

**THE SCHOOL BOARD OF BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF STRATEGY & OPERATIONS OFFICER**

**Maurice L. Woods
Chief Strategy & Operations Officer**

Signatures on File

May 28, 2014

TO: All Principals

FROM: Maurice L. Woods
Chief Strategy & Operations Officer

VIA: Desmond K. Blackburn, Ph.D.
Chief School Performance & Accountability

SUBJECT: **INCIDENTS AND SUSPENSIONS IN BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS,
2010-11 THROUGH 2012-13**

The attached Research Brief examines students' behaviors and suspensions in Broward County Public Schools from the 2010-11 through 2012-13 school years. The report analyzes behavioral violations (incidents) and suspensions from various perspectives. At each school level, disruptive behavior was reported as the most common type of incident. The data indicates that the total number of incidents and suspensions decreased substantially from 2010-11 to 2011-13. However, these data indicate that, over the three years of the study, Black students in the District had a larger number and rate of incidents and are suspended in larger numbers, and at higher rates, than their ethnic counterparts.

Also, reviewed were the specific incidents that resulted in a suspension action. This examination enables the District to determine the proper intervention programs needed at specific schools to improve student behavior and reduce the number of school suspensions. The data also, suggests that schools implementation of discipline actions are based on the severity of the incident rather than race/ethnicity profiling.

Finally, whether suspension was an appropriate deterrent for specific behavior violations were examined; specifically, the rate at which a particular incident is repeated after resulting in a suspension for sixth and ninth grade students. The highest types of incident reoccurrence after a suspension for the same behavior type, was disruptive incidents for both sixth and ninth grade students. The data also indicated that for all incident types except disruptive, less than 50 percent of students that receive a suspension for a specific incident type repeat that same offence.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact **Director Richard Baum, Student Assessment & Research at 754-321-2500**. This memo and report may also be accessed via the Student Assessment & Research Web site at: **<http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/sar/index.htm>**.

DKB/MLW/NB/RGB/RWC/JAC:rs
Attachments

cc: School Board Members
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Sharon Airaghi, Chief Service Quality Officer
Directors, School Performance & Accountability
Jody Perry, Director, Charter Schools Support



Research Brief

AN ANALYSIS OF BEHAVIOR INCIDENTS AND SUSPENSIONS IN BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2010-11 THROUGH 2012-13

Student behavior and discipline were examined in Broward County Public Schools (BCPS). Behavioral violations (incidents) were examined in accord with suspensions to investigate causes of the discipline issues. This brief reports disciplinary practices concerning in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and alternatives to external suspension (AES) in BCPS and the incidents that incur a student suspension. Districtwide data, including incidents and suspensions occurring at both non-charter and charter schools, was reviewed. Examination of specific incidents that resulted in student suspensions, enables school and District staff to target intervention programs that improve student behavior and ultimately reduce the number of school suspensions.

The District's Code of Student Conduct 2012-2013 (School Board Policy 5.8) provides specific information regarding the rules to which all students are expected to adhere, as well as consequences for violations (The School Board of Broward County, Florida, 2011). The District's discipline matrix identifies consequences for behavior incidents at the elementary and secondary levels. Both the Code of Student Conduct and the Discipline Matrix are reviewed annually by District stakeholders, including parents, teachers, administrators, counselors, and other community representatives (The School Board of Broward County, Florida, 2011). Beginning with the 2013-14 school year the Discipline Matrix will allow more flexibility for school administrators to make disciplinary decisions on a case by case basis.

Data from three complete school years were examined. Disciplinary events registered during the summer are not included in the data. For each school year, the total population reflects the number of students in grades Kindergarten to 12 who attended a BCPS school for at least five days during the year. Suspensions and incidents are classified according to the following guidelines:

- Suspensions were classified into three categories:
 - In-school (i.e., internal suspension),
 - Out-of-school (i.e., external suspension), and
 - Alternative to External Suspension (AES). The AES program description is available on the District's Dropout Prevention Alternative Education website (http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/dropoutprevention/html/alternative_to_suspension.html).
- Incidents were classified into eight categories which align to the District's Discipline Matrix. Further detail of the incidents that make up each category is available on Appendix I. The eight incident categories are:
 - Attendance
 - Rules Violation
 - Disruptive
 - Substance Abuse/Drug
 - Acts Against Persons
 - Property
 - Other Criminal
 - Bus

Results

Incidents

Behavior violations for the past three years were examined to identify trends. These data include all incidents (including those that did not result in suspensions). Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of total incidents for each type of behavioral incident for the 2012-13 school year. At each school level, disruptive behavior was reported as the most common type of incident. The proportion of incidents related to attendance and rules violations increase as students progress towards the high school level. Conversely, disruptive incidents and incidents related to acts against persons decrease as students progress towards the high school level. These distributions were found to be similar to previous school years. For each figure and chart in this report, percentages are rounded to the nearest whole point.

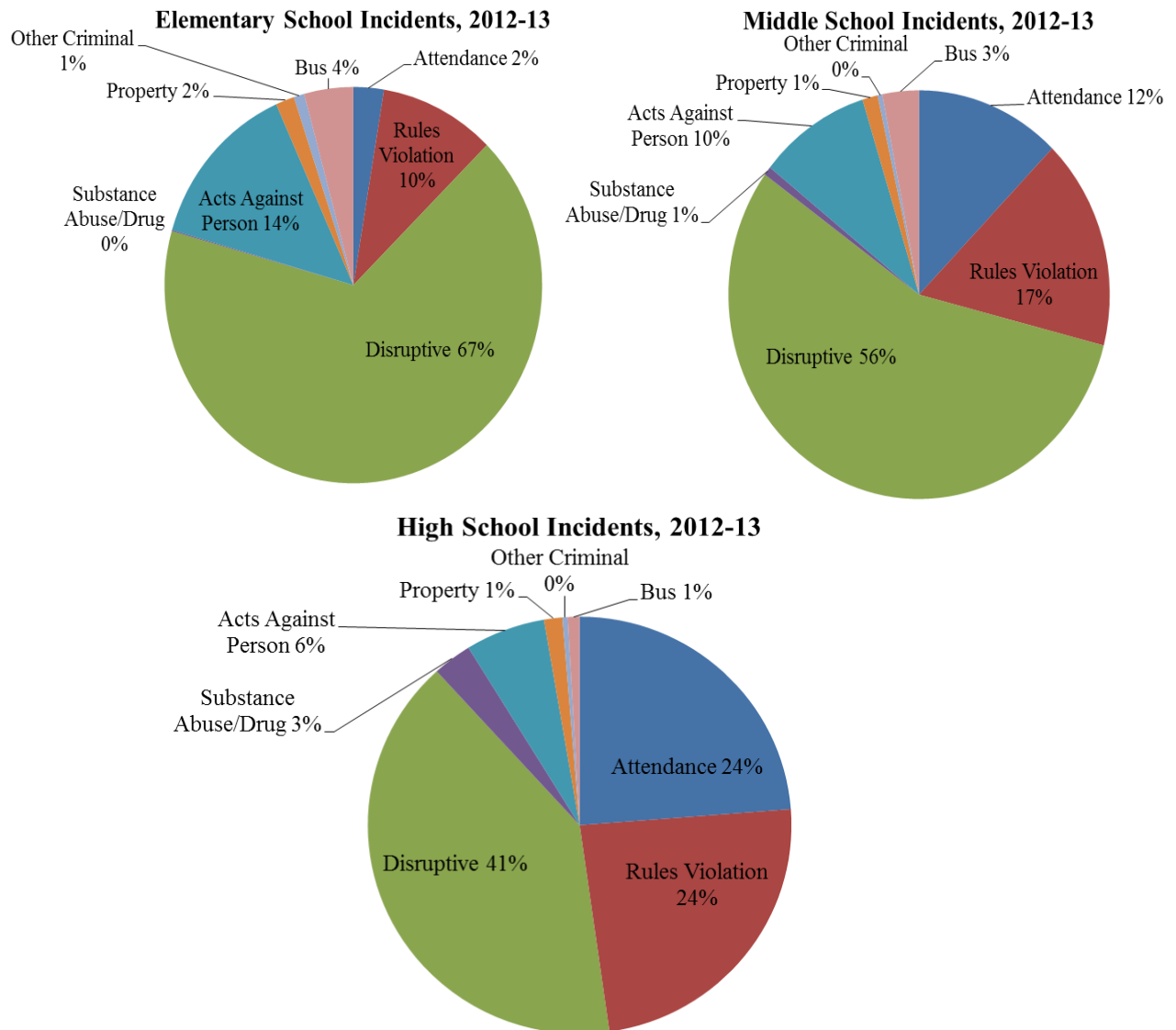


Figure 1. Percent of an incident occurrence by type and school level for 2012-13.

While Figure 1 illustrates the relative proportions of the various behavior incidents, it does not inform as to how common the incidents are among the student population. Figure 2 puts the incidents into the context of the student population. The figure displays the percent of students

who committed incidents, by school level for the previous three school years. **Overall, the rate of incidents has decreased over the past three years, which was most evident in disruptive, attendance, and rules violations incidents types.** At each school level, disruptive behavior was reported as the most common type of incident. While disruptive behavior has decreased over time, it continues to be a concern. Incidents related to attendance tend to increase as students progress towards the high school level, while middle schools reported the highest rates of rules violations, disruptive behavior, and acts against persons.

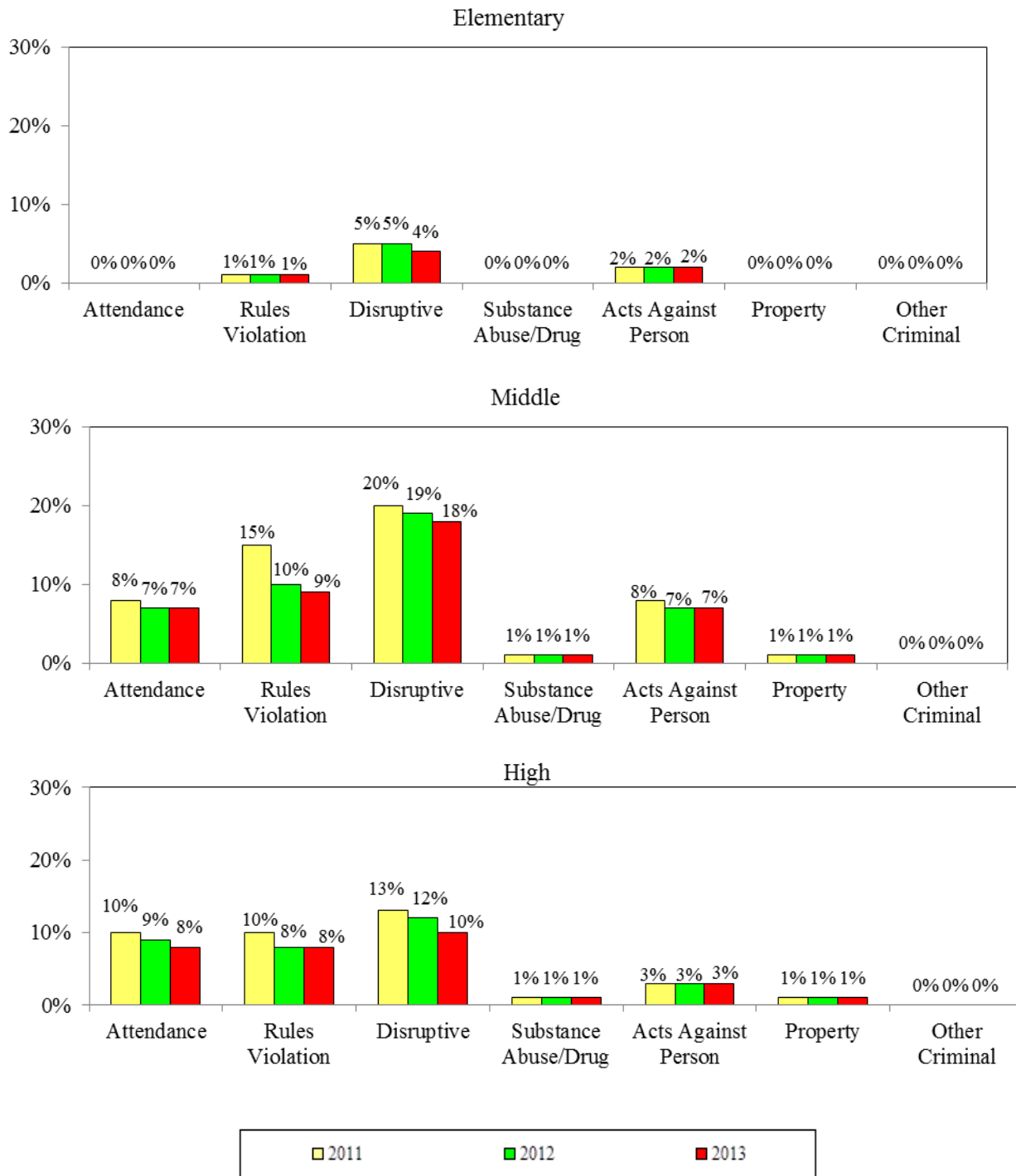


Figure 2. Percent of students who committed an incident by type of occurrence, by school level, and school year.

Incidents involving Black, Hispanic, and White students were examined and compared. Figure 3 illustrates the relative distributions of incidents as committed by each of the three major race/ethnicity groups for the 2012-13 school year. Inspection of these charts suggests that there are differences in the types of incidents across student groups. Disruptive behavior comprised more than half of the incidents involving Black students (56%) and less than half of the incidents committed by Hispanic (45%) and White (47%) students. Rule violations and attendance comprised a larger proportion of incidents among Hispanic (22%, 19%) and White students (21%, 18%) compared to Black students (16%, 12%).

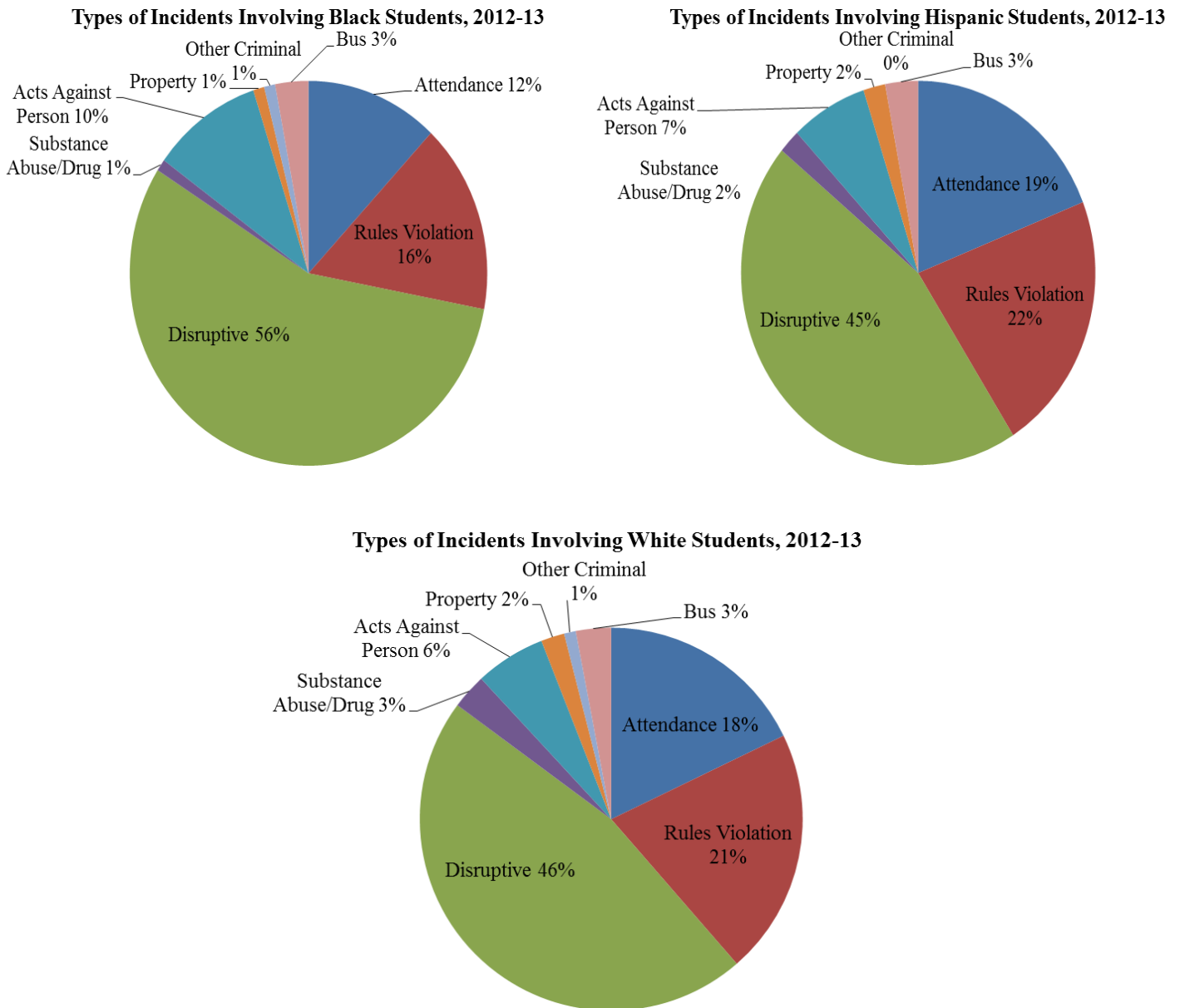


Figure 3. Percent of an incident occurrence by type and by students' race/ethnicity for 2012-13.

Figure 4 places the incidents into the context of the student populations over the past three years. The figure displays the Student Incident Rate of Black, Hispanic, and White students who

committed a specific incident type. The highest rate of disruptive, rule violation, acts against persons, and attendance incidents was registered by Black students, followed by Hispanic and White students for all three years. White and Hispanic students recorded similar incident rates for all three school years. Overall, student incidents decreased across all three school years for Black, Hispanic, and White students.

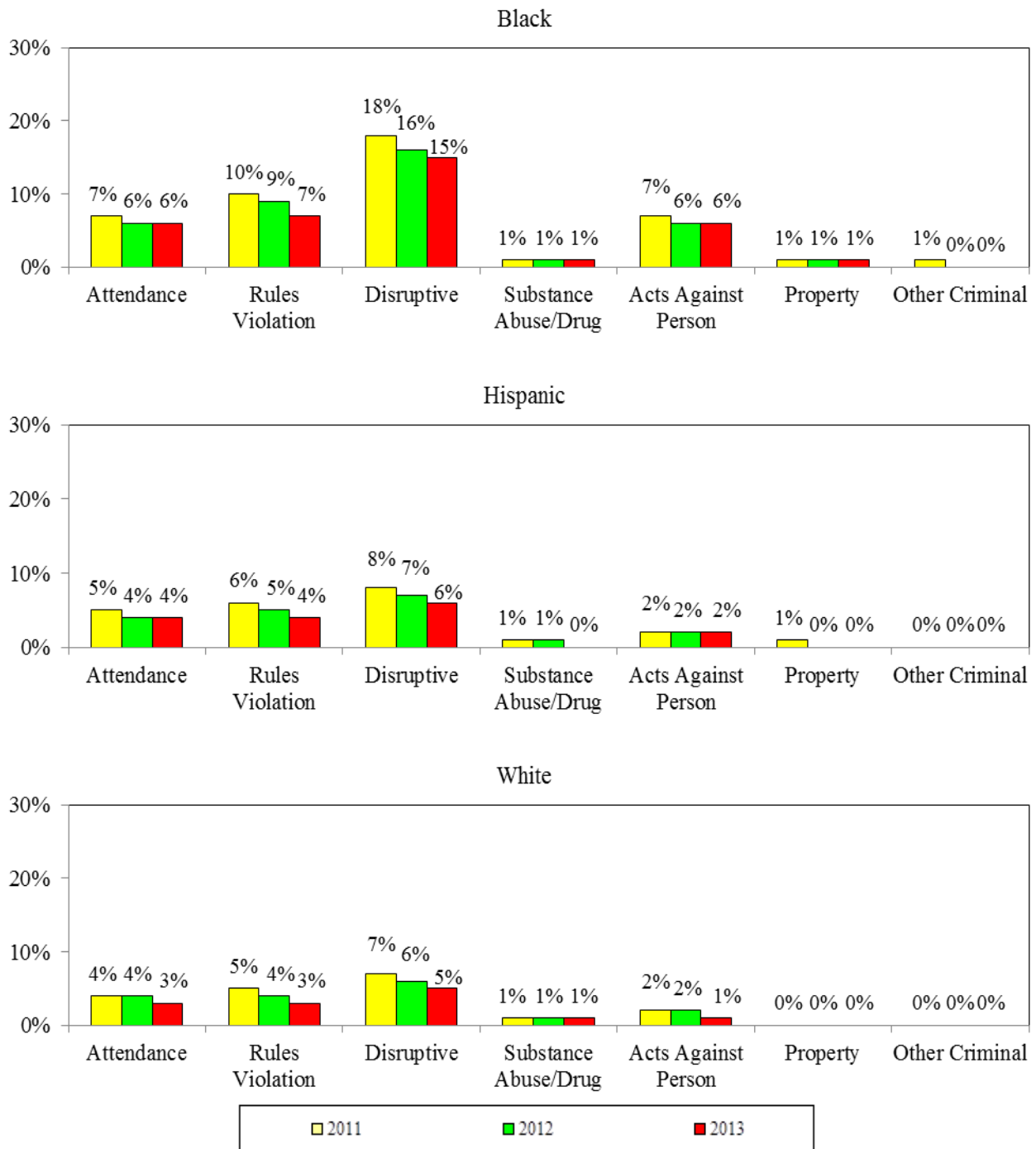


Figure 4. Percent of students who committed an incident by type of occurrence, by students' race/ethnicity and school year.

Suspensions

While student incidents can be used to target intervention programs that improve student behavior, suspensions must be examined to ensure students are learning in a safe and supportive environment. The District’s Discipline Matrix specifies whether a suspension is warranted for each behavior incident. Overall suspension rates were examined as a first step towards review of the use of suspensions in the District. Data representing Districtwide internal, external, and AES rates appear in Figure 5. These data follow a similar pattern found as incidents; elementary suspensions remained stable but decreases in suspensions at the middle and high school levels were evident. During the 2012-13 school year, the largest student suspension rate was internally suspended students at the middle schools (15%). Among elementary, middle, and high schools, the highest rate of student suspensions was in-school suspensions. All suspension rates at middle, high, and center schools decreased over the three-year period. Elementary schools had consistent suspension and AES rates for all three school years. Centers showed a different pattern; the external rate was the same as the internal suspension rate; however, both rates decreased across the three years examined.

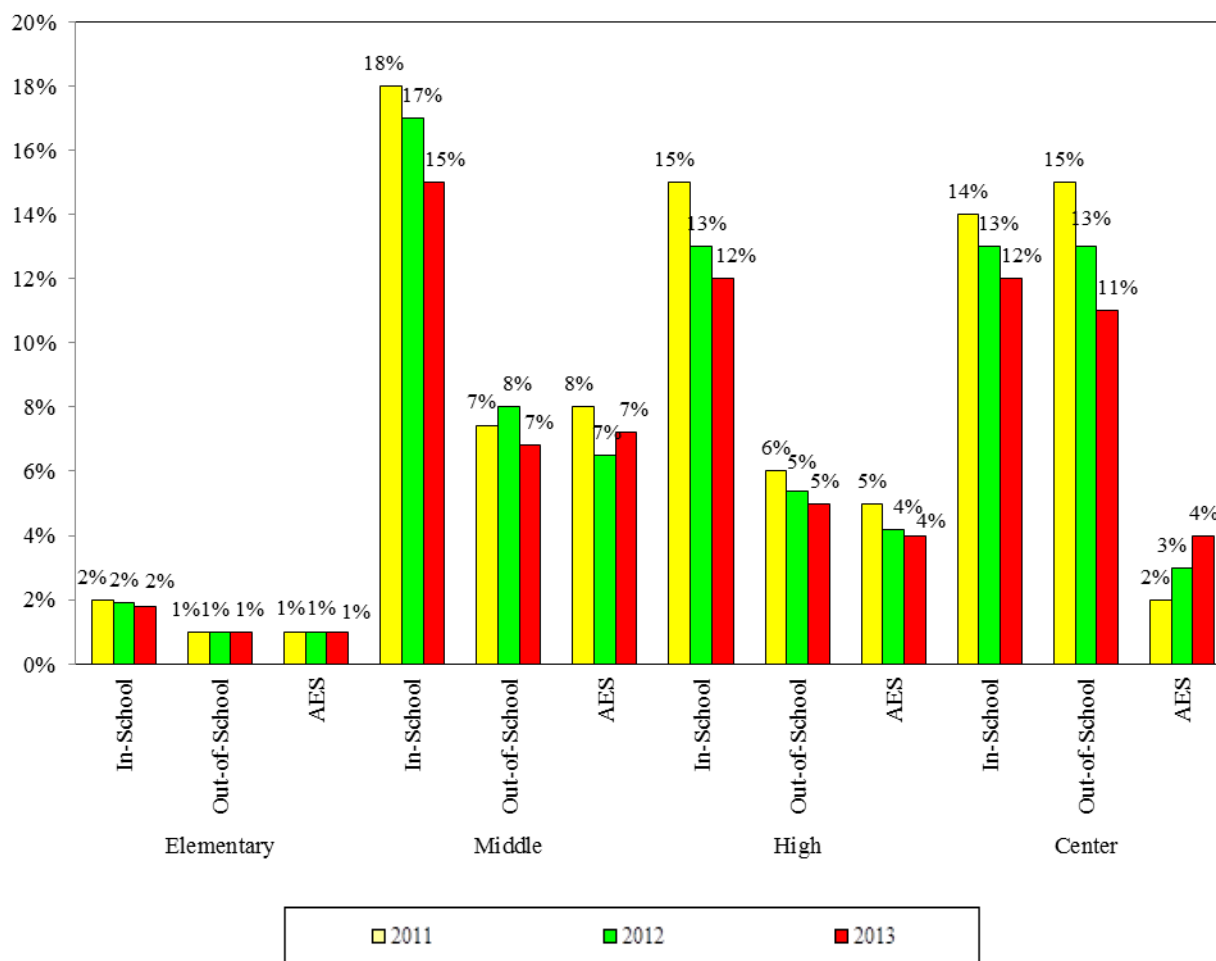


Figure 5. Suspension rates for elementary, middle, high, and center school students by type of suspension and school year.

Suspension rates among the District’s three largest ethnic/racial groups are displayed in Figure 6. Any student receiving an internal, external, or AES are included in the analysis. These data indicate that, across all years, the rates for all types of suspensions were higher among Black

students, compared to the rates registered by Hispanic or White students. During the most recent completed school year, 2012-13, the overall suspension rate for Black students was 17%, compared to 8% and 7% for Hispanic and White students, respectively. Hispanic and White students registered suspension rates similar to each other across years and by type of suspension. For all three groups, the rates of all suspensions decreased across the three school years.

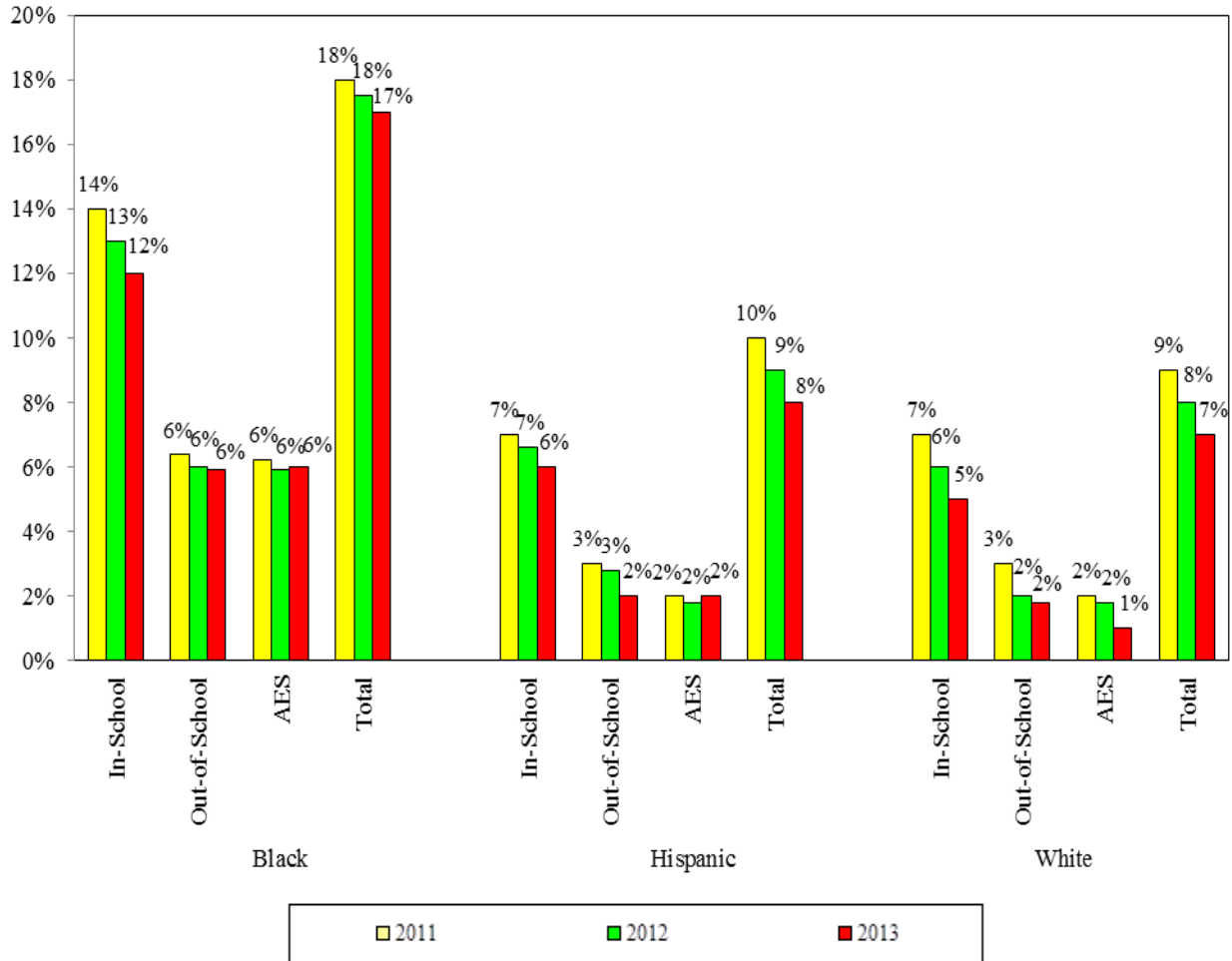


Figure 6. Suspension rates for Black, Hispanic, and White students by type of suspension and school year.

Figure 7 presents the rate that an incident resulted in a suspension by incident category, disaggregated by race/ethnicity. The data suggest that behavior violations resulted in suspensions at similar rates for all race/ethnicity groups. Black students registered slightly higher rates than White and Hispanic students for rules violation (four and two percentage points) and disruptive (five and three percentage points) incidents. However, Black students registered slightly lower suspension rates than White and Hispanic students for attendance (two and four percentage points) and property (three and five percentage points) incidents.

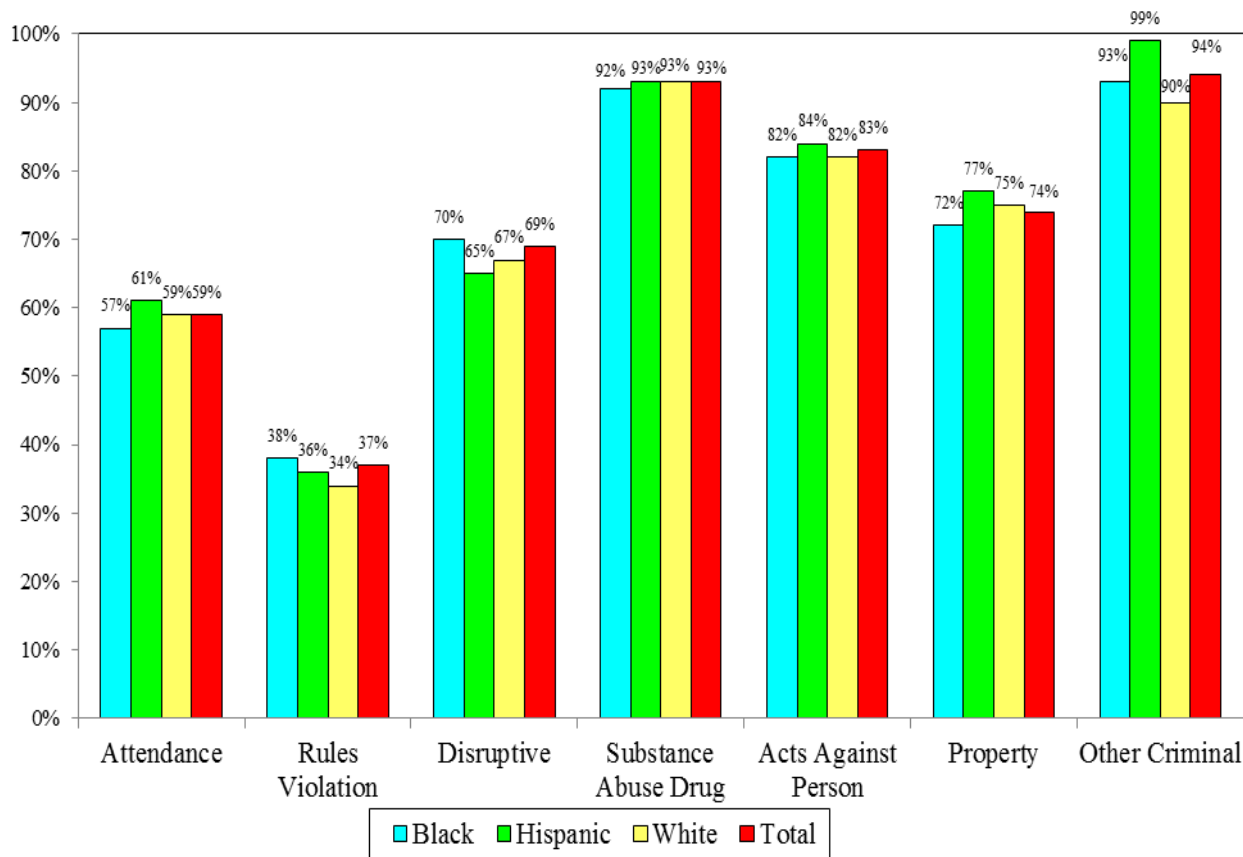


Figure 7: Rate of incidents resulting in an internal, external, and/or AES suspension by race/ethnicity for 2012-13.

The final figure illustrates whether suspension was an effective deterrent for specific behavior violations. Figure 8 presents, for sixth and ninth grade students, the rate at which a specific incident is repeated after resulting in a suspension, as well as the incident rate as a comparison. For this data investigation, only grade six and nine students were selected in order to reduce the potential impact of staff perceptions based on the students’ prior behavior. A student is classified as a ‘repeat offender’ if the behavior re-occurs following a suspension for the same behavior (time intervals were measured by marking period). The incident rate provides a baseline for a particular incident occurrence. Comparing these two rates suggest whether suspension was an effective deterrent for a particular incident. The highest types of incident reoccurrence after a suspension for the same behavior type, was disruptive behavior incidents for both sixth- and ninth-grade students. As seen in the figure, large gaps between the incident rate and the reoccurrence rate of attendance, rules violation, disruptive behavior, and acts against person incidents suggest the need for further review of the impact of these suspension at future discipline matrix meetings.

The data shows that for all incident types except disruptive behavior, less than 40% of students that receive a suspension for a specific incident type repeat that same offence again that year. However, a simple cause (suspension) and effect (non-incident recurrence) cannot be assumed. For example, a suspension incurred for property damage may also require the parent/guardian to pay restitution creating greater emphasis to the student regarding the negative impact of the behavior. Some incident category types, such as disruptive behavior, have a broad definition; therefore, of the same incident types may not reflect ‘true’ similar behaviors. Appendix F provides the number of incidents for sixth and ninth grade students and the rate a specific incident type is repeated prior to resulting in a suspension.

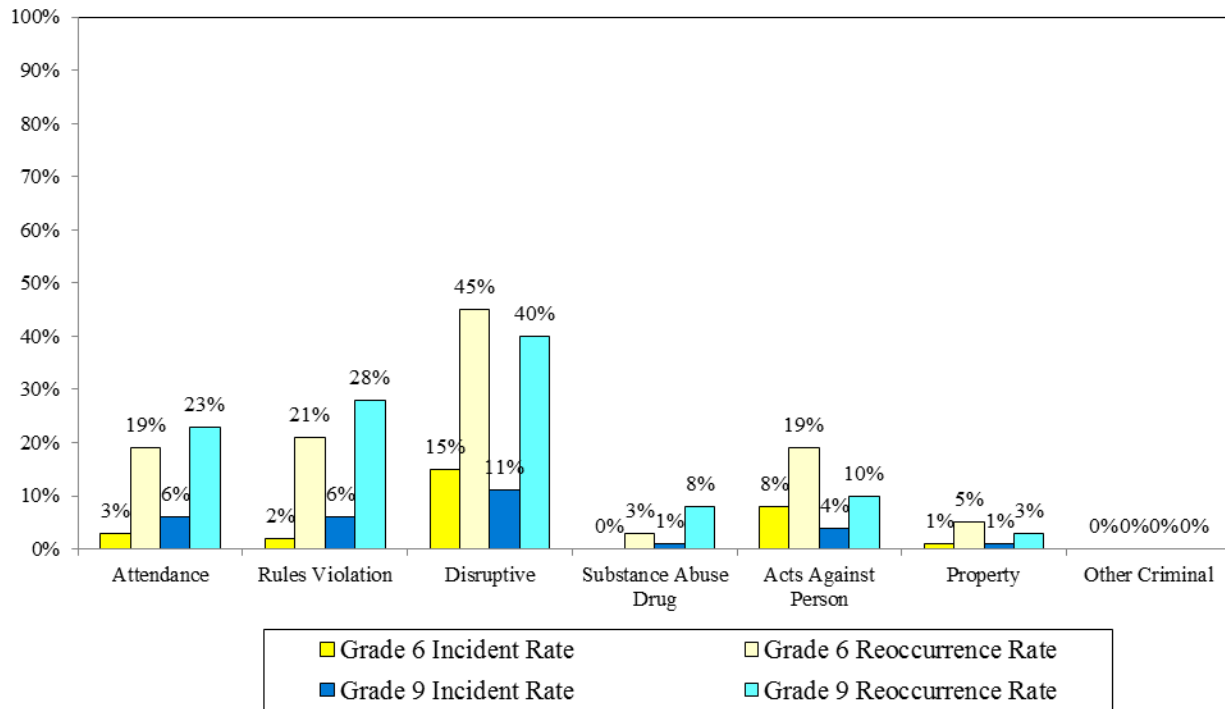


Figure 8: Rate of sixth- and ninth-grade students repeating a specific incident after same incident resulting in a suspension, 2012-13.

Detailed Appendices

Detailed data summaries are provided in the appendices:

Appendix A:

Table A-1: Total number and rate of incidents by school level, 2010-11 through 2012-13

Table A-2: Total number and rate of students who committed incidents by school level, 2010-11 through 2012-13

Appendix B:

Table B-1: Total number and rate of incidents by student race/ethnicity, 2010-11 through 2012-13

Table B-2: Total number and rate of students who committed incidents by student race/ethnicity, 2010-11 through 2012-13

Appendix C: Total number and rate of suspensions and students suspended by school level, 2010-11 through 2012-13

Appendix D: Total number of suspensions by student race/ethnicity and special populations, 2010-11 through 2012-13

Appendix E: Total number and rate incidents assigned a suspension by student race/ethnicity, 2012-13

Appendix F: Number of sixth and ninth grade students repeating a specific incident after same incident resulted in a suspension, 2012-13.

Appendix G: Total number of incidents by school, 2010-11 through 2012-13

Appendix H: Total number of suspensions by school, 2010-11 through 2012-13

Appendix I: Incidents categories specifics

Summary and Discussion

The present study represents a comprehensive investigation of incident occurrences and suspension rates in BCPS. Review of the data detailed in the appendices reveal the following findings:

Overall trends in incidents and suspensions

- The total *number* of incidents decreased by 20% from 151,089 in 2010-11 to 120,325 in 2012-13 (Appendix A, Table A-1). Decreases were found at middle schools (decrease 16%) and high schools (18%).
- Overall, the total number of suspensions decreased by more than 15% from 87,249 in 2010-11 to 73,868 in 2012-13 (Appendix D).
- The largest *number and percent of incidents* in 2012-13 occurred at middle schools 46% ($n=55,887$), followed by high schools 32% ($n=39,101$), elementary 16% ($n=19,733$), and centers 5% ($n=5,604$). (Appendix A, Table A-1).
- The largest *number and percent of suspensions* occurred at middle schools 49% ($n=36,306$), followed by high schools 37% ($n=27,572$), elementary schools 8% ($n=6,139$), and centers 19% ($n=3,851$) (Appendix C).

Incidents

- At all school levels, disruptive behavior was the number one infraction ($n=63,362$; 53%) for students who committed an incident (Figure 1 and Appendix A).
- The pattern of suspension rates across ethnic groups remained similar, regardless of the incident group, suggesting that students are suspended based on the infraction and not the racial/ethnic group (Figures 7 and Appendix E).

Suspensions by type and school level

- In-school suspensions (58%) occurred at twice the rate of out-of-school suspensions (21%).
- During each of the three years, in-school suspensions and AES assignments constituted more than three quarters of all suspensions assigned. That is, less than one fourth of all suspensions removed the students from an academic environment (Figure 5 and Appendix C).

Student subpopulations

- Black ($n=23,675$; 22.5%) students registered higher incident rates than did Hispanic ($n=8,781$; 11.2%) or White ($n=6,674$; 10.1%) students. This was true for each type of suspension (Figure 4 and Appendix B).
- Black ($n=17,667$; 17%) students registered higher suspension rates than did Hispanic ($n=5,976$; 8%) or White ($n=4,460$; 7%) students. This was true for each type of suspension (Figure 6 and Appendix D).

Action Steps

The Diversity, Cultural Outreach & Prevention department has provided the following information to address discipline concerns. The District has taken steps to ensure fairness and equity when determining disciplinary actions for students. The Discipline Matrix, which was introduced during the 2004-05 school year, was developed to assist school staff in making fair and equitable decisions related to the assignment and reporting of punitive actions. Schools are required by policy 5006 to use the Discipline Matrix as their guide in determining appropriate consequences for student infractions. Compliance with the Discipline Matrix is monitored by District staff. Information & Technology (IT) has developed reports designed to assist schools with the monitoring of incident and discipline data. These online tools are available through the School Reports Menu on the Data Warehouse Intranet website, as well as through the Behavioral and Academics Support Information System (BASIS). Furthermore, the BASIS tool will provide administrators and teachers with up-to-date, live data on academic, behavioral, and social emotional risk indicators having an impact on student behavior, and academic success. In addition:

- All schools are required to develop a unique School-wide Positive Behavior Plan. The created document details positive prevention and intervention strategies intended to reduce suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement involvement at the school level.
- Schools are provided data outlining incidents resulting in suspensions. The data from these reports will assist school leaders in examining these cases by student subpopulations, so schools can target their interventions on the most prevalent behavioral

concerns, and ensuring over-representation of minority groups is addressed. This data will drive strategic planning at the District and school-wide levels.

- Administrators are trained annually on current discipline legislation and local policy.
- All administrators are trained on the Breaking Barriers Professional Development series, which provides strategies for reducing suspensions and disciplinary referrals and creating a culture of learning in schools.
- Preventing, Recidivism through Opportunities, Mentoring, Interventions, Supports and Education (PROMISE) Initiative addresses the unique needs of students who have committed behavioral infractions that would normally lead to arrest and entry into the juvenile justice system. The initiative aligns best practice models to provide the supports needed by students to improve their behaviors, as well as developing their pro-social and resiliency skills.

References

- Iskandar, N. & Jones, E. S. (2004). *Alternative to External Suspension Program Evaluation, 2002-03*. Fort Lauderdale, Florida: The School Board of Broward County, Florida. Retrieved September 12, 2008, from http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/research_evaluation/Evaluations/AESEvaluation200203.pdf
- School Board of Broward County, Florida, The. (2011, April 19). School Board Policy 5006: Suspension and Expulsion. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Author. Retrieved October 10, 2011, from <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/sbbcpolicies/docs/P5006.000.pdf>
- School Board of Broward County, Florida, The. (2011, April 19). Code of Student Conduct. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Author. Retrieved October 10, 2011, <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/sbbcpolicies/docs/P5.8.000.pdf>

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