
Research Brief on Student Suspension

Suspensions in APS follow the student behavior handbook. The handbook defines the disposition school staffs follow when responding to a student infraction. In school suspensions may be used when the school staffs determine it is appropriate for the infraction. Students in in-school suspensions must have access to educational programming during the in-school suspension. Students who are suspended out of school may be suspended for no more than 5 days as a short-term suspension; or they may be suspended from the time of the infraction to the end of the semester, a long-term suspension. Students have a right to a hearing before a long-term suspensions.

In addition to these guidelines, the district has a set of infractions that must be reported to the state and other infractions considered by the district severe enough that they may warrant suspensions of some kind but are not required to be reported to the state. Each school is responsible for entering the behavioral event and the response, including in-school or out of school suspensions.

During 2014-15 there were a total of 15,380 suspensions, both in-school and out of school. The distribution is very close with 7,423 in-school suspensions and 7,927 out of school suspensions.

The range of days out of school is from a recorded 0 to a maximum of 20. In 797 instances, school staffs did not enter any days associated with the suspension or entered 0 days, only that a suspension was applied. Out of school suspensions account for 56% of those suspensions entered without the number of days the student was out of school. Two students are recorded as having a 50 day suspension and another having a 33 day suspension. Excluding these three extremes, student were out of school due to suspension a total of 18,894 days. That is equivalent to nearly 105 years of instruction.

If the blanks and 0 were equated to 1 day of suspension then students would have been out of school another 445 days making it equivalent to 107 days of lost instruction across all students suspended out of school.

When examining suspensions by ethnicity it is important to do so in the content of enrollment. Comparing the percent of students suspended by each ethnicity to the enrollment by each ethnicity is a more appropriate strategy to identify patterns of response. Often times a human resources (“HR”) standard of a discrepancy of 10% between the variable under study and the total representation is used to identify an over- or under-representation. However, for smaller numbers, sometimes the standard is double the representation over enrollment.

Using these standards applied to all suspensions, in and out of school, there is over-representation of African-Americans with these students making up 5% of all suspensions and

only 2% of the enrollment. This representation in suspensions is more than twice the enrollment. Suspensions of Hispanic students is 7 percentage point higher than enrollment (75% of suspensions are Hispanic students while Hispanics make up 67% of enrollment). White students make up 12% of the suspensions and 21% of enrollment.

When these kinds of comparisons are made for out of school and in-school suspensions (all forms of suspension) the percentage discrepancies are the same for Hispanic students; slightly lower for African-American students and slightly higher for white students. These similarities suggest that any biases that may be in effect hold across both forms of suspension, in-school and out of school.

Figure 1 – All Suspensions Compared to Enrollment by Ethnicity

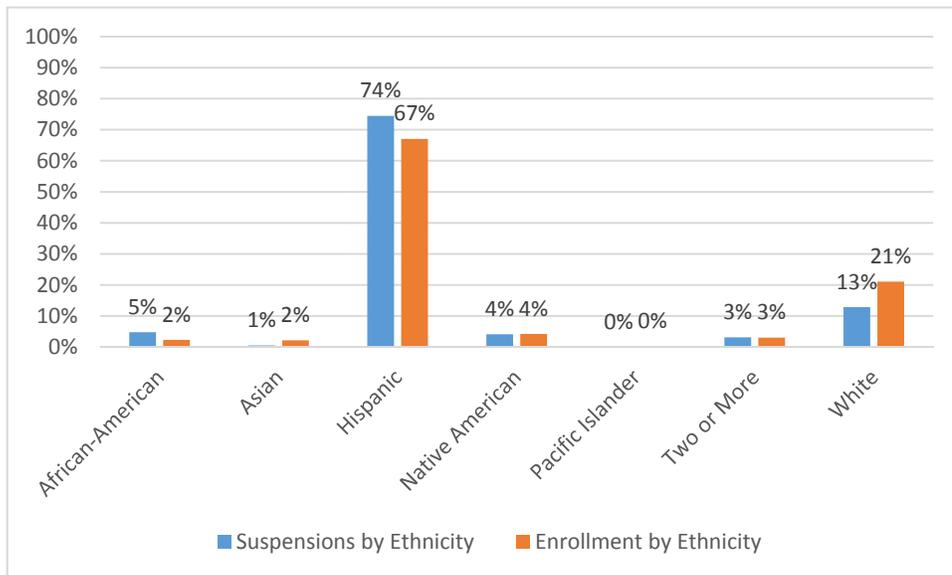


Figure 2 – In-School Suspensions Compared to Enrollment by Ethnicity

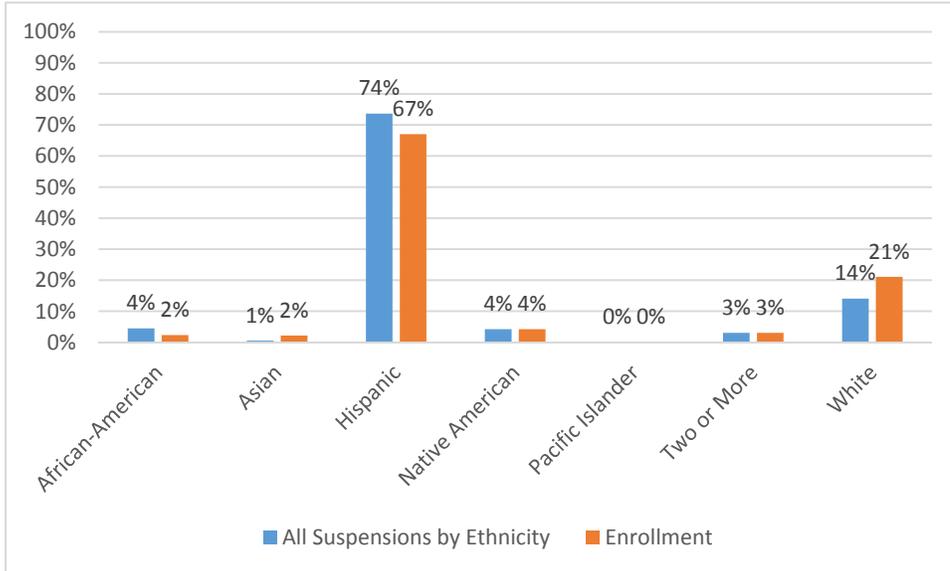
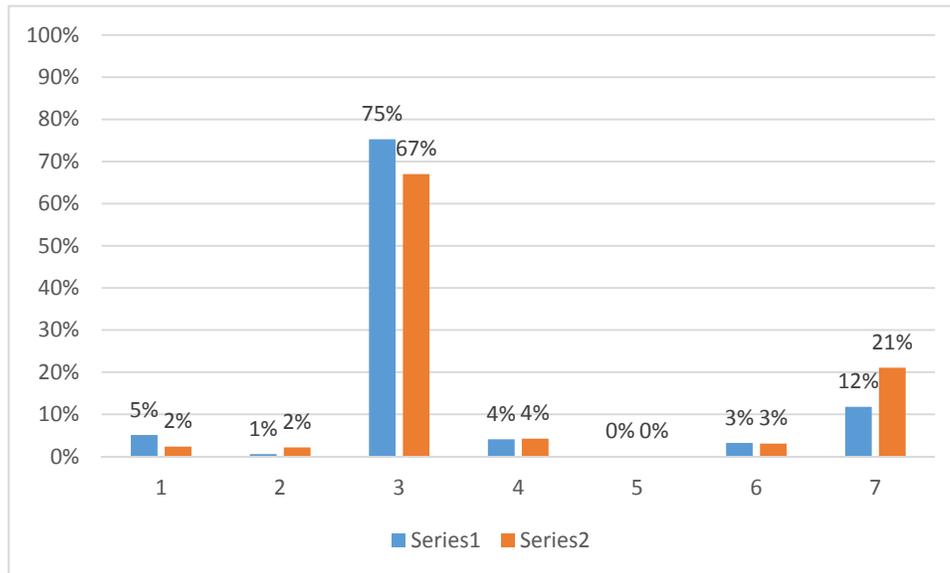


Figure 3 – Out of School Suspensions Compared to Enrollment by Ethnicity



Gender

Girls make up 27% of the out of school suspensions and 30% of the in-school suspensions. Overall girls account for 29% of all suspensions. Overall, the comparison of boys to girls suspended (in or out of school) is about 3:1; a bit higher in some ethnicities and lower in others. The only exception to this is for Pacific Islanders. There are under 5 Pacific Islander students suspended and girls make up 66% of those suspensions. These numbers are too small to create a trend or pattern.

Hispanic girls make up 77% of all female suspensions but account for only 67% of the female enrollment. This discrepancy would meet the “HR standard” for over-representation.

Suspension by Level of School

Of the 142 schools that may report suspensions, 126 had at least one suspension either in-school or out of school. Those not reporting were all elementary schools. As would be expected elementary schools had the fewest suspensions with many schools reporting only 1, and that was in-school. The highest suspension numbers for an elementary school were 175 with 73% of those being out of school.

At the middle schools, the highest overall suspension number was 1,362, but only 1/3 of those were out of school. The next highest school had 906 suspensions but again only 1/3 of those were out of school. 14 of the 27 middle schools had in-school suspensions that out-numbered the out of school suspensions. Two notable exceptions were schools with 247 and 344 out of school suspensions with only 7 and 4 in-school suspensions, respectively.

High school suspensions ranged from a low of 52 to a high of 761. Out of school suspensions ranged from 39 to 284. The highest rate of out of school suspensions compared to in-school suspensions for any high school was 96%, The lowest out of school suspensions compared to in-school suspension was only 14% out of school suspensions across 613 total suspensions.

Summary and Recommendations

For African-American students there is a clear discrepancy between their representation in suspensions and their enrollment. However, for Hispanic students, suspensions out-strip enrollment by as much as 7 percentage points, suggesting an issue that deserves closer study and consideration by school staffs.

Suspension for Hispanic girls is 10 percentage points above enrollment, showing a pattern of over-representation.

An additional study is underway examining the types of infractions by student groups. This study will be published in a separate report distributed through the website for the Office of Accountability and Reporting.

Suspension data is poorly reported in the student information system. Days in suspension – whether it is in-school or out of school are erratically reported. Some schools have either no suspensions or significantly low numbers when compared to schools of similar size, suggesting one of two possibilities: differences in how the school culture deals with misbehaviors or differences in how school staffs record infractions and suspensions. Either deserves a closer review and inspection.

When examining the rate of in-school suspensions compared to out of school suspensions, some schools seem to have developed a strategy for keeping students engaged in school but still able to impose some consequences for misbehaviors. A study of the school culture and the disciplinary practices at those schools might be of value especially among high school principals.

When reviewing the kinds of infractions, although it was a cursory review, it was evident that some schools only report the state mandated infractions as discipline events while others report any infraction that warrants an intervention or response from the school staff.

It is important that all schools report suspensions accurately and identify the reason or infraction. A clear expectation should be established for the types of infractions that must be reported so that each school has a comparable figure when future studies are undertaken.

Until that common expectation is established, support and intervention for students and support for staff will not be as effective as they most likely could be.