

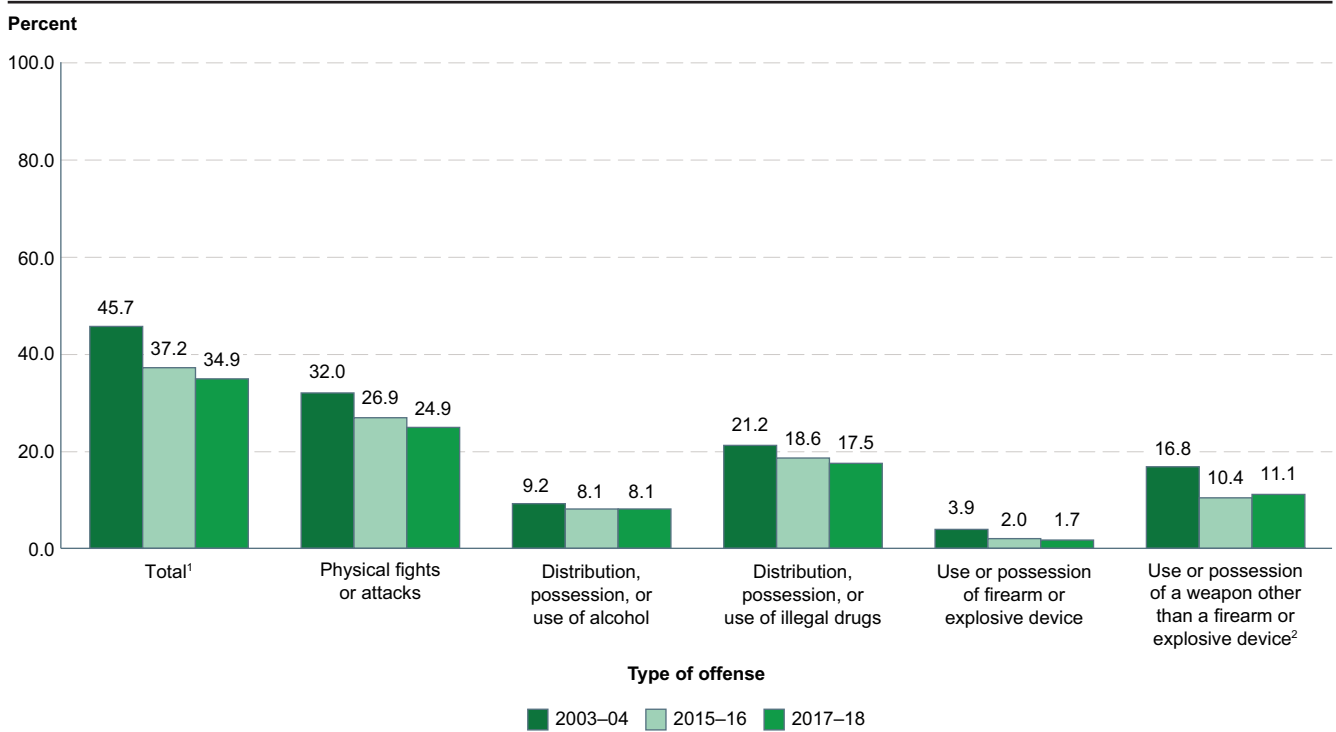
Serious Disciplinary Actions Taken by Public Schools

During the 2017–18 school year, higher percentages of high schools (76 percent) and middle schools (58 percent) took at least one serious disciplinary action than did primary schools (17 percent).

In the School Survey on Crime and Safety, public school principals were asked to report the number of disciplinary actions their schools had taken against students for specific offenses. The student offenses reported by principals during the 2017-18 school year and discussed in

this indicator are physical attacks or fights; distribution, possession, or use of alcohol; distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs; use or possession of a firearm or explosive device; and use or possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device.

Figure 1. Percentage of public schools that took a serious disciplinary action in response to specific offenses, by type of offense: School years 2003–04, 2015–16, and 2017–18



¹ Totals for 2003–04 are not directly comparable to totals for 2015–16 and 2017–18, because the 2015–16 and 2017–18 questionnaires did not include an item on insubordination. Schools that took serious disciplinary actions in response to more than one type of offense were counted only once in the total.

² In 2003–04, the questionnaire wording was simply “a weapon other than a firearm” (instead of “a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device”).

NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Serious disciplinary actions include out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days, but less than the remainder of the school year; removals with no continuing services for at least the remainder of the school year; and transfers to specialized schools for disciplinary reasons. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04, 2015–16, and 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2004, 2016, and 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 233.10.

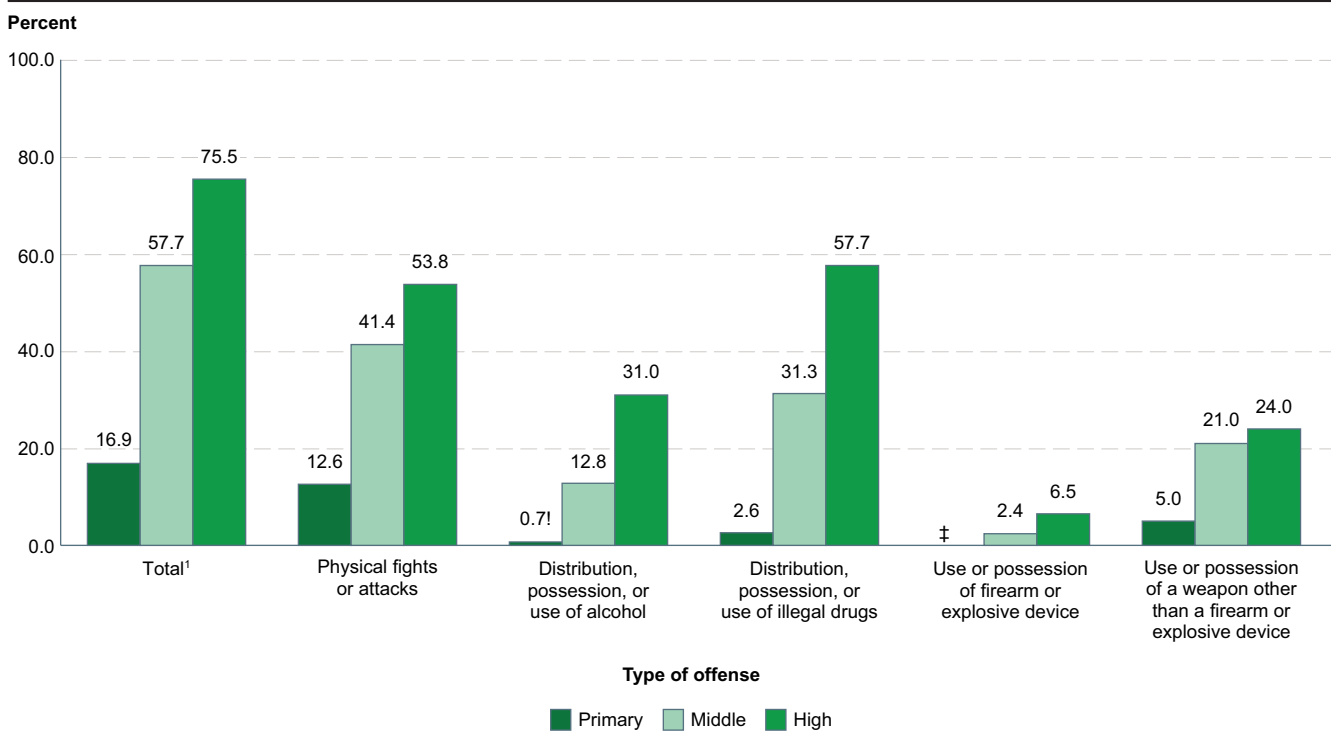
During the 2017-18 school year, 35 percent of public schools (28,700 schools) took at least one serious disciplinary action—including out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days, removals with no services for the remainder of the school year, and transfers to specialized schools—for specific offenses.

Out of all offenses reported during the 2017-18 school year, physical attacks or fights prompted the largest percentage of schools (25 percent) to respond with at least one serious disciplinary action. In response to other offenses by students, 18 percent of schools took serious disciplinary actions for the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs; 11 percent did so for the use or possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device;

8 percent did so for the distribution, possession, or use of alcohol; and 2 percent did so for the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device.

The percentage of schools taking at least one serious disciplinary action was lower during the 2017-18 school year than during the 2003-04 school year across all specific offense types except the distribution, possession, or use of alcohol, for which there was no measurable difference between the two years.¹ There were no measurable differences between the 2015-16 school year and the 2017-18 school year in the percentages of schools taking at least one serious disciplinary action for any offenses, including the total number of offenses.

Figure 2. Percentage of public schools that took a serious disciplinary action in response to specific offenses, by type of offense and school level: School year 2017–18



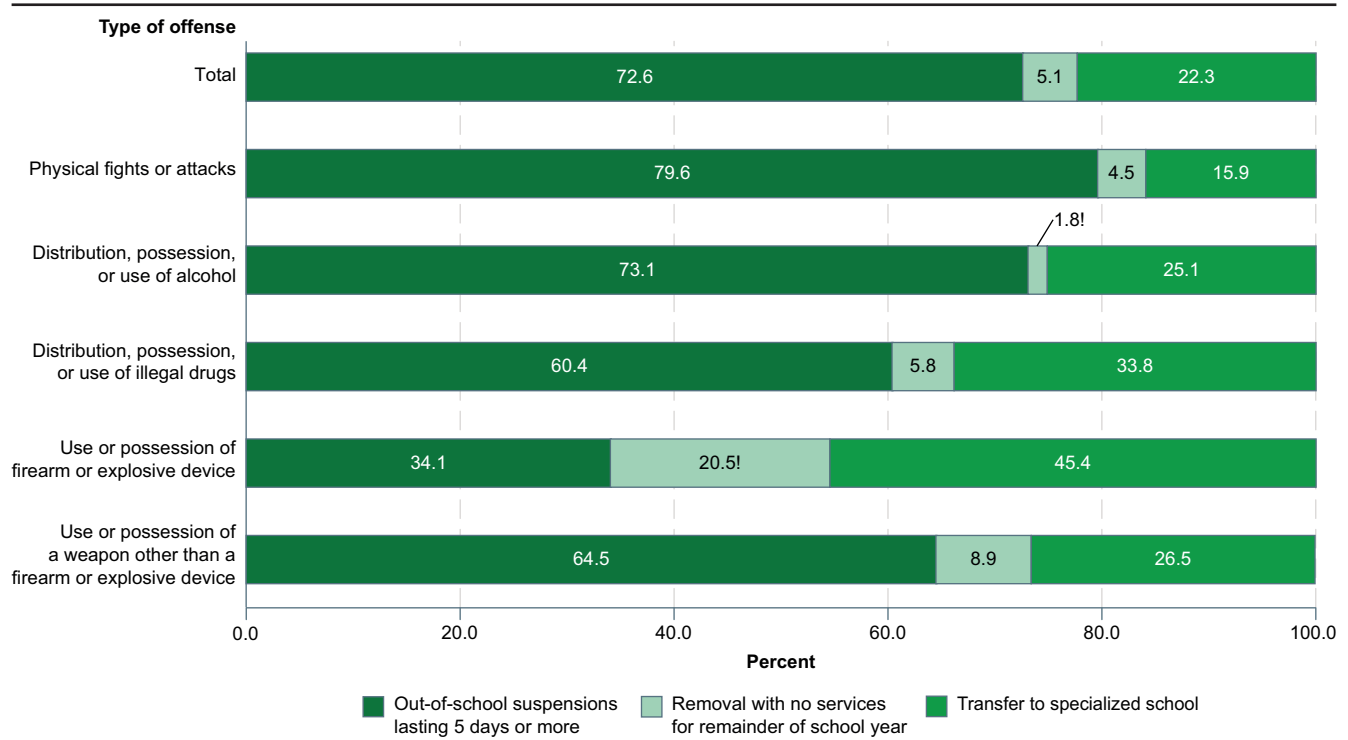
! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
 ‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.
¹ Schools that took serious disciplinary actions in response to more than one type of offense were counted only once in the total.
 NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Primary schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not higher than grade 3 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 8. Middle schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 4 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 9. High schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 9. Excludes combined schools, which include all other combinations of grades, including K–12 schools. Serious disciplinary actions include out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days, but less than the remainder of the school year; removals with no continuing services for at least the remainder of the school year; and transfers to specialized schools for disciplinary reasons. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 233.12.

During the 2017-18 school year, higher percentages of high schools (76 percent) and middle schools (58 percent) took at least one serious disciplinary action than did primary schools (17 percent). This pattern by school level was generally observed for disciplinary actions taken in response to specific offenses as well. For example, 58 percent of high schools and 31 percent of middle schools, compared with 3 percent of primary schools, took serious disciplinary actions in response to the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs.

During the 2017-18 school year, the percentage of public schools that took at least one serious disciplinary action

was highest among public schools with 1,000 or more students enrolled (74 percent); this percentage ranged from 25 to 35 percent among schools with smaller enrollment sizes. The percentage of public schools that took at least one serious disciplinary action was lower for schools in suburban areas (30 percent) than for schools in cities (35 percent), rural areas (38 percent), and towns (39 percent). Additionally, the percentage of public schools that took at least one serious disciplinary action was lower for schools in which 25 percent or less of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL; 23 percent) than for schools in which higher percentages of students were eligible for FRPL (36 to 39 percent).²

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of serious disciplinary actions taken by public schools, by type of offense and type of disciplinary action: School year 2017–18



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
 NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 233.10.

A total of 291,100 serious disciplinary actions were taken by public schools during the 2017-18 school year for specific offenses. The largest number of these reported disciplinary actions were taken in response to physical attacks or fights (170,400 actions; 59 percent). Of the serious disciplinary actions taken during the 2017-18 school year, 73 percent were out-of-school suspensions for 5 or more days, 22 percent were transfers to specialized schools, and 5 percent were removals with no services for the remainder of the school year.

During the 2017-18 school year, out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days constituted a greater percentage of responses to physical attacks or fights (80 percent) than of responses to the distribution, possession, or use of alcohol (73 percent), the use or possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device (65 percent), the distribution,

possession, or use of illegal drugs (60 percent), and the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device (34 percent). Removals with no services for the remainder of the school year constituted a greater percentage of responses to the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device (21 percent) than of responses to the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs (6 percent), physical attacks or fights (4 percent), and the distribution, possession, or use of alcohol (2 percent). Transfers to specialized schools constituted greater percentages of responses to the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device (45 percent) and the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs (34 percent) than of responses to the use or possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device (27 percent), the distribution, possession, or use of alcohol (25 percent), and physical attacks or fights (16 percent).

Endnotes:

¹ Totals for 2003-04 are not directly comparable to totals for 2017-18, because the 2017-18 questionnaire did not include an item on insubordination.

² The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) programs is a proxy measure of school poverty. For

more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCES blog post "[Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)"

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, tables 233.10 and 233.12

Related indicators and resources: [Marijuana Use and Illegal Drug Availability](#); [Physical Fights on School Property and Anywhere](#); [Safety and Security Practices at Public Schools](#); [Students Carrying Weapons on School Property and Anywhere](#) and [Students' Access to Firearms](#); [Students' Use of Alcohol](#)

Glossary: Firearm/explosive device; Free or reduced-price lunch; Locale codes; Physical attack or fight; Public school or institution; Weapon (Fast Response Survey System and School Survey on Crime and Safety)