



SNAPSHOT

Informal removal of students with disabilities in Tennessee

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Matthew Veach | *Research Analyst* | Matthew.Veach@cot.tn.gov
Kim Potts | *Principal Research Analyst* | Kim.Potts@cot.tn.gov

A new report from OREA examines the use of informal removals of students with disabilities in Tennessee public schools. OREA conducted this study in response to a February 2024 legislative request.

Informal removal of students with disabilities refers to informal practices that restrict or remove students' access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE), a primary right under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and other relevant educational services. One example of an informal removal would be a school administrator contacting a parent of a student with a disability who has had a behavioral incident in a classroom, asking the parent to come pick the child up for the remainder of the school day or longer, and not documenting the student's suspension and the reason for it.

Informal removals are a problem for multiple reasons. They violate the law under IDEA, result in learning loss for affected students, create an incentive for students to misbehave to get out of school, and can strain the ability of parents, especially single and low-income parents, to hold employment to financially support their families.

Conclusions

- **The number of informal removals that occur each year in Tennessee schools is unknown.** Neither the state nor districts nor schools collect data on informal removals. The lack of data is a significant limitation to what can be known about informal removals, especially regarding their frequency, the number of students informally removed, and the reason for each informal removal.
- **Despite the lack of data on informal removals, OREA's research generated several insights into the practice.** The insights address how informal removals occur, why they occur, who is most likely to be informally removed, and the role of teachers.
- **The Tennessee Department of Education has a goal of reducing and eliminating the use of informal removals in districts and schools through information and professional learning opportunities and technical assistance.**

Recommendations

- **Districts and schools should examine their policies, procedures, and practices for disciplining students with disabilities in light of OREA's report.**
- **Districts and schools should properly document all removals of students with disabilities and all disciplinary actions taken for such students.**