
Disproportionality in school discipline: An assessment of trends in Maryland, 2009–12

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Key findings

During school years 2009/10, 2010/11, and 2011/12:

- The percentage of students in Maryland who received out-of-school suspension or expulsion declined from 5.6 percent in 2009/10 to 5.0 percent in 2011/12.
- Of students suspended or expelled for the same type of infraction, Black students were more likely to receive out-of-school suspension or expulsion than were Hispanic or White students.
- Black students received out-of-school suspension or expulsion at more than twice the rate of White students.
- Students in special education were removed from school at more than twice the rate of other students. While the number of removals fell for both groups over the three school years, it fell more slowly for students in special education than for other students.

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Summary

In the United States exclusionary discipline (suspension and expulsion) is commonly used to remove disruptive students from the classroom or school. While any disciplinary action should be applied fairly and consistently to all groups, for more than 35 years the research literature has highlighted a discipline gap between racial/ethnic minority students and White students. Recently, the literature has identified a gap in the rates of exclusionary discipline between students in special education and other students. These disparities are a concern because exclusionary discipline has been linked to poor academic achievement, grade retention, recurrent misbehavior, dropout, juvenile delinquency, and other undesirable outcomes.

This study used Maryland State Department of Education data on K–12 public school students for 2009/10, 2010/11, and 2011/12 to answer two questions about disproportionality in student discipline in the 24 Maryland school systems:

- Is exclusionary discipline (suspension and expulsion) meted out in a way that has a disproportionate impact on Black and other racial/ethnic minority students relative to White students?
- Is exclusionary discipline meted out in a way that has a disproportionate impact on students in special education relative to other students?

The study found that during these three school years:

- The percentage of Maryland students receiving out-of-school suspension or expulsion dropped from 5.6 percent in 2009/10 to 5.0 percent in 2011/12.
- Because rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion decreased more rapidly for White students than for Black students, disproportionality between Black and White rates increased in 2011/12, the most recent year examined.
- For the same type of infraction, Black students had higher rates of out-of-school suspension or expulsion than did Hispanic and White students.
- In all 24 Maryland school systems Black students received out-of-school suspension or expulsion at more than twice the rate of White students.
- Statewide, students in special education were removed from school at more than twice the rate of other students. Even though the number of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions decreased for both groups over the three years, it decreased more slowly for students in special education than for other students.