



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
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Report on Student Suspensions for the 2022-2023 School Year

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PURPOSE:

1. To present the annual report on student suspensions for the 2022-2023 school year.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. Examination of student suspension data informs the implementation of actions/initiatives which are designed to enhance safety and support the cultural, emotional, and physical well-being of students and staff, as outlined in the [2023-2027 strategic plan](#).

Disaggregation of suspension data by student demographics and identity is also a key indicator in the *Importance of Identity* section of the [Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Roadmap, 2020-2023](#) where part of the goal is to identify and disrupt systemic and structural barriers to address disproportionate access, opportunities and outcomes for students who identify as Indigenous, Black and minoritized.

CONTEXT:

3. Regular monitoring of student suspension data is undertaken by the Safe and Caring Schools Division, along with Superintendents of Instruction. The Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division (READ) supports this work by preparing annual district level summary reports of student suspension data that are used by superintendents to inform strategy and system guidance, and by the District to monitor progress towards creating and maintaining safe spaces for students to learn. In addition, the READ team works with school principals and vice-principals to explore their data and inform practices at the individual student level.

This report primarily focuses on data for 2022-2023 and measures change over time. The data shows an increase in suspensions compared to the previous year, but a decrease compared to pre-pandemic rates. There are many important

contextual factors to consider when interpreting these trends, such as changes in legislation and enrolment in virtual school. Disaggregation of data by identity shows that some of our identified groups of students continue to be suspended at a higher rate than all students.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. Safe Schools

Over the last two years, Safe and Caring Schools has updated key policies such as Safe Schools P.032.SCO, School District Code of Conduct P.125.SCO, Exclusion (Pause for Safety) P.144.SCO and procedures such as Student Dress Code PR.628.SCO, Search and Seizure PR.534.SCO and Exclusion (Pause for Safety) PR.695.SCO so that our practices are culturally responsive, grounded in the human rights code and student centered.

Beginning in September 2023, Conditions for Learning kits were created for educators to implement. These kits were derived from The Third Path, and its eight optimal learning conditions. This relationship-based approach to student well-being and achievement puts relationships first and clarifies that it is through strong adult/child connections that students learn and grow. The eight conditions are: Safety, Belonging, Identity, Regulation, Engagement, Positivity, Meaning and Mastery.

The focus of our work is shifting towards creating learning environments for students where they are comfortable expressing themselves without fear of retribution; are engaged in developmentally appropriate learning tasks; and see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in the staff who are responsible for supporting their learning and well-being while in school.

5. Legislative Requirements

Section 314.5 of the *Education Act* requires all publicly funded school boards in Ontario to submit annual reports of suspensions and expulsions to the Ministry of Education. This information is collected through the 30 June OnSIS submission. Suspension rates are calculated as a percentage of the October 31 enrolment and include suspensions issued over the full course of the year (i.e., between the first day of school in September and the last day of school in June).

Effective 31 July 2020, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced a new regulation ([O. Reg.440/20](#)) which removes the principal's discretion to suspend students enrolled in Kindergarten to Grade 3 for activities listed in subsection [306\(1\) of the Education Act](#). This is a consideration when comparing data before and after the implementation of this regulation.

OCDSB Policy P.026.SCO Student Suspension and Expulsion requires annual reporting of student suspension data. [Report 23-039](#) (and [accompanying appendix](#)) is the most recent report published which incorporated analysis of identity data gathered in 2019-2020 under the *Anti-Racism Act (ARA; 2017)* and associated [Data Standards](#).

6. **Students Learning from Home**

An important consideration when examining the 5-year trend is the impact that the pandemic had on the nature of schooling, particularly in 2020-2021. For this reason, comparisons to pre-pandemic years are most meaningful. It is also worth noting that the continued option for students to learn from home through Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School may be a factor which continues to influence the most recent data.

7. **Summary of Main Findings**

Results from 2022-2023 show:

- 1.9% of OCDSB students were suspended during the 2022-2023 school year (1,490 out of 77,009 students), a rate that is slightly higher than last year but lower than pre-pandemic years (see Table 1 below);
- Over the past decade (2011-2021), the suspension rates for OCDSB students have consistently remained within 1% of both regional and provincial averages, typically falling below.
- Consistent with trends province-wide, suspension rates continue to be higher in the secondary panel than they are in elementary (see Table 2);
- 84% of suspensions were discretionary¹ (Table 3; note that this represents a 4% increase compared to the last year);
- 61% of suspensions issued were one-day suspensions; the majority of suspensions lasting for five or more days were of a mandatory nature (Figure 1);
- 72% of OCDSB students who were suspended were suspended one time (Figure 2);
- The most common reasons cited for suspensions for elementary and secondary include: *conduct injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school and any act considered by the principal to be contrary to the District or school code of conduct or Board policies* (see Appendix A, Tables 3 and 4 for a full list by elementary and secondary);
- There were three expulsions issued in 2022-2023.

¹Discretionary suspensions may be issued for bullying, uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm on another person, etc.; whereas mandatory suspensions are issued when a student has engaged in activities posing a significant safety concern, such as: weapons related offenses, trafficking drugs, physical assaults that cause bodily harm requiring treatment by a medical practitioner, robbery, extortion, sexual assault, repeated bullying, actions motivated by hate, etc.

Table 1. Historical Overview of Enrolment and Suspension Data (September to June).

Student Enrolment	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021*	2021-2022	2022-2023
<i>Elementary</i>	49,532	50,295	49,189	49,908	51,283
<i>Secondary</i>	25,440	24,559	24,986	24,569	25,726
Total	74,972	74,854	74,175	74,477	77,009
Number of Suspensions Issued by Panel					
<i>Elementary</i>	2232	1,305	356	667	1,049
<i>Secondary</i>	1609	1,069	89	746	1,070
Total	3,841	2,374	445	1,413	2,119
Number of Students Suspended by Panel					
<i>Elementary</i>	1262	866	277	515	721
<i>Secondary</i>	1097	808	85	568	769
Total	2359	1,674	362	1,083	1,490

*Suspension rates are substantially lower in 2020-2021 due to the nature of schooling during the pandemic.

Table 2. Suspension Rates: 5-Year Trend by Panel.

Suspension rates	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021*	2021-2022	2022-2023
<i>Elementary</i>	2.5%	1.7%	0.6%	1.0%	1.4%
<i>Secondary</i>	4.3%	3.3%	0.3%	2.3%	3.0%
All Students	3.1%	2.2%	0.5%	1.5%	1.9%

Table 3. Number of Suspensions by Type (Mandatory vs. Discretionary), 2022-2023.

Number of Suspensions by Type	Elementary	Secondary	All
Mandatory	151	187	338
Discretionary	898	883	1,781
All Suspensions	1,049	1,070	2,119
<i>Rate of discretionary suspensions</i>	86%	83%	84%

Figure 1. Length of Suspensions by Type

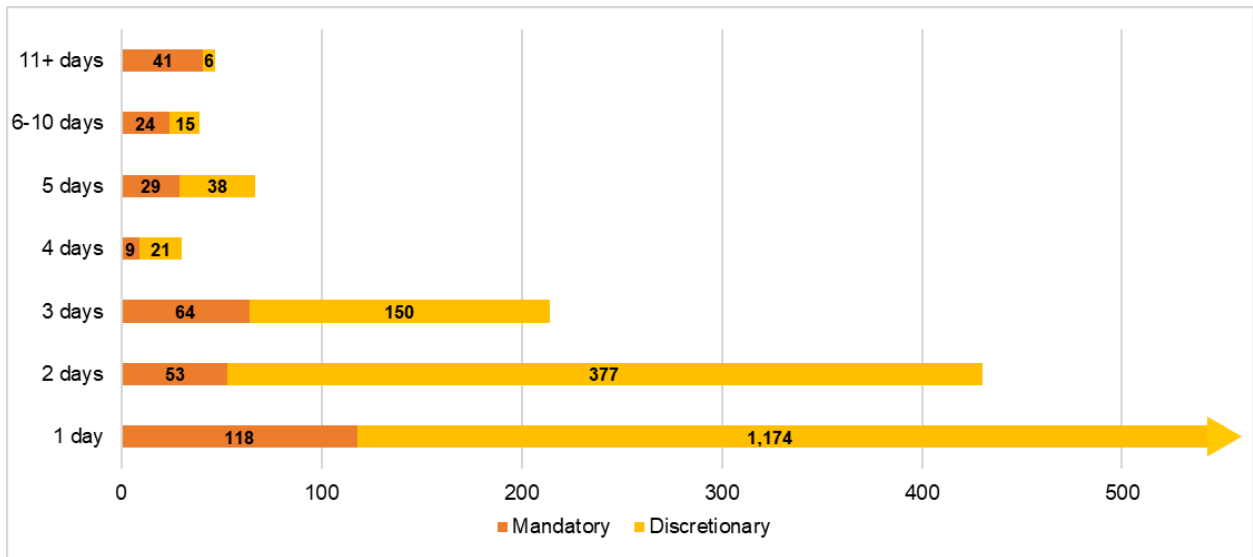
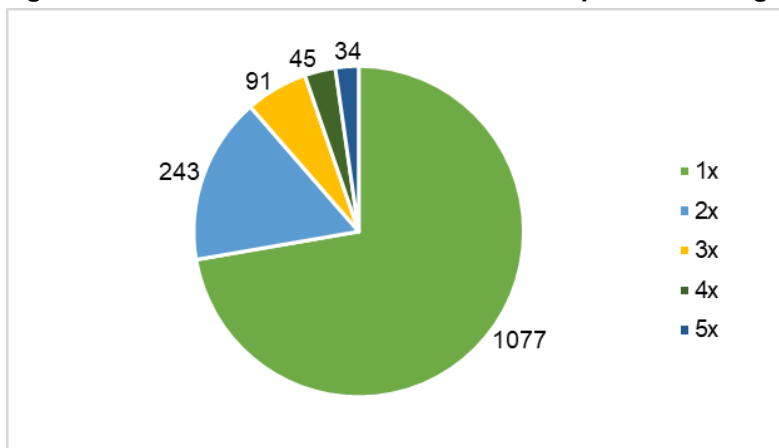


Figure 2. Number of Times a Student was Suspended During the School Year.



8. Representation of Identity in Suspension Data

Understanding disproportionalities in suspension data is a critical component in reducing suspensions for our racialized and marginalized students.

Disaggregation and reporting by identity is done using two datasets. One is district-level reporting based on information available for the full population of students in the student information system. The other is for the subset of students who participated in the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Student Survey* in 2019-2020. For survey participants, reporting groups are based on self-reported information from questions related to Indigenous identity, race, gender identity, and disability.

It is important to note that some aspects of identity may change over time (e.g., gender identity, disability) and that the calculation of disproportionality may be influenced by something other than the elimination of barriers and/or biases (e.g., the number of students in a reporting group/population, changes in aspects of

identity over time, who provided the information, loss of data over time as students progress through the education system). As such, caution should be used when interpreting the results, particularly when numbers are small. For the portion of students who were issued a suspension in 2022-2023, self-reported identity-based data from the Valuing Voices Survey exists for 28%.

Suspension data is reported and disaggregated by identity for overall suspensions (Appendix A, Table 1) and for discretionary suspensions (Appendix A, Table 2). While schools have greater control over a discretionary suspension, many of these infractions are extremely serious in nature and have a profound impact on students who have been harmed. Prior to issuing a discretionary suspension, schools work through progressive discipline, which always includes education, as well as mitigating factors. Given the high proportion of suspensions classified as discretionary, it is not surprising that the trends observed across all suspensions are persistent when isolating for that particular type.

Disaggregated data is compared to the previous year (2021-2022) to monitor progress. In addition, given the caveats on suspension data during the pandemic, it would be valuable to compare to pre-pandemic numbers (2018-2019). However, the Valuing Voices Survey was not administered until 2019, therefore the earliest comparison we can make is to 2019-2020. For information purposes, this comparison is also included in the tables in Appendix A.

From this disaggregation, we observe:

- based on data from our student information system: students who reside in lower income neighbourhoods; males; students who identify as transgender, non-binary, or gender diverse; students who identify as Indigenous; and students with special education needs (excluding gifted) are suspended at a higher rate than all students;
- based on additional data from the Valuing Voices Survey: students who identify as Indigenous, Black, Middle Eastern, gender diverse (composite), and/or having a disability are suspended at a higher rate than all students; and,
- when data is compared over time we see that for most groups listed above (and for all students as a whole), suspension rates increased compared to 2021-2022, but decreased compared to 2019-2020. This tends to be the case for all and discretionary suspensions.

9. **Creating Safe Spaces and Conditions for Learning**

The annual review of suspension data allows us to assess the proactive strategies employed to engage and support students, progressive discipline approaches, identify patterns and trends in the data, identify systemic and/or structural barriers, and use that data to inform changes in practice.

The reasons for mandatory suspensions are outlined in Section 310(1) of the Education Act, which include use of weapons to threaten others, committing

physical assault causing harm that requires medical attention, committing sexual assault, trafficking in weapons or drugs, robbery or extortion or giving alcohol or drugs to a minor. In the above cases, the principal must suspend the student, unless they are under 12 years of age. As per Section 306(1) of the education act, discretionary suspensions may be issued when a student threatens serious bodily harm on another student, possessing alcohol or illegal drugs, being under the influence of alcohol or cannabis, swearing at a teacher or another person in position of authority, committing an act of vandalism and bullying.

The rate at which discretionary suspensions are issued, particularly those that last for only one day, increased from 2021-2022 to 2022-2023. Prior to any suspension, mitigating factors are taken into consideration, as well as progressive discipline. As part of a progressive discipline approach, the school and system engages in strategies and supports to engage and assist students in being able to regulate and advocate for themselves. Educating students continues to be the critical element in supporting a change of behaviour.

Relationships are critical and form the foundation of this work. A collaborative approach with the Safe Schools team, Equity Team, Mental Health Lead, Indigenous Education Department, and Learning Support Services, emphasizing the conditions that support student well-being and academic achievement: safety, belonging, identity, regulation, engagement, positivity, meaning and mastery. An Exclusion/Pause for Safety might be employed where progressive discipline is deemed inappropriate after reviewing mitigating and other factors and where the student's infraction poses a significant physical and/or mental safety risk of students to themselves and others and cannot be mitigated by other available supports. A memo on exclusions, including disaggregation of data where possible, will be shared with Trustees in the coming weeks.

10. **Tools and Training Moving Forward**

The District has renewed its focus around Restorative Practices through on-going training and learning. Restorative practices proactively build a positive school community through the development of strong interpersonal relationships and community building. This approach provides multiple opportunities for students to achieve success and take on the responsibility for helping to make their school a safe and nurturing place. It is a relational and restorative approach to solving conflicts and for taking responsibility and repairing relationships when harm has been done.

Twenty-four principals and vice-principals across the District were selected as Safe and Caring School Leads to support schools through the use of proactive strategies that assists staff and students in implementing structures and techniques to best meet the needs of all students. Safe and Caring Leads received training and support during the school year. This learning will be ongoing and continue to benefit all school communities.

The District has revised its Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (BPIP) with a renewed focus on restorative practices, conditions for learning and strategies to elicit student voice paying particular attention to students who may not historically have had the opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences.

Staff continue to be engaged in learning about equity-centred trauma-informed practices that will improve staff capacity to identify and address the impact of harm, hurt and trauma on students.

The OCDSB's use of an anonymous reporting tool provides students with an opportunity to report their concerns about the health, well-being, and safety of themselves or others in an anonymous manner, which allows schools to use this information to assist with increased safety and support for students.

In addition, both the [OCDSB Strategic Plan 2023-2027](#) and the [Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap](#) outline some of the key work for moving us forward. With the renewal of the roadmap being undertaken this year, we are working to promote more safe and inclusive learning spaces for students. Some of this work includes:

- professional learning for school and District staff in Diversity and Inclusion Fundamentals, Unconscious Bias, anti-racism, anti-oppression and human rights;
- mandatory learning on Holocaust Education in Grade 6 Social Studies and Grade 10 History;
- mandatory learning in Grades 7, 8 and 10 on Black Canadian History; and,
- redesigning course content (e.g., Social Studies, History and Geography; Grade 9-12 English) to include and represent Indigenous, Black and minoritized histories perspectives and ways of knowing.

Staff will also continue to work with the community and system to identify additional strategies and supports to help address these issues of inequity.

11. **Using the Data to Support Schools and Students**

Student suspension data informs our ongoing work at multiple levels: for the district, for schools, and for individual students. To equip school administrators and their teams with the knowledge and tools needed to better understand their school data, we have implemented a Data Support Model. Specifically, Data Support Leads from the Research, Evaluation, and Analytics Division (READ) are partnered with each Superintendent of Instruction to support the group of schools within their Superintendency. The main objective of this model is to build greater capacity at the school level in supporting data-driven decision-making and evidence-informed practice in the development, monitoring, and measuring of goals.

Using available data sources, Data Support Leads assist with the exploration and analysis of patterns and trends in school-level data. In the fall, the research team hosted working sessions with all OCDSB principals to explore and better understand their school-level data gathered through student, staff, and parent/caregivers [School Climate Surveys](#). Furthermore, in February, principals had the opportunity to work with the research team and interact with school-level dashboards which highlight trends in their school's suspension data and allow for drill-down capabilities to individual students and incidents. This data, coupled with the principal's in-depth knowledge of their school and students, informs the tailored strategies for supporting student well-being which are developed collaboratively during superintendency planning sessions. This facilitates putting faces on the data, with the goal of reducing suspensions for marginalized and racialized students. Schools are also engaged in proactive strategies to increase students' sense of belonging. This includes increased student voice in what and how they learn, the creation of identity affirming spaces, and access to culturally relevant staff supports.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

12. The District receives funding through Priorities and Partnership Funding (PPFs) to support improved mental health and well-being. These funds are being used to support the implementation of Restorative Practices, as well as for Anti-Sex Trafficking training for students. Total funding for the two PPFs is approximately \$85,000.

COMMUNICATION:

13. The information presented in this report is an important component of District level monitoring efforts to eliminate barriers and biases in disciplinary practices and create safe spaces for students to learn. District level results also provide important context against which school level efforts can be measured.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions are provided for discussion purposes:

- What stands out for you in the data/information that is presented?
- How do we situate the data in the contextual considerations?
- How does the data help inform our work to address disproportionalities?
- What actions/next steps should be considered?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A [Additional Tables](#)