

## Suspensions of Minority Students Increase Black and Hispanic students also suffer from higher drop out rate.

By Julia O'Donoghue  
Tuesday, March 27, 2007



By Julia O'Donoghue/The Connection

**West Potomac High School has the highest drop out rate in Fairfax County.**

The rate of Black and Hispanic student suspensions has grown over the past six years in Fairfax County Public Schools even though the school system's general population suspension rate has remained relatively flat during the same time period, according to a county school board presentation last week.

Hispanic and Black students were suspended at a rate of 11.68 percent during the 2005-2006 school year compared to 9.6 percent in the 2000-2001 school year. The general secondary school population has a suspension rate of 10.06 percent during the 2000-2001 school year and 10 percent during the 2005-2006 school year, according to school system charts.

High School Drop Out Rates in 2004-2005



Fairfax schools failed to meet the goal of decreasing the suspension rate for Black and Hispanic students to 9.5 percent and for general secondary students to 8.5 percent by the 2005-2006 school year, said assistant superintendent Leslie Butz during the meeting.

[Email this Article](#)  
[Print this Article](#)

"Part of the challenge is that the Fairfax County suspension rate is already low," she said.

Despite having high-risk populations, Fairfax's suspension rate was less than Virginia's overall suspension rate and was lower than half of the states in the country during the 1999-2000 school year, she said.

Fairfax is implementing some programs to address the disciplinary gap. Schools with the system's Positive Behavior Support program – in which staff is trained to reinforce and encourage good behavior – have seen a drop in their overall rate of suspension since its introduction in 2003-2004 school year, Butz said.

The drop is even more dramatic when looking specifically at Black and Hispanic students in schools with Positive Behavior Support programs, according to the school system's charts.

"The Black and Hispanic students appear to respond more to PBS," said Butz. The school system staff recommended the school board expand the Positive Behavior Support program to high schools with a larger percentage of suspensions and the corresponding feeder elementary and middle schools.

Positive Behavior Support is currently run at 42 of Fairfax's 238 schools and the school system plans to expand the program to 50 more schools next year.

"I am pleased that in a tight budget, we have proposed an expansion," said school board member Jane Strauss (Dranesville District).

But Stuart Gibson (Hunter Mill District) said he did not believe the county had enough data about Positive Behavior Support to draw conclusions. He noted that the "control group" of schools without the Positive Behavior Support program was three to four times the size of the experimental group.

"I am concerned about drawing too easy a conclusion in favor of PBS," said Gibson.

In addition to suspensions, Black and Hispanic students have also tended to be expelled and drop out at a higher rate.

Black students make up approximately 10.8 percent and Hispanic students make up 16 percent of the Fairfax County Public Schools population.

Out of the 2,060 students dropping out of Fairfax schools during the 2004-2005 school year, 325 were Black and 1,050 were Hispanic, according to a school system report.

Schools with higher drop out rates are also typically those that have a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic students.

West Potomac High School had the highest drop out rate in Fairfax County the second highest percentage of Black students in 2004-2005.

The Northern Virginia Urban League has formed an education committee within their organization and met with Fairfax schools superintendent Jack Dale in February to discuss minority student achievement.

"This is the first time the superintendent of Fairfax has ever met with our organization. The fact that he came here and met with us shows something. He is willing to reach out and work with us to resolve those issues," said Tyrone Mooror, the Northern Virginia Urban League's vice president and chief operating officer.

South Lakes parent Maria Allen said the county should be doing more at the systemwide level to address the achievement gap between minority and white students.

Allen has done research comparing the scores of Black students in the Fairfax system to those of Black students in other parts of the state and found that students in Richmond, a school system with fewer resources, outperformed their peers in Fairfax.

"If the kids aren't doing well in school, they are more likely to act out," said Allen.

Concerns had also been raised last year about the expulsion and suspension rates of another vulnerable population, students with disabilities.

The Fairfax County Council of Parent Teacher Associations grew concerned last year when they discovered that students with disabilities tended to get suspended and expelled at a higher rate than students in the general population.

"We asked the school board to look at suspensions and expulsions overall particularly because we saw a trend and the rate skewing higher for student with disabilities," said Michele Menapace, the organization's president.

Public information officer Mary Shaw said information regarding suspensions or drop out rates of students with disabilities was not available.

©2011 [Connection Newspapers](#). All Rights Reserved. [Privacy Policy](#)  
1606 King Street ♦ Alexandria, VA 22314 ♦ 703-821-5050  
Site Design, Development and Hosting by [Timberlake Publishing](#)