you transgender?

- A. No, I am not transgender
- B. Yes, I am transgender
- C. I am not sure if I am transgender

D. I do not know what this question is asking

**High School Question:**

Some people describe themselves as transgender when their sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender. Are you transgender?

- A. No, I am not transgender
- B. Yes, I am transgender
- C. I am not sure if I am transgender
- D. I do not know what this question is asking

According to the findings in the 2019 Report, 1.8% of DC middle school students identified as lesbian or gay, 8.2% as bisexual, and 8.1% not sure. 4.5% of DC high school students identified as lesbian or gay, 11.4% as bisexual, and 3.7% as not sure. The 2019 findings also show 0.9% of middle school students identify as transgender compared to 1.9% of high school students.

OSSE does not collect student identifiers related to sexual orientation and gender identity. This information is highly personal and fluid especially in a child’s formative years; therefore, we are unable to report data on the rate of disciplinary actions on LGBT students using our discipline data collection.

However, the DC YRBS does provide information on experiences of bullying, harassment, and violent behavior for students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. High school students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual report nearly double the rate of having been bullied on school property compared to their heterosexual peers. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual high school students also report approximately 5 percent higher rates of being removed from class for at least one day for disciplinary reasons than their heterosexual peers. More information, on this and other findings from our bi-annual YRBS, can be found on the OSSE website.<sup>30</sup>

Note that throughout the 2019 DC YRBS report, analysis that refers to lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students only includes those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; students who responded as “not sure” are excluded from analysis that compares heterosexual youth to LGB youth. Additionally, because the survey collects students’ sexual orientation and gender identity through two independent questions, all analysis that refers to transgender only includes those who identify as transgender; those who responded as “not sure” are excluded from analysis.

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<sup>30</sup> [“DC Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\).”](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

## Conclusion

Although the discipline data for the 2019-20 school year was cut short due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, the trends from prior year's report on discipline still remain. Discipline data from the 2019-20 school year suggest that inequities persist in exclusionary disciplinary practices. Specifically, students who are Black or African American, at-risk, male, have disabilities, or are enrolled in grades six through nine are excluded from instructional time at greater rates than other populations of students. Further investigation into why this disproportionality exists should help uncover the behavioral, structural, environmental, and perceptual components of student behavior and related disciplinary actions.

Out-of-school-suspensions remain the most commonly reported type of exclusion, and two-thirds of out-of-school-suspensions result from fighting or disruptive behavior. Understanding why students fight and supporting alternative resolutions and interventions can help reduce the amount of instructional time students miss due to out-of-school-suspension.

In-school-suspension rates continue to vary widely by LEA. This suggests LEAs use different approaches to support and to address student behavior. The District will benefit from more research into which practices particularly reduce the recurrence of in-school-suspension, where there is often greater disproportionality for the populations mentioned above.

Expulsions often result from incidents of violence, though not always. It is also encouraging that students who are expelled reengage in school at high rates and very rarely receive another expulsion.

OSSE is proud to be a collaborative partner with LEAs and schools with ongoing discipline activities, as authorized under the Students Fair Access to School Act.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Data Methodology

### Definitions

**Disciplinary Unenrollment:** The expulsion (including modified expulsion) or involuntary transfer of a student from a school.

**Emergency Removal:** The immediate out-of-school suspension or disciplinary unenrollment of a student based on the school's reasonable belief that the student's presence poses an immediate and continuing danger to other students or school staff.

**Expulsion:** Removal of a student from the student's school of enrollment for disciplinary reasons for the remainder of the school year or longer in accordance with LEA policy.

**In-School Suspension:** Temporarily removing a student from his/her regular class schedule for disciplinary reasons, during which time the student remains on school grounds under the supervision of school personnel who are physically in the same location as the student.

**Involuntary Dismissal:** The removal of the student from school attendance for less than half of a school day for disciplinary reasons, during which time the student is not under the supervision of school personnel and is not allowed on school grounds.

**Involuntary Transfer:** The removal of a student from the student's school of enrollment for disciplinary reasons for the remainder of the school year, or longer, and the student's enrollment in another school within the same LEA, in accordance with LEA policy.

**Modified Expulsions:** Removal of a student from the student's school or enrollment resulting from violations of the Gun-Free Schools Act that are modified to less than 365 days.

**Out-of-School Suspension:** Temporarily removing a student from school attendance to another setting for disciplinary reasons, during which time the student is not under the supervision of the school's personnel and is not allowed on school grounds.

**School-Based Intervention:** Temporarily removing a student from the student's regular class schedule for the purpose of providing the student with school-based targeted supports, such as behavioral therapy, in response to student conduct that would otherwise warrant an in-school suspension.

### Data Sources

The student universe and subgroup identification are based on the data validation file that DCPS and public charter school schools certified at the end of the 2019-20 school year. Disciplinary action data are based on

self-reported data provided by LEAs and PCSB. Data files provided by LEAs and PCSB that contained altered field names and values were mapped to OSSE's template for state-level reporting. OSSE has participated in several conversations with PCSB to develop consistencies between both discipline collection templates.

## Data Cleaning and Limitations

Several students included in the student universe in this report had missing or invalid demographic values for one or more reported subgroup analyses. These students are included in state, LEA, and school-level totals but are not included in analyses by subgroup. OSSE does not receive discipline data from non-public schools, so students only enrolled in non-public schools were excluded from the analyses throughout this report as were students in juvenile justice programs.

## Counts of Disciplinary Actions

Counts of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, involuntary transfers, removals to an interim alternative educational setting, and disciplinary actions were obtained from the discipline data collected by OSSE from the LEAs. Each unique student disciplinary action date and disciplinary action type were calculated once for this report.

## Student-Level Analyses

This report includes various calculations of student-level data, including:

- Number of students with at least one in-school suspension (in-school suspension rate)
- Number of students with at least one expulsion (expulsion rate)
- Number of students with at least one out-of-school suspension (out-of-school suspension rate)
- Number of out-of-school suspensions per student
- Cumulative duration of out-of-school suspensions per student

Reporting at the state level, students are counted once to calculate the total number of disciplinary actions. Regarding complete counts of disciplinary incidents, students with multiple disciplinary incidents are counted based on their sum of disciplinary actions.

# Appendix B: Disciplinary Actions by Month

Figure 22: In-School and Out-of-School Suspensions by Month, 2019-20

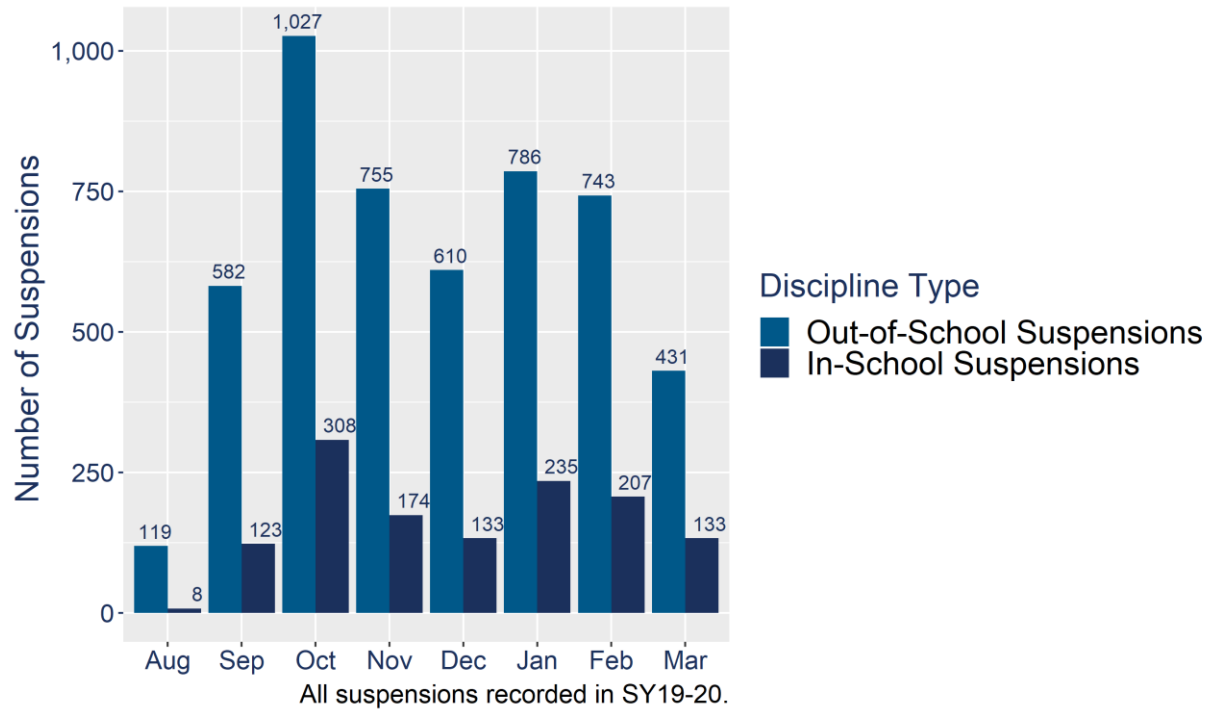


Figure 23: In-School and Out-of-School Suspensions by Month, 2018-19

