

Research Recap: Informal removal of students with disabilities in Tennessee

May 2025

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.

Ex: 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.

Conclusion

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.

Conclusion

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.

Conclusion

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.

Recommendation

Districts and schools should examine their policies, procedures, and practices for disciplining students with disabilities in light of OREA's report.



Recommendation

Districts and schools should properly document all removals of students with disabilities and all disciplinary actions taken for such students.

To read the full report, visit the Comptroller's OREA website at tncot.cc/IR