

Significant Discrepancy in Long-Term Suspensions and Expulsions



Special Education Indicator 4a
Fact Book

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**Department of
Education &
Workforce**

What is Significant Discrepancy in Long-Term Suspensions and Expulsions (Indicator 4a)?

This Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) indicator is part of a set of equity measures that evaluates whether students with disabilities are being suspended or expelled ¹ at a higher rate than their peers without disabilities. It assesses significant discrepancy between students with disabilities and students without disabilities with more than 10 cumulative days of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. The state sets targets for this results measure with stakeholder input.

Why is Significant Discrepancy in Long-Term Suspensions and Expulsions Important?

Significant Discrepancy in Long-Term Suspensions and Expulsions (Indicator 4a) aims to understand whether:

- Schools administer exclusionary discipline equally to all students, regardless of disability.
- Schools administer discipline in a nondiscriminatory manner.

Districts and schools must consistently review their discipline practices to promote the most equitable environment for students with disabilities.

How is Significant Discrepancy Calculated?

In fall 2024, Ohio sought stakeholder input on the number of years considered in the calculation for Indicator 4a. See [Ohio's Special Education Methodology and Target Setting](#) webpage for more information about the stakeholder engagement process. Table 1 summarizes each methodological component of Indicator 4a, including both the previous and new methodologies, and highlights the changes in blue cells and bold font. Ohio implemented the new methodology for Indicator 4a for the first time with the 2024-25 Special Education Profile, based on data from the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years.

Table 1. Comparison of Ohio's new Indicator 4a methodology to Ohio's previous methodology

Methodological Component	Ohio's Previous Methodology	Ohio's New Methodology	Ohio's Definition
Threshold	1.00 percentage point	1.00 percentage point	Ohio defines, "significant discrepancy," as a discipline rate for children with disabilities that is 1.00 percentage point or more than the discipline rate for children without disabilities in the same district or community school.
Minimum Cell Size	10	0	A minimum cell size of 0 means a rate difference is calculated for all districts and community schools. Previously, Ohio used a minimum cell size of 10. This meant that for a district to be included in the analyses, there had to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• at least 10 children with disabilities suspended/expelled for at least 10 cumulative days in the district; and• at least 10 children without disabilities suspended/expelled for at least 10 cumulative days in the district.
Minimum N Size	30	0	A minimum n-size of 0 means a rate difference is calculated for all districts and community schools. Ohio previously used a minimum n-size of 30. This meant that for a district to be included in the analyses, there had to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• at least 30 children with disabilities enrolled in the district; and• at least 30 children without disabilities enrolled in the district.

¹ IDEA 20 U.S.C. [1416\(a\)\(3\)\(c\)](#)

Methodological Component	Ohio's Previous Methodology	Ohio's New Methodology	Ohio's Definition
Multiple Years of Data	3	2	Ohio uses two years of data to determine whether “significant discrepancy” is occurring in a district or community school. A district or community school must have a rate difference that exceeds 1.00 percentage point for each of the years considered to have a significant discrepancy as defined by Ohio. Ohio previously used three years of data.

Significant discrepancy is calculated based on the data reported by each district and community school in the Education Management Information System (EMIS). Across all categories, enrollment data are calculated based on full-time equivalency, or FTE. FTE provides a precise calculation based on the amount of time each student was enrolled in the district during the school year. Ohio calculates significant discrepancy in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (OSSE) using a rate difference (see Figures 1-3 and Table 2). The “discipline rate difference” is the difference between the rate of discipline for students with disabilities and the rate of discipline for students without disabilities. The below graphic shows how to calculate the rate difference.

Figure 1. Calculation step 1: The number of students with disabilities with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 cumulative days divided by the district enrollment of students with disabilities equals the district rate for students with disabilities with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 cumulative days.



Figure 2. Calculation step 2: The number of students without disabilities with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 cumulative days divided by the district enrollment of students without disabilities equals the district rate for students with disabilities with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 cumulative days.

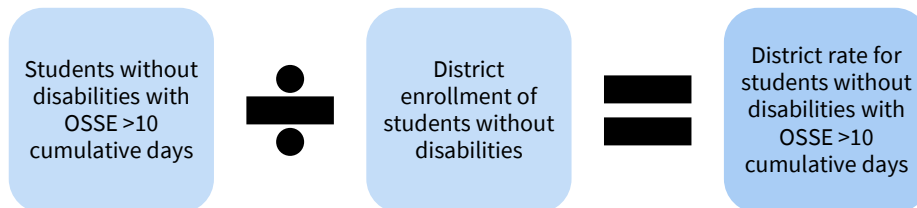


Figure 3. Calculation step 3: The district rate for students with disabilities with greater than 10 out-of-school suspensions or expulsions (OSSE) of greater than days minus the district rate for students without disabilities with OSSE greater than 10 cumulative days equals the discipline rate difference.

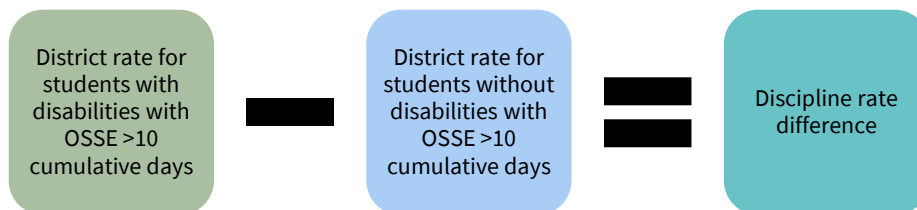


Table 2. Example of a step-by-step calculation for significant discrepancy in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (Indicator 4a).

Calculation	Description	2022-23	2023-24
A	Students with disabilities with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of more than 10 cumulative days	200	250
B	Students with disabilities enrollment	4,300	4,400
C = A ÷ B	Students with disabilities discipline rate	4.65%	5.68%
D	Students without disabilities with out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of more than 10 cumulative days	580	680

Calculation	Description	2022-23	2023-24
E	Students without disabilities enrollment	17,200	17,800
$F = D \div E$	Students without disabilities discipline rate	3.37%	3.82%
$G = C - F$	Discipline rate difference	1.38%	1.49%

To have a significant discrepancy in Ohio, the discipline rate difference must be greater than 1.00 percentage point for both years considered. Using the example in Table 2, this district has significant discrepancy, as defined by Ohio, because their rate difference exceeds 1.00 percentage point for both school years. A rate difference of 1.00 percentage point means that the rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 cumulative days for students with disabilities is one percentage point higher than the rate for students without disabilities in the district. A rate difference of zero means that students with disabilities are no more or less likely to be disciplined than students without disabilities.

Rationale for New Methodology

Stakeholders who recommended using two years of data stated two years is enough to establish a potential pattern and allows for local education agencies to obtain support from the state sooner. Stakeholders appreciated the option to use these indicators as an early warning system for significant disproportionality.

Stakeholders who opposed using two years of data in favor of using three noted it is necessary to gather as much data as possible to identify trends, particularly with the reduction in the minimum cell and n-sizes. Stakeholders also focused on having insufficient staff at the local level to effectively address behavioral concerns and the need to address staff mindset.

Few stakeholders noted their belief in meritocracy suggesting race is not an issue, while others shared a preference for lowering the rate ratio threshold for indicator 4b and for having consistent methodology across indicators where possible.

Data for Significant Discrepancy in Long-Term Suspensions and Expulsions

Ohio's percentage of districts and community schools with a significant discrepancy between students with and without disabilities in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 cumulative days that exceeded 1.00 percentage point for two consecutive years was 5.34 percent in 2023-24 (See Table 3).

Table 3. Ohio's percentage of districts and community schools with a significant discrepancy of greater than 1.00 percentage point for two consecutive years

4a: Significant Discrepancy between Students with and without Disabilities in Out-of-school Suspensions and Expulsions of Greater than 10 Cumulative Days	2023-24
Two consecutive years of discipline data	Data from the 22-23 and 23-24 school years
Number of districts and community schools with a discrepancy >1.00 percentage point for two consecutive years	52
Total number of districts and community schools included in the analysis	974
Percentage of districts and community schools with a discrepancy >1.00 percentage point for two consecutive years	5.34%
Target	TBD*
Total number of districts and community schools	974
Percentage of all districts and community schools included in the analysis	100.00%

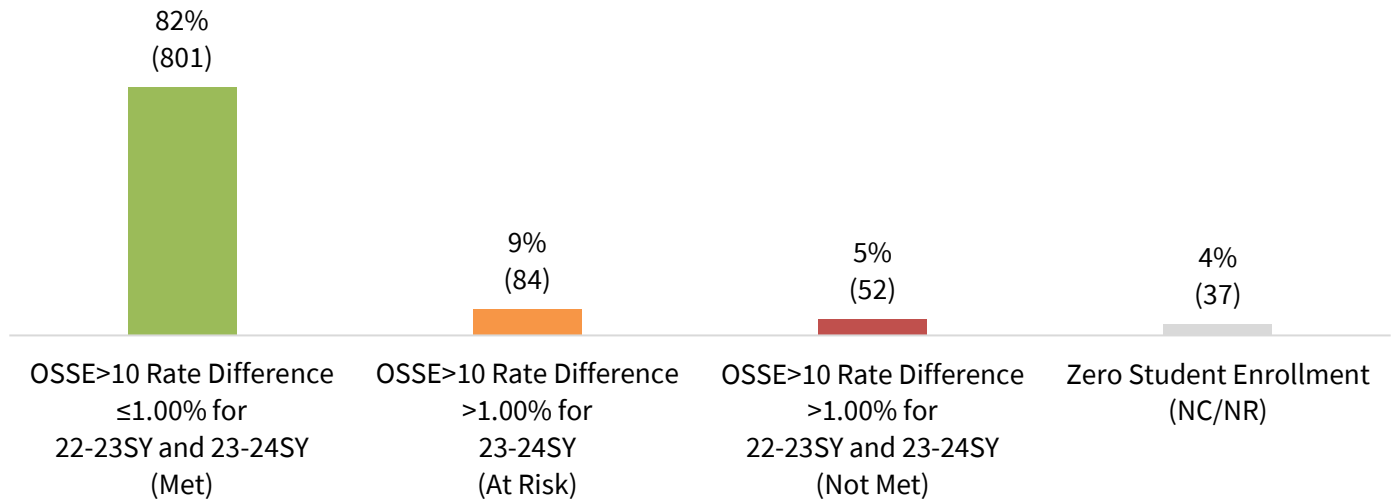
*The Department will reengage stakeholders in spring 2025 to set targets for Indicator 4a.

Data Source: Education Management Information System (EMIS)

State-level data from the 2023-24 school year for Indicator 4a will be reported to the U.S. Department of Education in the Annual Performance Report due February 2026. District and community-school level data for Indicator 4a will be reported within the 2024-25 Special Education Profile targeted for release in January 2025. Figure 4 identifies the number of districts and community schools that exceeded the state threshold for two consecutive years.

Figure 4. Number and percentage of districts and community schools with a significant discrepancy between students with and without disabilities in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 cumulative days.

Indicator 4a: Significant Discrepancy between Students with and without Disabilities with Out-of-school Suspensions and Expulsions of Greater than 10 Cumulative Days



OSSE>10 = out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 cumulative days

Districts and community schools with Zero Student Enrollment are differentiated by NC for Not Calculated (the district or community school had students included in the calculation for only one of the two years considered) and NR for Not Rated (the district or community school had zero students included in the calculation for both years considered).

Required Actions for Significant Discrepancy

Districts and community schools exceed the threshold of 1.00 percentage point for each year must:

- 1) Review their policies, procedures, and practices and submit documentation to the Department of Education and Workforce. If noncompliance is identified during this review, correct the noncompliance according to IDEA.
- 2) Identify and address the factors that may be contributing to the significant discrepancy.

Resources for Addressing Systemic Improvement of Significant Discrepancy

Table 4. Resources for addressing systemic improvement of significant discrepancy

Resource	Resource Description
Implicit Bias Modules from The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity	Activity addressing possible biases staff may have between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.
Learning Management System (LMS)	Professional learning opportunities including <i>Culturally Responsive Practice Program</i> .

Resource	Resource Description
Ohio's Whole Child Framework	A framework to support a student-centered environment that meets mental, behavioral, physical health, wellness, nutrition, and safety needs.
Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence's (OCALI) Teaching Diverse Learners Center	Provides learning opportunities through the <i>Challenging Behaviors Webinar Series</i> and <i>Bullying and Individuals with Special Needs and InspirED Zoomcasts</i> .
Ohio Preschool Expulsion Prevention Partnership	Partnership developed between Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to reduce the rate of expulsions for preschool children.
SchoolSafety.gov	Created by the federal government to provide schools and districts with actionable recommendations to create safe and supportive learning environments for students and educators.

Historical Data for Significant Discrepancy in Long-Term Suspensions and Expulsions

Prior to the 2023-24 school year, Ohio considered the three most recent consecutive years to determine whether a district or community school had a significant discipline discrepancy. At that time Ohio also used a minimum cell size of 10 and a minimum n-size of 30 (see definitions above in Table 1). The historical data presented here is based on the state's previous methodology. However, it is important to note that Office of Special Education Programs notes lack of reasonableness in methodology if states include fewer than 10 percent of local education agencies (LEAs) in the analysis.² With Ohio's previous methodology, including the minimum population requirements (i.e., minimum cell and n-sizes used), and three consecutive years of data for which districts and community schools must exceed the state threshold, the state has included fewer than 3 percent (4 LEAs) of all local education agencies in the analysis for Indicator 4a since the 2019-20 school year.

Ohio's percentage of districts and community schools with discipline discrepancies greater than 1.00 percent was 25 percent in 2018-19, which met the state target of 25 percent. In 2019-20, Ohio's percentage of districts and community schools with discipline discrepancies greater than 1.00 was 20 percent, which met the state target of 20 percent. Ohio's percentage of districts and community schools with discipline discrepancies greater than 1.00 has remained at 0 percent since the 2020-21 school year, meeting the state target of 20 percent each year. Figure 1 displays Ohio's percentage of districts and community schools with a significant discrepancy since the 2018-19 school year. While the state has met its target for the last five years, the proportion of LEAs included in the calculation due to minimum cell and n-sizes is too small to fully understand the state's performance on this measure as a whole.

² Imura, M., Johnson, N., Marcotte, C., & Veenema, S. (2023, November 14-15). *Has OSEP Required Your State to Take Action on Indicator 4? You Are Not Alone!* [Conference Presentation]. IDEA Data Center SPP/APR Summit, Cincinnati, OH, United States.

Figure 5. Ohio's percentage of districts and community schools with a significant discipline discrepancy.

Indicator 4a: Districts and Community Schools with Discipline Discrepancies $\geq 1.00\%$ for Three Consecutive Years

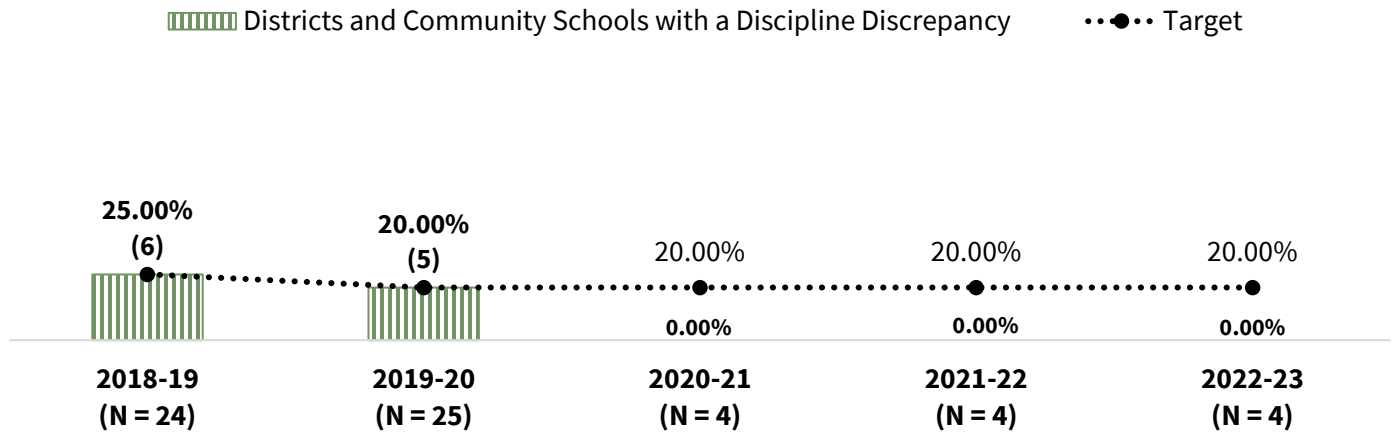


Table 5. Ohio's percentage of districts and community schools with a significant discipline discrepancy.

4a: Discipline Discrepancy	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Three consecutive years of discipline data	Data from the 16-17, 17-18, and 18-19 school years	Data from the 17-18, 18-19, and 19-20 school years	Data from the 18-19, 19-20, and 20-21 school years	Data from the 19-20, 20-21, and 21-22 school years	Data from the 20-21, 21-22, and 22-23 school years
Number of districts and community schools with a discipline discrepancy $\geq 1\%$ for three consecutive years	6	5	0	0	0
Total number of districts and community schools included in the analysis	24	25	4	4	4
Percentage of districts with a discipline discrepancy $\geq 1\%$	25.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Target	25.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%
Total number of districts and community schools	969	933	932	943	968
Percentage of all districts and community schools included in the analysis	2.48%	2.68%	0.43%	0.42%	0.41%

Data Source: Education Management Information System (EMIS)