



NEWS RELEASE

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Minnesota Department of Human Rights Finds Suspension and Expulsion Disparities in School Districts Across the State

New analysis finds that students of color comprise 31 percent of the population, yet receive 66 percent of all suspensions and expulsions; students with disabilities comprise 14 percent of the population, yet receive 43 percent of all suspensions and expulsions

Students who are absent from the classroom are less likely to graduate and achieve success later in life

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights has engaged with school districts to develop strategies for alleviating disparities

ST. PAUL, MN – Students of color comprise 31 percent of Minnesota’s student population and receive 66 percent of all suspensions and expulsions and students with disabilities comprise 14 percent of Minnesota’s student population and receive 43 percent of all suspensions and expulsions, according to new analysis released today by the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR). These disparities constitute a violation of the Minnesota Human Rights Act because they deny students of color and students with disabilities educational access and negatively impact academic achievement. In response to the findings, MDHR has engaged school districts in a series of meetings to develop strategies for resolving disparities.

“Studies have proven that higher rates of school suspensions and expulsions among students of color and students with disabilities can have lasting negative impacts in their lives and education,” said Human Rights Commissioner Kevin Lindsey. “That is why the Minnesota Department of Human Rights takes seriously any allegation or evidence that indicate disciplinary measures are falling disproportionately upon children of color and students with disabilities in our schools. It is our responsibility to fully review such allegations, and work with local school officials to ensure equal treatment under the law for all kids.”

All public schools and charters in Minnesota are required to annually report information about their suspension and expulsion decisions to the Department of Education, which maintains the information in its Discipline Incident Reporting System (DIRS). The Department of Human Rights, in turn, reviewed five years of data. The 2015-2016 school year reveals trends in the data that is representative of the last five years:

- American-Indian students were ten times more likely to be suspended or expelled than white peers.
- African-American students were eight times more likely to be suspended or expelled than white peers.
- Students of color were twice more likely to be suspended or expelled than white peers.

- Students with disabilities were twice more likely to be suspended or expelled as their peers without a disability.

In its analysis, the Department of Human Rights did not consider situations where physical safety was a concern, the student was fighting or in possession of a weapon or illegal drugs. Excluding these situations, the department found that 55 percent of all suspensions in the state were the result of a subjective judgment made by school officials, leading to disparate results.

“At MNEEP, we applaud the collaborative approach that school districts and the MDHR are pursuing to create classroom practices that advance civil rights protections for students while ensuring that powerful teaching and learning occurs in schools,” said State Rep. Carlos Mariani, Executive Director, Minnesota Education Equity Partnership. “I am hopeful we can teach each other new ways on how to structure discipline policies that responsibly keeps students in classrooms and contributes to academic success for all.”

Engagement with Minnesota School Districts

Disparities exist in nearly every school district and charter school in the state. In the fall of 2017, the Department of Human Rights invited 43 school districts and charter schools to meet with the department to develop corrective action strategies. The Department, in collaboration with districts and charter schools, is starting to reach tentative agreements that will help all children succeed. Robbinsdale Public Schools—while it did not have the biggest disparities in the bunch—was the first to want to work collaboratively with MDHR to address this issue.

“We are looking forward to working with Minnesota Department of Human Rights and other partners to address these local, state and national disparities,” said Dr. Carlton Jenkins, Superintendent, Robbinsdale Area Schools. “We must work together to do what is in the best interest of our children.”

If MDHR and a school district or charter school are unable to reach an agreement, then the department may file administrative charges. An administrative charge would require the school district or charter school to submit additional information necessary for MDHR to investigate. Upon completion of its investigation, the department may issue a probable cause determination. A probable cause determination means the department believes that there is sufficient evidence to believe that discrimination has occurred.

Importance of Alleviating Disparities

All Minnesota students need and deserve access to a world class education for success in life. School suspensions account for [20 percent of the difference](#) in achievement between African-American and white students. Students at schools with high rates of suspensions exhibit lower achievement — even if never suspended. Reducing suspension and expulsion disparities will help ensure that students of color, American Indian students, and students with disabilities are given the same opportunities for success as their white peers.

“PACER is pleased that the Minnesota Department of Human Rights is working with school districts to address the disproportionate use of suspensions and expulsions for students with disabilities,” said Paula Goldberg, Executive Director, PACER Center. “We hope to see increased use of positive behavioral interventions that support improved academic outcomes for all Minnesota children.”

The high school graduation rate for students of color has increased by 11.1 percentage points since 2012, reducing the gap between white students and students of color by nearly 30 percent. Despite this improvement significant gaps in educational opportunity and achievement persist. Resolving student discipline disparities could help to further reduce Minnesota’s achievement gaps.

If you believe you have been discriminated against in violation of the [Minnesota Human Rights Act](#), please contact MDHR's enforcement unit at 651.539.1100, 1.800.657.3704 or online at mn.gov/mdhr/intake. For more information about discrimination, please visit mn.gov/mdhr or follow the conversation on Twitter at [@mnhumanrights](#).

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