

School Suspensions Drop Sharply

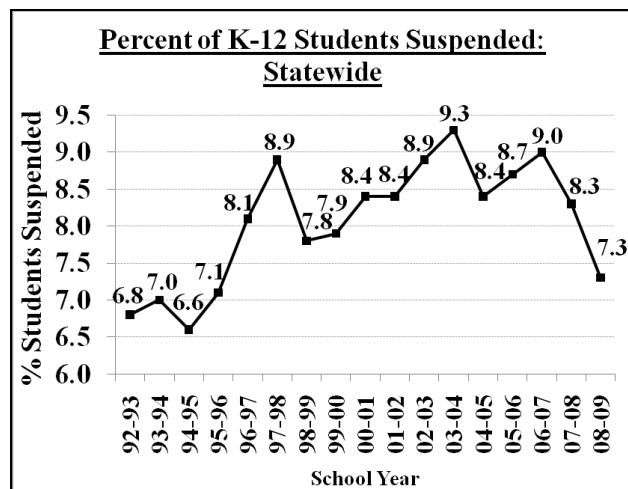
Three Districts Lead the Way; Baltimore County Rate Remains High

Executive Summary

The percent of students suspended in 2008-09 dropped twelve percent from the prior year and fell to the lowest level in more than a decade. Baltimore City, Montgomery County and Prince George's County accounted for more than 80 percent of the change. Baltimore County bucked the statewide trend and now has the highest suspension rate among Maryland's largest school districts. The number of students receiving multiple suspensions also fell. Racial disparities narrowed, reversing several years of increases. Key success factors included district leadership, more restrictive policies on use of out-of-school suspensions, rewards for positive behavior, training of teachers in classroom management, more in-school services for chronically disruptive students, use of data at the school and district levels and conscious targeting of racial disparities.

Suspension Trends

Over 60,000 K-12 students were suspended during the 2008-09 school year—one in 14 students.¹ The 7.3 percent suspension rate is the lowest level since 1995-96.



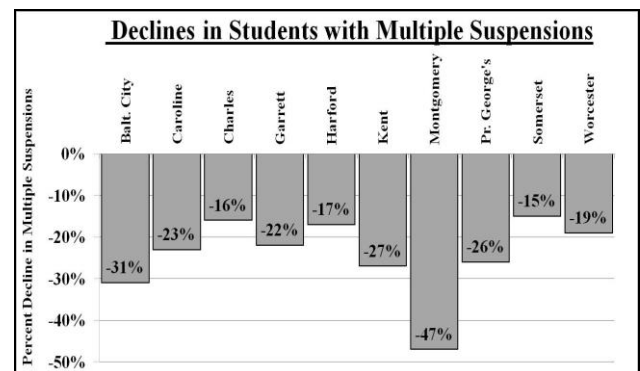
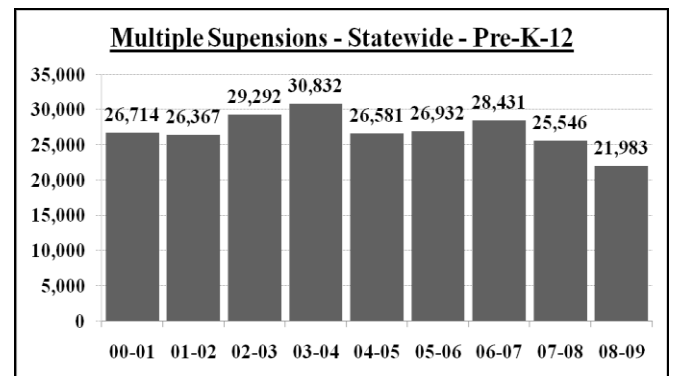
Baltimore City and Montgomery and Prince's George's Counties led the improvement, accounting for more than 80 percent of the statewide change.

- Montgomery County saw a 38-percent decrease, with 2,000 fewer students suspended
- Prince George's County saw a 22-percent decrease, with 2,900 fewer students suspended;
- Baltimore City saw an 18-percent decrease, with 1,600 fewer students suspended.

Baltimore County saw a small increase in school suspensions. It now has the highest suspension rate for a large school district in Maryland.²

Multiple Suspensions

The number of students receiving more than one suspension during the year fell sharply, to the lowest level this decade. Many jurisdictions saw drops; Baltimore City, Prince George's and Montgomery accounted for 80 percent of the statewide decrease.



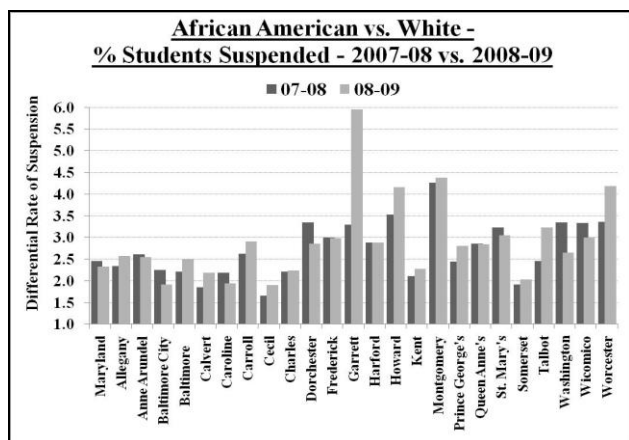
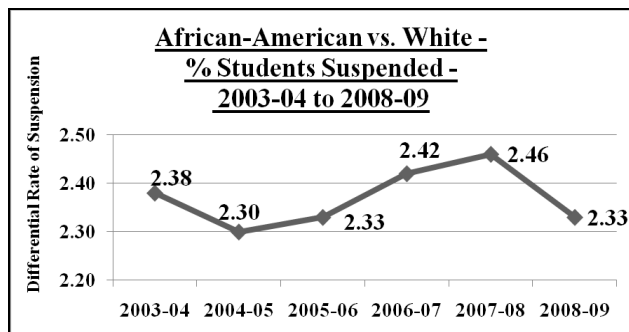
¹ Maryland State Department of Education, *Suspensions, Expulsion, and Health Related Exclusions, Maryland Public Schools 2008 – 2009* (Dec. 2009).

² For more data by school district, see www.acy.org.



Racial Disparities

African-American students were 2.3 times more likely to be suspended than White students, but this disparity narrowed after several years of widening. Hispanic students are now less likely to be suspended than White students. Montgomery, Howard, Garrett and Worcester Counties had the largest disparities, with African-American students more than four times as likely to receive suspensions.³



Discussion

The decrease in suspensions in Baltimore City, Prince George's County and Montgomery County resulted from a conscious, concerted effort to improve student behavior without out-of-school suspensions.

In Montgomery County, school-based staff received training on "utilizing the teaching and learning process to resolve problematic behaviors." The training used scenarios from actual events. Schools used Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a system for encouraging positive behavior while identifying and helping chronically disruptive

students. The school system closely tracked data during the school year and shared effective strategies among the schools. Finally, the school system intentionally targeted racial disparities.⁴

Prince George's County also used PBIS and its tiered approach of strategies that helped all students combined with more intensive interventions for students with greater needs. Schools expanded use of in-school suspensions. The school system restricted the permissible use of out-of-school suspension. It also formed a task force, which has recommended comprehensive strategies to make further reductions in school suspensions.⁵

Baltimore City also narrowed the circumstances under which a student could be suspended, used data to monitor school progress and expanded PBIS.

Recommendations

1. Leadership counts, and progress can best occur when the superintendent and school board indicate that reducing suspensions is a priority.
2. Confine suspensions to serious behaviors that endanger others, understanding that out-of-school suspensions usually make the situation worse.
3. Use data to track student behaviors and suspensions at the school and district levels.
4. Reward good student behavior, through systems like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.
5. Train teachers in how classroom management can reduce disruptive behavior and help principals and school-based administrators learn how to coach teachers in effective strategies.
6. Provide resources for in-school interventions that address the underlying cause of chronic misbehavior.

⁴ Dr. Jerry Weast, Superintendent, memo to the Montgomery County Board of Education "Goal 1: Ensure Success for Every Student—Reduction of Suspensions" (Sept. 8, 2009).

⁵ Prince George's County Public Schools Suspension Reduction Task Force, "Findings and Recommendations" (Aug. 27, 2009).

³ Garrett County's rate is based on only five suspensions.