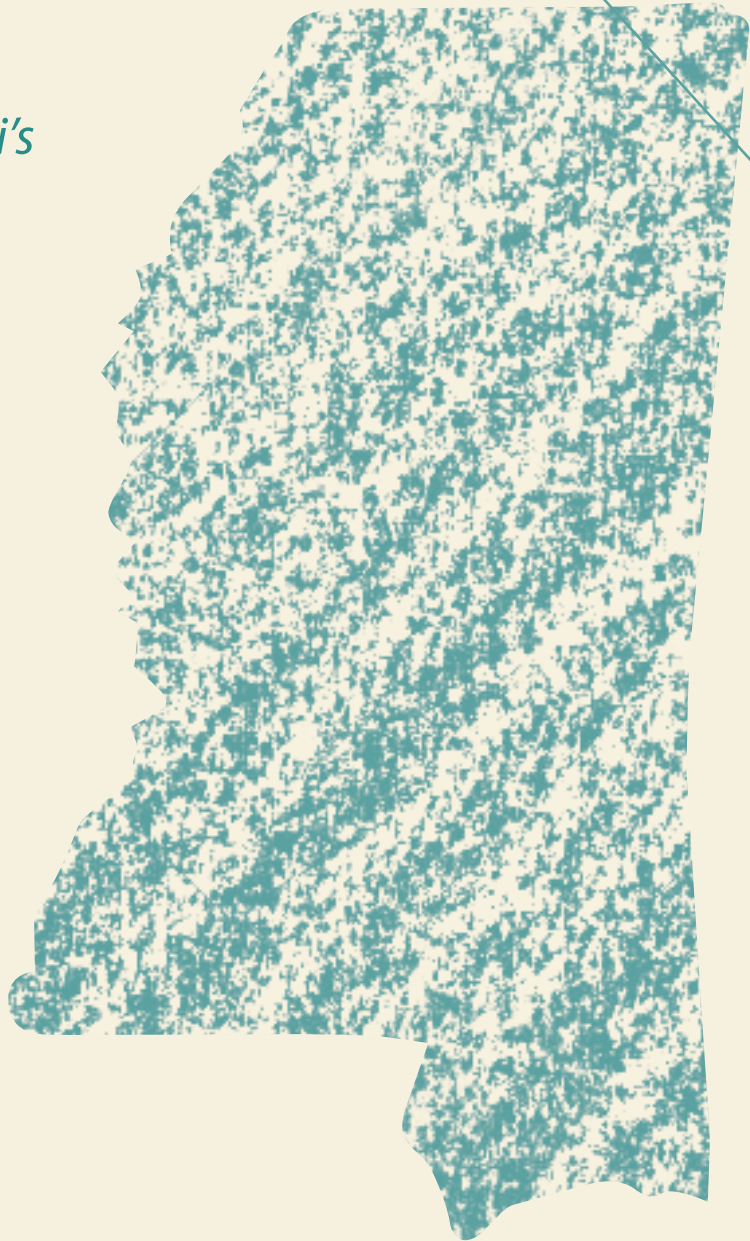


MISSISSIPPI DATA PROJECT

Report
February 2017

Education Suspended:

*An Overview of Student
Suspensions in Mississippi's
Public Schools*



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INTRODUCTION

School attendance promotes student success and ensures the probability of graduating on time, yet students from kindergarten through 12th grade are frequently disciplined in a way which requires them to lose critical hours and days from school instead of participating in an educational setting to gain the social and academic skills which are essential to becoming productive, educated, and successful citizens. This brief summarizes information on the status of school suspensions among Mississippi's public school students, compares this status to national suspension rates, and outlines policy considerations. The purpose of this policy brief is to advance data driven decision-making in promoting best practice models and educational policies for children and families in Mississippi.

Compared to the national average of 6%, Mississippi had a higher rate of children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions (OSS), during the 2013-2014 school year. Approximately 42,100 Mississippi students (K-12), or 8.3% of all public school students, were given one or more out-of-school suspensions.

Eight percent of all Mississippi public school students were given one or more out-of-school suspensions during the 2013-2014 school year, compared to the national average of six percent.

During the same 2013-2014 school year, in public schools across the United States, 2.8 million students (K-12), or 6% of all students, received one or more out-of-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education 2016a). Racial disparities in suspensions were apparent. Black students were nearly four times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions compared to White students (U.S. Department of Education 2016a). Although Black girls were only 8% of all enrolled students in the U.S., they were 13% of students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education 2016a). In Mississippi during the 2013-2014 school year, Black students (12.7% OSS rate) were over three times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspension as White students (4.0% OSS rate).

Research demonstrates this is due to teachers interpreting misbehavior differently, depending on a student's race, rather than a difference in behavior between White and Black students (Stanford University 2015). Black students are more likely to be suspended for infractions which are determined subjectively by the referring teacher such as insubordination, willful defiance (Butrymowicz 2015), disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering. White students tend to be referred for suspension due to offenses which can be objectively determined such as smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, and obscene language (Skiba, Trachok, Chung, Baker, and Hughes 2012).

ABOUT SUSPENSION IN MISSISSIPPI

Costs and Effects of Suspension

Student suspensions have both a direct and indirect economic impact on taxpayers. A 2016 study estimated that suspensions in 10th grade alone, at the national level, increased the number of dropouts by more than 67,000. Since students who received suspensions are more likely to drop out of high school, this may result in lost wages and taxes, increased crime, higher welfare costs, and poorer health. The long-term fiscal and social costs of these losses have been estimated at \$11 billion in fiscal impact in lost tax revenues over the lifetimes of these additional dropouts, and \$35 billion in social impact and costs to the larger society (Rumberger and Losen 2016).

“A suspension can be life altering. It is the number-one predictor - more than poverty - of whether children will drop out of school, and walk down a road that includes greater likelihood of unemployment, reliance on social-welfare programs, and imprisonment.”

*National Education Association, neaToday
(Flannery 2015)*

When considering the cost of student suspensions to the suspended children and their classmates, research shows a very different picture from commonly held beliefs around the effectiveness of school suspensions. Extreme disciplinary practices do not show positive results for either the children who have been suspended, or for their classmates. A key assumption (upon which many school districts' discipline policies are based) is that disruptive students must be removed from the classroom for the good of the non-disruptive students and to make the classroom more conducive to learning (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008). However, research shows that over time, high levels of out-of-school suspensions in a school are instead associated with declining reading and math scores among non-suspended students (Perry and Morris 2014). Mississippi data also reflect a relationship between school suspension rates and student outcomes. An analysis of districts across the state for the 2013-2014 school year shows that school districts with a high performance rating under the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System tended to have low suspension rates and vice versa. Districts with an “A” rating for the 2013-2014 school year suspended an average of 9% of their students and districts with a “D” rating suspended an average of just over twice as many (19%) of their students. For the student who is suspended, such disciplinary practices frequently lead to the suspended student becoming less engaged and “connected” at school and more likely to break school rules over time as the student becomes more resentful of the teacher/school and less trusting of school authority in general (American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi 2013).

Mississippi State Discipline Policies

Across the U.S., most education policy is written at the state and local levels; the role of the federal U.S. Department of Education is quite limited beyond providing legislation, regulations, guidance and other policy document resources and information. School disciplinary policies and student codes of conduct vary across districts and states. In Mississippi, the authority to determine the grounds for suspension, and the authority to carry out this punishment, is in the hands of local school districts and school boards. The Mississippi Department of Education designates the power and authority of disciplining Mississippi students to school districts' superintendents, school boards, and principals.* Local school boards are the ultimate authority in school discipline matters and they are mandated by Mississippi statute 37-11-55 to "adopt and make available to all teachers, school personnel, students and parents or guardians, at the beginning of each school year, a code of student conduct developed in consultation with teachers, school personnel, students and parents or guardians" (U.S. Department of Education 2016b). The statute further states that each school district's Code of Conduct is expected to include the following (U.S. Department of Education 2016b):

"Specific grounds for disciplinary action under the school district's discipline plan"

"Procedures to be followed for acts requiring discipline (including suspensions and expulsions), which comply with due process requirements"

"An explanation of the responsibilities and rights of students with regard to: attendance; respect for persons and property; knowledge and observation of rules of conduct; free speech and student publications; assembly; privacy; and participation in school programs and activities"

"Policies and procedures for dealing with a student who causes a disruption in the classroom, on school property or vehicles, or at school related activities"

"Procedures for the development of behavior modification plans by the school principal, reporting teacher and student's parent for a student who causes a disruption in the classroom, on school property or vehicles, or at school related activities for a second time during the school year"

"Policies and procedures specifically concerning gang related activities in the school, on school property or vehicles, or at school related activities"

*See Laws 37-7-301 General Powers and Duties & 37-9-71. Suspension of Pupils, listed in the 2016 *Mississippi Compilation of School Laws and Regulations* (U.S. Department of Education 2016b).

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION POLICIES

Findings from a Review of Mississippi Student Handbooks' Discipline Policies

A review of student handbooks and/or code of conduct handbooks from 25 Mississippi school districts found that schools employed a wide-range of disciplinary policies and types of discipline, from in-school suspension, detention, and corporal punishment to out-of-school suspension, alternative school placement, and expulsions. The school districts reviewed for this study varied in student population sizes and geographical location with a mix of districts from the Northern, Central, Delta, Southern, and Eastern regions of the state. Local school districts have the authority to determine whether or not to give In School Suspensions (ISS) or Out of School Suspensions (OSS) but ISS is hardly mentioned as an option in the state level documents describing Mississippi School Law that were reviewed for this brief (Mississippi Department of Education 2008; U.S. Department of Education 2016b; Mississippi Office of Attorney General and Mississippi Department of Education Office of Healthy Schools 2006). Because district student handbooks' discipline plans and codes of conduct vary widely across districts, details and guidance around when ISS and OSS should be given as a punishment for student infractions also varies across districts.

The term "suspension" may be defined as follows: "the temporary denial of the privilege of attending school in [name of school district] imposed after due process upon any student of the district at the direction of the principal of the school in which the student is enrolled or the principal's designee, but shall not include in-school suspension.... The term 'suspension' is often referred to as an 'out-of-school suspension', or OSS" (Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District 2016). The term "in-school suspension" (or ISS) may be defined as: "a change of placement for the student from the regular classroom to a special classroom monitored by a full-time district employee. During this change of placement, the student will be afforded the opportunity to work on his/her school assignments in a supervised classroom (Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District 2016)."

The handbooks showed a range of disciplinary procedures throughout every sampled school. Policies reviewed were those associated with expectations for student conduct and disciplinary action to be taken when student infractions occur. Specifically, each handbook was reviewed for whether or not it contained information, guidance, and rules related to: attendance; tardiness; bullying; medicine administration; dress code; school bus conduct; in school suspension; detention; out of school suspension; expulsion; alternative school placement; corporal punishment; disciplinary hearing procedures; disciplinary procedures for special education and students with disabilities as provided under Section 2 of Senate Bill 2506 (1999 Legislative Session) based on the requirements of IDEA (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act); behavioral assessment evaluations of students under 13 who have two instances of behavior classified as "disruptive behavior"; and whether or not a specific list of infractions and consequences for each type of infraction (in order of offense) was provided.

Generally, the larger the school district, the more extensive its disciplinary policies were. Some of the larger school districts tended to have policies in place which addressed minor student infractions with less severe punishments so that students could not be suspended for infractions such as dress code violations.

Local School Boards have the authority to suspend or expel a student for misconduct and to support the superintendent, principal and teachers for the proper discipline of the school. Mississippi school law also recognizes the teacher as the authority in classroom matters (thereby giving teachers the right to remove any student who is “disrupting the learning environment”) and in any decisions classroom teachers make in compliance with the district’s code of conduct (U.S. Department of Education 2016b).

The district superintendent and principal of a school have the authority to suspend a pupil when that pupil’s conduct “renders that pupil’s presence in the classroom a disruption to the educational environment of the school or a detriment to the best interest and welfare of the pupils and teacher of such class as a whole, or for any reason for which such pupil might be suspended, dismissed or expelled by the school board under state or federal law or any rule, regulation or policy of the local school district” (U.S. Department of Education 2016b). The school board may decide the number of days a student may be suspended (Mississippi Office of Attorney General and Mississippi Department of Education Office of Healthy Schools 2006). A student who is 13 years of age or older, who has “habitually disruptive behavior” may be expelled upon the third occurrence of disruptive behavior within a school year, provided a behavior modification plan had been developed. Disruptive behavior is defined in Mississippi State Statute 37-11-18.1. as:

“conduct of a student that is so unruly, disruptive or abusive that it seriously interferes with a school teacher’s or school administrator’s ability to communicate with the students in a classroom, with a student’s ability to learn, or with the operation of a school or school related activity, and which is not covered by other laws related to violence or possession of weapons or controlled substances on school property, school vehicles or at school related activities. Such behaviors include, but are not limited to: foul, profane, obscene, threatening, defiant or abusive language or action toward teachers or other school employees; defiance, ridicule or verbal attack of a teacher; and willful, deliberate and overt acts of disobedience of the directions of a teacher” (Mississippi Office of Attorney General and Mississippi Department of Education Office of Healthy Schools 2006).

What is commonly referred to as the “Zero Tolerance” law is applied to students who bring drugs, weapons, or commit a violent act at school. The MS School Law states:

“Any student in any school who possesses any controlled substance in violation of the Uniform Controlled Substance Law, a knife, handgun, or other firearm or any other instrument considered to be dangerous and capable of causing bodily harm or who commits a violent act on educational property as defined in Section 97-37-17, shall be subject to automatic expulsion for a calendar year by the superintendent or principal of the school in which the student is enrolled; provided, however, that the superintendent of the school shall be authorized to modify the period of time for such expulsion on a case by case basis” (Mississippi Office of Attorney General and Mississippi Department of Education Office of Healthy Schools 2006).

Spotlight on Discipline Policy:

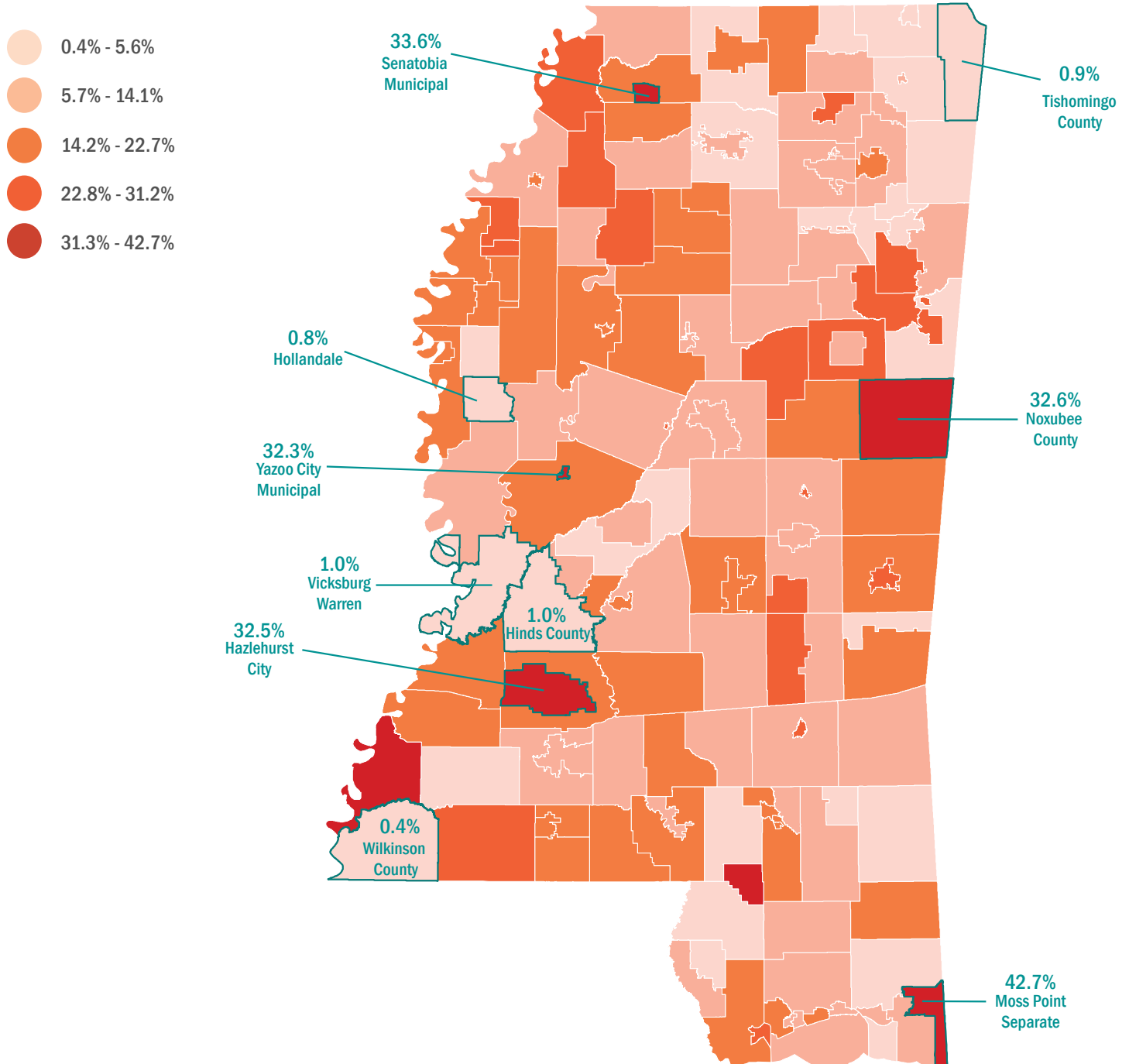
The Grenada School District’s Student Handbooks state: “Academic success is directly correlated with instructional time received by the student. In the effort to fully implement School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports...and reduce the loss of instructional time due to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, each school ...will utilize a wide variety of corrective strategies that do not remove children from valuable instructional time. These strategies are designed to prevent the occurrence of student infractions, teach alternative or replacement behaviors, or motivate students to demonstrate compliance with established school expectations outlined in the Code of Conduct.... [and] serve as a first line of remediation in the successful management of student behaviors.”

Corrective strategies to be used as alternatives to suspension and expulsion include: Detention or In-School Suspension in conjunction with instruction designed to teach replacement behaviors; Behavioral contracts and/or Behavior Support Plans; Conflict Resolution/ Appropriate Communication/ Social Skills; Effective de-escalation strategies; Mentoring with specific focus on the remediation of behavioral infractions and plans to teach replacement behaviors; Pre-correction and effective limit-setting strategies designed to prevent the occurrence of behavioral infractions; Reflective activity focused on teaching of replacement behaviors for repeated infractions; Restitution; Re-teaching of school-wide behavioral expectations...using direct instruction, modeling, and corrective feedback; Social skills instruction...; Self-charting of behavior in conjunction with corrective and reinforcing feedback; Short-term Behavioral Progress Reports... and communication with home...; Supervised work assignment... at student’s level or designed to address specific behavioral infractions; Written Apology with appropriate model and/or guidance from school personnel (Grenada School District 2016).

MISSISSIPPI SUSPENSION DATA

Reviewing data provided by the Mississippi Department of Education, researchers from the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University note the following current trends for children being suspended from Mississippi schools:

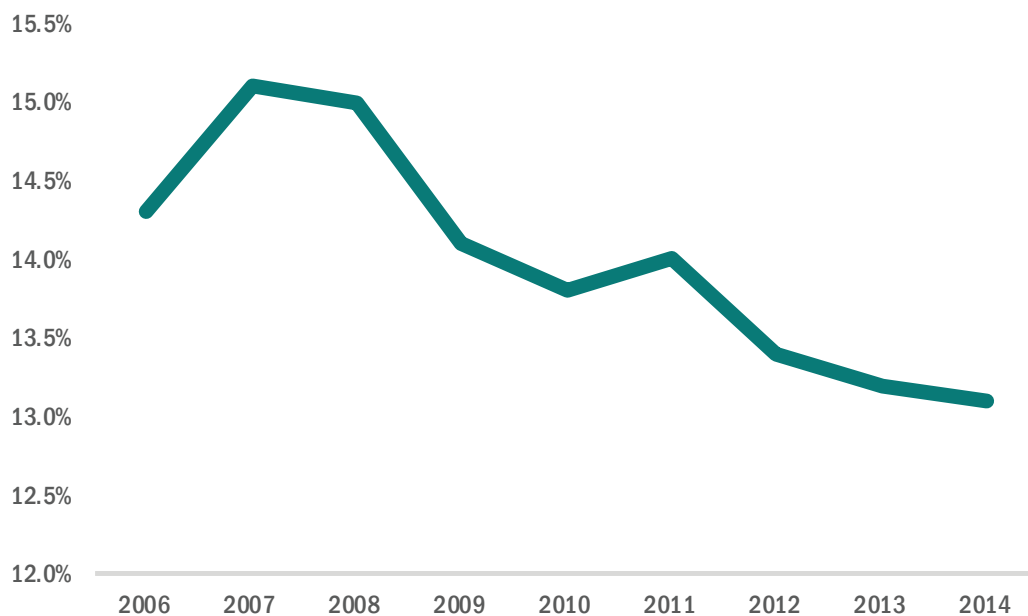
Figure 1. Suspension Rates by District (2014)



Suspension Rates by District: School districts vary considerably in their use of ISS versus OSS. For instance, during the 2014-2015 school year, 18.3% of students in the Quitman County School District received an OSS while no students received an ISS. Conversely, during the same school year, only 3.9% of students in the Bay St. Louis-Waveland School District received an OSS versus 24.5% who received an ISS. Data also revealed wide variability among school districts' use of suspensions when comparing schools by their Mississippi Statewide Accountability System letter grades; school districts with a high performance rating under the accountability system tended to have low suspension rates and vice versa.

Districts with lowest total suspension rates		Districts with highest total suspension rates*	
1. Wilkinson County	(0.4%)	1. Moss Point Separate	(42.7%)
2. Hollandale	(0.8%)	2. Senatobia Municipal	(33.6%)
3. Tishomingo County	(0.9%)	3. Noxubee County	(32.6%)
4. Hinds County	(1.0%)	4. Hazlehurst City	(32.5%)
5. Vicksburg Warren	(1.0%)	5. Yazoo City Municipal	(32.3%)

Figure 2. Suspension Rates (ISS & OSS; 2006 - 2014)



Time Series: Between 2007 and 2014 school suspension rates (students with one or more OSS or ISS) have shown a general decline, with the lowest suspension rate of 13.1% in 2014 (8.2% OSS and 7.5% ISS). The one exception was a slight uptick in 2011, with a total rate of 14% (8.9% OSS and 8.2% ISS).

Suspension Rates (OSS & ISS) by District (2014)

District	Total Rate	OSS	ISS
Aberdeen	22.8	17.2	11.5
Alcorn	2.0	0.8	1.3
Amite County	26.0	12.9	20.7
Amory	2.2	2.0	0.4
Attala County	8.6	8.4	0.3
Baldwyn	6.1	4.7	2.2
Bay St Louis Waveland	25.2	3.9	24.5
Benton County	17.6	17.5	0.3
Biloxi Public	14.1	5.8	11.2
Booneville	6.1	3.6	3.7
Brookhaven	10.9	5.8	6.6
Calhoun County	5.7	4.7	1.3
Canton Public	12.2	12.2	0.0
Carroll County	16.7	14.0	7.2
Chickasaw County	4.5	4.3	0.2
Choctaw County	23.8	5.3	22.2
Claiborne County	14.7	14.1	1.7
Clarksdale	14.5	10.8	6.4
Clay County	10.5	9.9	1.3
Cleveland	14.9	11.6	7.2
Clinton Public	6.8	6.8	0.2
Coahoma County AHS	32.7	32.4	2.5
Coahoma County	11.3	11.2	0.3
Coffeetown	16.3	7.8	11.3
Columbia	7.6	7.4	0.3
Columbus Municipal	24.1	11.1	18.2
Copiah County	18.7	10.0	13.2
Corinth	1.1	0.9	0.2
Covington County	6.6	6.4	0.3
Desoto County	13.6	4.2	12.1
Durant Public	27.9	14.5	19.8
East Jasper	13.5	13.3	0.5
East Tallahatchie	26.3	13.4	19.2
Enterprise	5.2	4.9	0.9
Forest Municipal	20.3	8.6	16.9
Forrest County	19.8	10.6	14.3
Forrest County AHS	31.6	13.5	29.0

District	Total Rate	OSS	ISS
Franklin County	1.9	1.7	0.3
George County	19.0	9.2	15.4
Greene County	5.6	4.8	1.3
Greenville Public	17.7	16.0	4.6
Greenwood Public	19.4	19.2	0.3
Grenada	14.4	3.4	13.0
Gulfport	21.4	12.8	16.4
Hancock County	16.0	5.6	13.9
Harrison County	14.0	10.8	5.9
Hattiesburg Public	17.0	13.1	8.8
Hazlehurst City	32.5	27.9	14.0
Hinds County	1.0	0.9	0.2
Hollandale	0.8	0.6	0.2
Holly Springs	21.1	17.9	3.7
Holmes County	9.3	9.0	0.5
Houston	6.1	4.0	3.9
Humphreys County	13.2	12.6	0.9
Itawamba County	2.0	1.8	0.3
Jackson County	5.2	5.0	0.3
Jackson Public	15.8	10.9	7.9
Jefferson County	22.1	18.6	5.3
Jefferson Davis County	21.9	19.8	5.7
Jones County	10.1	5.3	6.8
Kemper County	17.7	11.0	11.7
Kosciusko	7.7	7.7	0.0
Lafayette County	3.2	1.9	1.4
Lamar County	5.1	5.0	0.2
Lauderdale County	15.9	6.9	12.6
Laurel	24.0	14.3	16.7
Lawrence County	9.9	6.2	5.4
Leake County	6.3	5.3	2.0
Lee County	10.1	4.1	8.2
Leflore County	14.9	13.2	3.5
Leland	3.9	3.8	0.2
Lincoln County	11.8	4.7	9.1
Long Beach	11.9	6.7	8.1
Louisville Municipal	15.2	5.0	11.9

District	Total Rate	OSS	ISS
Lowndes County	1.1	0.9	0.2
Lumberton Public	31.3	12.8	27.1
Madison County	4.6	4.5	0.1
Marion County	20.6	10.9	15.8
Marshall County	4.8	4.5	0.4
Mccomb	20.6	17.3	9.5
Meridian Public	25.9	16.8	17.6
Monroe County	11.2	1.7	10.2
Montgomery County	12.4	11.7	1.3
Moss Point Separate	42.7	29.3	34.3
Natchez-Adams	31.5	21.4	21.9
Neshoba County	11.0	8.7	3.5
Nettleton	2.5	1.4	1.5
New Albany	24.8	6.5	23.2
Newton County	12.0	5.0	9.9
Newton Municipal	28.5	13.2	24.1
North Bolivar Cons.	24.5	22.9	5.2
North Panola	22.0	18.5	9.5
North Pike	19.5	14.6	13
North Tippah	1.2	1.1	0.1
Noxubee County	32.6	25.4	18.7
Ocean Springs	10.1	3.7	8.5
Okolona Separate	5.6	5.4	0.6
Oktibbeha County	24.2	22.1	3.4
Oxford	10.6	4.7	8.2
Pascagoula	12.5	12.0	1.3
Pass Christian Public	15.1	1.9	14.5
Pearl Public	14.7	7.1	11
Pearl River County	4.6	4.2	0.4
Perry County	11.6	10.7	1.2
Petal	9.8	3.6	8.1
Philadelphia Public	24.3	19.7	10.9
Picayune	8.1	8.0	0.2
Pontotoc City	9.1	4.8	6.2
Pontotoc County	9.2	2.3	7.8
Poplarville Separate	4.9	4.6	0.4
Prentiss County	1.4	1.4	0.1

District	Total Rate	OSS	ISS
Quitman	29.9	12.4	26.2
Quitman County	18.3	18.3	0.0
Rankin County	12.3	5.4	9.4
Richton	2.2	2.0	0.8
Scott County	15.7	9.5	9.8
Senatobia Municipal	33.6	11.2	31.0
Simpson County	18.3	12.4	11.0
Smith County	10.0	8.7	2.1
South Delta	9.0	8.9	0.2
South Panola	7.0	6.9	0.1
South Pike	14.2	13.8	0.7
South Tippah	5.9	3.5	3.5
Starkville	13.5	13.1	0.8
Stone County	7.5	6.8	1.3
Sunflower County Cons.	20.9	18.0	5.3
Tate County	15.1	10.3	8.2
Tishomingo County	0.9	0.9	0.1
Tunica County	27.9	25.9	9.1
Tupelo Public	19	10.0	15.2
Union County	6.9	2.7	4.9
Union Public	9.7	6.5	4.9
Vicksburg Warren	1.0	0.8	0.2
Walthall County	15.7	6.5	11.9
Water Valley	19.7	6.5	15.1
Wayne County	11.1	10.0	2.3
Webster County	8.8	5.5	4.6
West Bolivar Cons.	15.4	13.2	3.7
West Jasper	23	8.7	19.2
West Point	25.5	14.5	20.0
West Tallahatchie	13.7	12.5	2.7
Western Line	14.5	3.3	13.0
Wilkinson County	0.4	0.2	0.2
Winona Separate	11.6	11.3	0.4
Yazoo City Municipal	32.3	23.8	22.2
Yazoo County	17.0	12.1	9.4

Suspension Rates by Grade (2014)

Suspension Rates by Grade in 2014:

Data from the 2014-2015 school year shows a steady increase by grade in the percentage of students suspended (both OSS and ISS) with the highest percentage of suspended students, 9,459 (24.0%) suspended in 9th grade. Among 10th through 12th grade students there is a drop with each subsequent age group in the percentage of suspended students. Among elementary schools, the lowest number of suspended students during the 2014-2015 school year was among kindergarten students, 1,496 children (3.6%) and first grade students, 1,796 children (4.2%). Even among the youngest elementary school students, a higher percentage of students were given OSS compared to ISS.

Figure 3. Suspension Rates (Total) by Grade (2014)

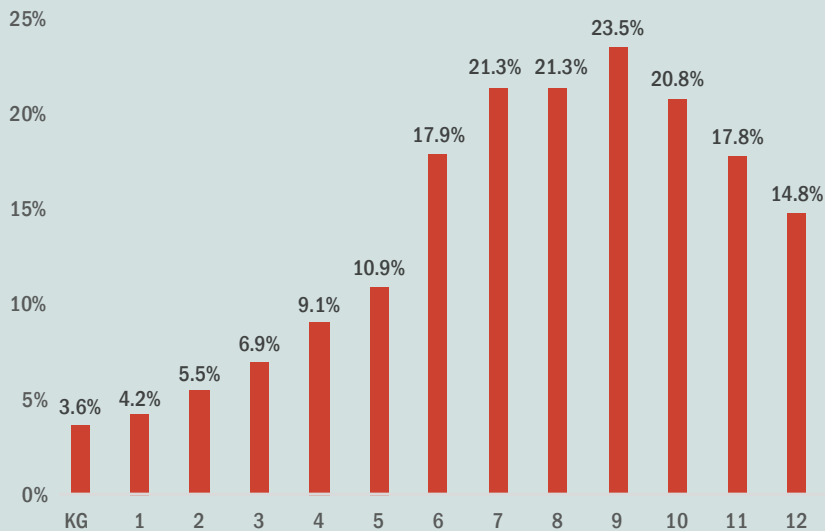


Figure 4. Suspension Rate (OSS) by Grade (2014)

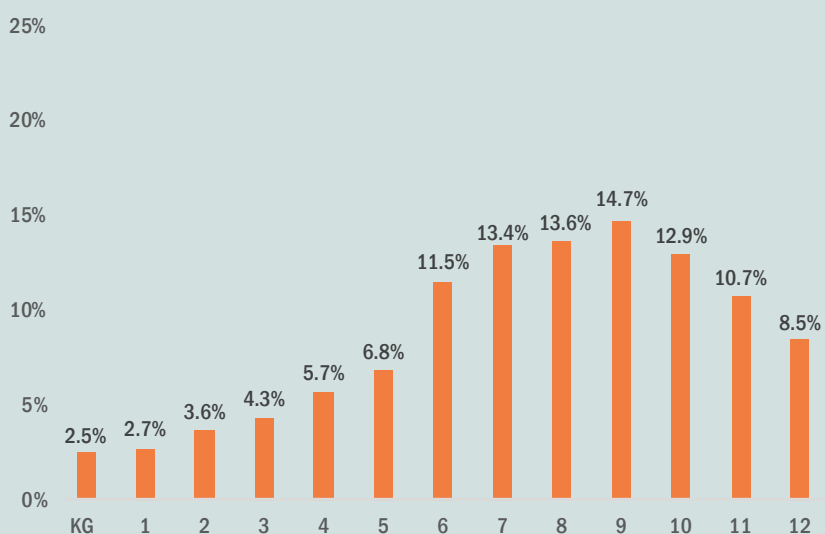


Figure 5. Suspension Rate (ISS) by Grade (2014)

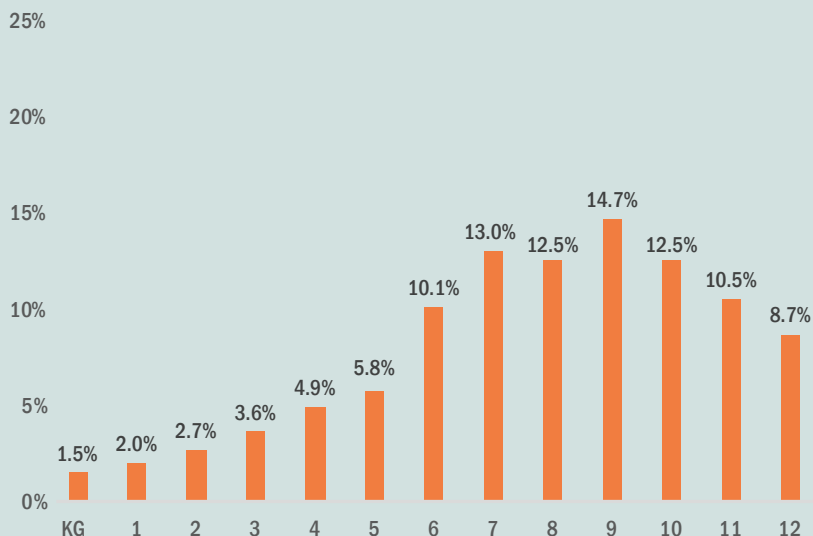
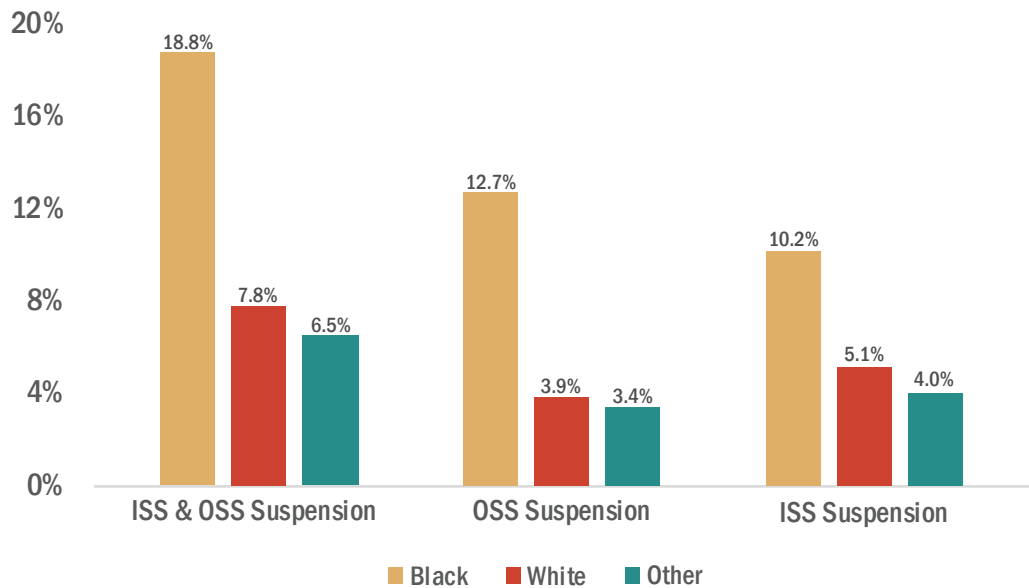


Figure 6. Suspension Rates by Race (2014)



Suspension Rates by Race in 2014: Racial disparities in suspensions are apparent nationwide and the discipline gap is especially stark in Mississippi. Black students in 2014 were more than twice as likely to receive a suspension compared to White students. Nineteen percent of all Black public school children during the 2014-2015 school year received an OSS or ISS compared to eight percent of White children during the same school year.

Suspension Rates by Type of Suspension in 2014: The types of suspensions (OSS or ISS) differed by race. During the 2014-2015 school year, Black students were more than three times as likely to receive an OSS (12.7%) compared to White students (3.9%). Even when less restrictive discipline was used, Black students were twice as likely to receive an ISS (10.2%) compared to White students (5.1%). Looking at the percentages of children who receive each type of suspension, it is also interesting to note that a higher percentage of White children who were given a suspension received a punishment which allowed them to remain in school (ISS) rather than an OSS, while a higher percentage of Black children who were given a suspension received a punishment which required them to be absent from school (OSS). The OSS rate for Black students was 12.7% while the ISS rate for Black students was 10.2% and the OSS rate for White students was 3.9% while the ISS rate for White students was 5.1%.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing High Suspension Rates and Exploring Alternatives to Suspension

What are emerging national best practices for addressing the challenge of high suspension rates which could be promoted in Mississippi?

-  Track suspension rates as a school district to learn which children are being suspended, for what type of infraction, and how often, so that discipline disparities can be identified and addressed (American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi 2013).
-  Include OSS and ISS rates as a factor among other performance standards taken into account by the State Department of Education for determining the performance classification assigned to a school or district as part of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Rating System standards (Rumberger and Losen 2016).
-  Conduct reviews at the school district level of School Handbook Discipline Policies and Codes of Conduct to ensure sufficient guidance and detail is provided to students and teachers about the types of student infractions, and their consequences, so that ambiguous codes don't lead to unfair and subjective punishments. Consider organizing discipline policies by students' age and school level and removing the suspension category of "willful disobedience" / "willful defiance" which can be broadly and subjectively defined and interpreted (Butrymowicz 2015).
-  Rewrite Codes of Conduct and discipline policies so that they use a graduated approach such as a Discipline Ladder and ensure students cannot be suspended for minor offenses such as tardiness, truancy, and dress code violations (Rumberger and Losen 2016). A "Discipline Ladder" approach is used in the Corinth School District and its district handbook details various possible student infractions and designates a range of steps on a "Discipline Ladder" which serve as a range of possible punishments for the infractions. Less severe disciplinary actions are recommended to be taken before a student may be given OSS (Corinth School Board 2016).
-  Focus on understanding the root problems which are triggering misbehavior and ensure school counselors are available and equipped to help address the emotions, feelings, and underlying issues which have prompted the misbehavior. Implement a school wide approach such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) which focuses on preventing negative behavior and supporting and rewarding positive student behavior (DeRuy 2016).
-  Increase Professional Development and Pre-Service teacher and school personnel training on culturally relevant positive classroom discipline and classroom management (American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi 2013).
-  Adopt "Restorative Justice" programs which hold offenders accountable for inappropriate and offensive behavior, make reparations to the victim, and seek to repair harm done to people and relationships (Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley & Petrosino 2016).

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Methodology

The analysis in this report uses student-level data obtained through a data use agreement with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). Suspension rates (in school, out-of-school, and total) were calculated by dividing the number of students who had one or more suspensions by the total number of enrolled students. Unless otherwise specified, all suspension rates are for the 2014/2015 school year.

Qualitative analyses were also conducted to compare discipline policies across districts in Mississippi. District handbooks from a total of 25 Mississippi public school districts were reviewed for content. The handbooks were retrieved online through school district websites. Handbooks were reviewed based on their availability online and based upon their school district's size and location. An attempt was made to select handbooks from districts which represent various student population sizes and regions throughout the state from the Northern, Central, Delta, Southern, and Eastern regions of the state.

'Other race' includes Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Multiracial, and Pacific Islander. Note that while Hispanic is an ethnicity that can overlap with racial categories, MDE treats it as a mutually exclusive racial category.

Resources

More resources are available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/catalog/suspensions-discipline.html>

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