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## Suspensions, School Commitment, and Perceptions of School Climate

Jennifer Medel

*University of the Pacific*, [jmedel@pacific.edu](mailto:jmedel@pacific.edu)

Elaine Doherty

*University of Maryland, College Park*

Finn-Agge Esbensen

*University of Missouri-St. Louis*

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# Suspensions, School Commitment, and Perceptions of School Climate

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Jennifer Medel, Elaine Doherty, and Finn Esbensen



UMSL CSSI Fact Sheet #7—August 2018

## School Suspension Rates

Suspensions, both in-school and out-of-school, are used to discipline students though some schools issue suspensions more frequently than do others. In this report we explore how suspended students' commitment to school and perception of school climate vary by overall school suspension rate. Using the most recently available administrative data (2015), we calculated school suspension rates (number of suspensions per 100 students enrolled) for each school participating in the CSSI study at wave 2 (2018). Schools with 19 suspensions or fewer per 100 students are considered low rate suspension schools (6 schools), schools with 80 suspensions or more per 100 students are considered high rate suspension schools (6 schools), and schools falling in between are categorized as moderate rate schools (9 schools).

In line with the administrative data, Table 1 shows that the percent of students self-reporting suspensions varies by the rate at which schools suspend all students. Overall, 1 in 4 CSSI students report that they have ever been suspended with close to 1 in 5 suspended in the 6 months prior to surveying. Moreover, students at high rate schools are 3 times more likely to report a recent suspension than students attending low rate schools.

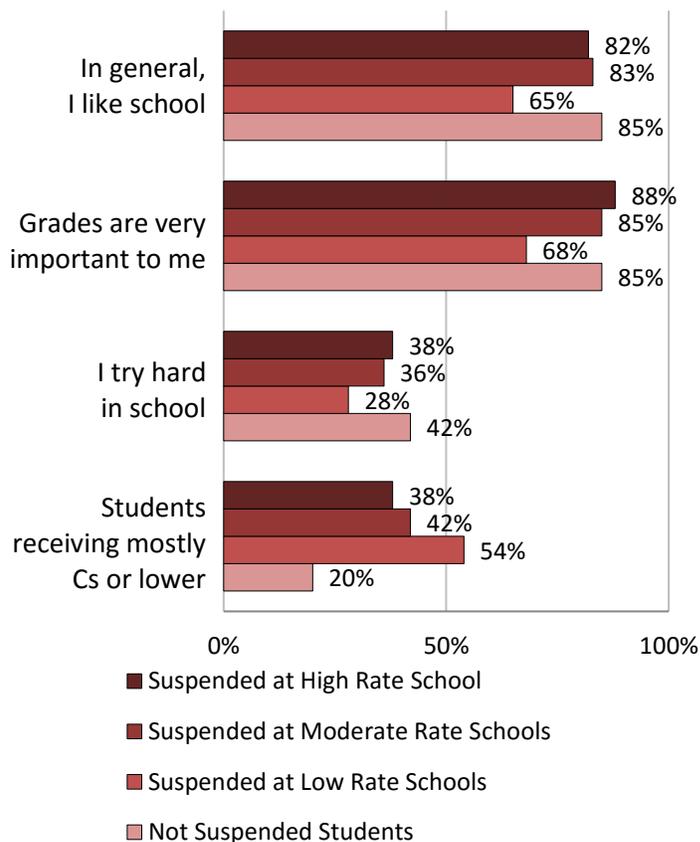
**Table 1. CSSI Student Suspension Based on School Suspension Rates**

School Suspension Category	Suspensions per 100 Students	CSSI Sample	
		Ever Suspended	Recently Suspended
Low	13.2	14%	8%
Moderate	50.2	28%	22%
High	90.1	35%	26%
<i>All Schools</i>	<i>49.2</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>18%</i>

## Suspension and School Commitment

In the wave 2 survey, students were asked the extent to which they agree with a series of statements regarding school commitment, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items include: in general I like school; grades are very important to me; and I try hard in school. As another indicator of school commitment, students also reported their grades (e.g., mostly As, mostly Bs, etc). A comparison of non-suspended students with recently suspended students within low-rate, moderate-rate, and high-rate schools reveals that recently suspended students

**Figure 1. Students' School Commitment Based on Recent Suspension and School Suspension Rates**



from low-rate suspension schools are the least likely to express commitment to school across a variety of indicators when compared to non-suspended students as well as recently suspended students from schools with higher rates of suspension (see Figure 1). Specifically, these students are the least likely to report liking school and are least likely to agree that grades are important to them. Interestingly, for these items, recently suspended students from high- and moderate-rate suspension schools have similar levels of school commitment. In line with these sentiments, students suspended from low rate schools are the least likely to try hard in school and report the lowest grades with 54% reporting receiving mostly Cs or lower. These findings suggest that, perhaps, suspended students in higher-rate suspension schools are less likely to be negatively impacted by their suspension given the “normalization” of suspension. Suspended students from low-rate suspension schools may experience more negative consequences from their suspension given the low prevalence of suspension in their schools.

## Suspension and School Climate

Next we examine how being suspended is related to students' perceptions of school climate, regarding treatment by teachers and school rules, comparing non-suspended students and recently suspended students from schools with varying suspension rates. Again, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), students were asked about their level of agreement regarding several indicators of school climate including: teachers treat students fairly; teachers treat students with respect; school rules are fair, school rules are consistently enforced, and school rules are clearly stated. There is a clear pattern of overall low agreement regarding treatment from teachers and the fairness of school rules with non-suspended students expressing the highest levels of agreement (see Figure 2). Among the recently suspended students, those from high-rate schools are the least likely to agree that teachers treat students fairly and with respect; a similar pattern emerges regarding the fairness of school rules with students recently suspended from high-rate schools being the most critical.

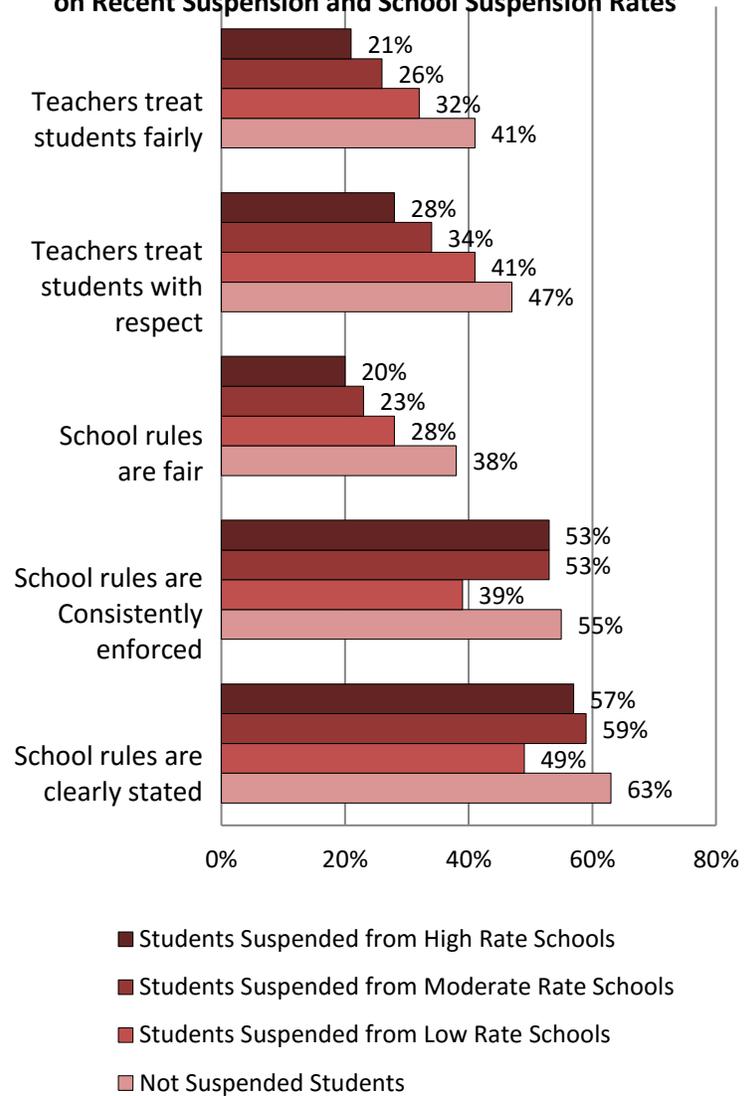
Figure 2 also depicts a second pattern regarding school climate, which is that recently suspended students from low-rate suspension schools are the least likely to agree that school rules are consistently enforced or are clearly stated. Moreover, those recently suspended students from moderate- and high-rate suspension schools have similar levels of agreement to those of non-suspended students regarding school rules. This pattern suggests that suspended students from low-rate schools may feel more "singled out" by their suspension.

## Conclusion

Not only do suspended students have lower levels of both school commitment and school climate than their peers, levels of school commitment and climate vary by school-level suspension rates. Students suspended from low-rate schools have the lowest levels of school commitment, but have relatively high perceptions of school climate compared to their suspended peers, except regarding the clarity and consistency of school rules. Students suspended from high-rate schools on the other hand, maintain high levels of school commitment, but have poor perceptions of school climate. The question remains whether being suspended "causes" lower school commitment and perceptions of school climate, or whether low school commitment and poor perceptions of school climate "cause" suspension. Future school reports will explore this topic.

In light of these findings, school administrators, especially those at schools with low suspension rates, may need to be cognizant of maintaining suspended students' engagement in coursework during their absence and assist both teachers and students in students' reintegration into the classroom. Given that suspensions are less common in

**Figure 2. Students' Perception of School Climate Based on Recent Suspension and School Suspension Rates**



low-rate schools, suspended students may feel more ostracized from their teachers and peers or may feel that the school rules are not enforced similarly for all students. Moreover, teachers from low-rate suspension schools may not be as equipped to handle students who have missed class compared to teachers in moderate and high rate schools where suspensions are more frequent and perhaps normalized. Finally, given the low agreement from all students on many of the school climate items, particularly about treatment by teachers and fairness of school rules, teachers and school administrators could seek greater student input on school rules and policies. When students believe that their concerns are heard and perceive that both teachers and school rules are fair, they may be less likely to violate school rules that result in suspensions.

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