

The Washington Post

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Primary schools suspend thousands

Practice is widely used in D.C. area; some sent home are as young as 4

BY DONNA ST. GEORGE

Thousands of elementary students were suspended from public schools last year in Washington and its suburbs, some of them so young that they were learning about out-of-school discipline before they could spell or multiply.

Those sent home for their behavior included kindergartners in nearly every area school system — 94 in Prince George's County, 74 in Fairfax County, 61 in Anne Arundel County, 50 in the D.C. school system, 38 in Prince William County and 22 in Montgomery County.

They included children who idled at home for a day or two and some who accompanied their parents to work.

They included the pre-kindergarten son of Rajuawn Thompkins, who said the boy was removed from his D.C. charter school for kicking off his shoes and crying in frustration. Thompkins had thought the boy was too young to be suspended.

He was 4. "I would explain it to him, and he still didn't understand," she said. "He'd ask me, 'Mommy, why can't I go to school?'"

His pointed question underlies a debate about the merits of out-of-school suspension.

Some researchers and critics question whether children in the early grades should ever be suspended. The goal should be teaching appropriate behavior, they say, not sending students home.

Still, many educators see suspension as necessary — a strong message about conduct that

SUSPENSIONS CONTINUED ON A8

2012 GRAMMY AWARDS



MARIO ANZUONI/REUTERS

Jennifer Hudson performs the megahit "I Will Always Love You" as a tribute to the late Whitney Houston at Sunday night's Grammys.

A sweep on a solemn night

As Adele rolls in the awards, musicians salute Whitney Houston — who once defined excellence

BY CHRIS RICHARDS

Whitney Houston's unexpected death on the eve of Sunday's 54th Annual Grammy Awards turned the music industry's biggest night into a tone-dizzy exercise in grief, joy and show-must-go-on gusto.

Even as the show was rolling on, details of Houston's death were emerging — how she was found in the hotel room bathtub, how friends had tried to revive her before paramedics

arrived. Grim video footage of the singer's body being removed on a stretcher played on the local news.

So this year's Grammy awards suddenly became a chance to memorialize a voice that once embodied the excellence the awards claim to celebrate. Instead, viewers endured a ceremony riddled with disjointed collaborations that spanned genres and generations for the sake of... what, exactly?

Certainly not for the sake of rallying around Houston's lega-

cy. A six-time Grammy winner herself, Houston's influence on the past 25 years of popular music can't be overstated. Her dazzling vocal abilities changed the way we think about singing, making it nearly impossible to imagine what Mariah Carey, Christina Aguilera, Boyz II Men, Mary J. Blige, Beyoncé — let alone "American Idol" — would sound like without her imprint.

Jennifer Hudson was the only Grammy performer to pay tribute to Houston in song, and she did it with a quick, stately rendi-

tion of Houston's signature hit "I Will Always Love You." It was the evening's most coherent performance, but it wasn't enough to make the entire night at the Staples Center in Los Angeles

GRAMMYS CONTINUED ON A8

on [washingtonpost.com](#)

Grammys: View galleries and read artist reaction; Chris Richards hosts a live chat at noon.

Whitney Houston: Follow her life in photographs and watch video of memorable performances.

A key visit for China, U.S.

XI JINPING IS SET TO BE PRESIDENT

Washington trip comes amid growing tensions

BY WILLIAM WAN

The man who is expected to become China's next president will arrive in Washington on Monday for a visit crucial to his political ascension and also to U.S. hopes for easing the mounting tensions between two of the world's most powerful nations.

Xi Jinping is regarded as more self-confident and gregarious than President Hu Jintao, the famously stiff leader he is on track to succeed next year in a highly choreographed transition that includes, as a major step, this week's visit.

He is, for example, quick to mention his fondness for the American Midwest, having toured Iowa's small towns in 1985 as a lowly provincial official, visiting farms and staying overnight in the cramped bedroom of a middle-class family, surrounded by their boys' "Star Trek" figures.

But it remains unclear whether Xi's familiarity with U.S. culture will help lead to warmer relations between the countries after years of intensifying economic and military rivalry. So far, he appears no less likely than previous Chinese leaders to resist demands for expanded human rights at home or to rail against Westerners for meddling in Chinese affairs.

This week's visit, however, could indicate whether Xi's as-

CHINA CONTINUED ON A10

Romney's Winter Games rescue role is questioned

Future candidate widely credited for '02 success — too much so, some say

BY AMY SHIPLEY

SALT LAKE CITY — Thirteen years ago, as details of an international bribery scandal came to light, federal investigators and news reporters swarmed to the downtown offices of this city's 2002 Winter Games organizing committee. Top management officials resigned. Potential sponsors bolted. Morale sank.

Robert Garff, chairman of the Salt Lake City Olympic committee, sought a "white knight" to lead the organization out of the humiliating mess. He homed in on Mitt Romney, a wealthy venture capi-

talist in Massachusetts who had lost a Senate race several years before.

Romney accepted the challenge of running the Salt Lake committee, leaving the enormously profitable Bain Capital for Salt Lake City, the spiritual center of gravity for his Mormon faith. Over the next three years, he helped turn what had been a public disgrace into one of the most successful Winter Games in history.

That reversal would become a cornerstone of his political biography — and the subject of a book he wrote about the experience — earning Romney a reputation as a turnaround artist with extraordinary management skills.

Today, even Romney's critics concede he helped drive a remarkable about-face for the Salt

ROMNEY CONTINUED ON A6

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The Obama budget proposal will be released at 11:15 this morning. Go to [washingtonpost.com](#) for reports on how it will affect all areas of the federal government and share your thoughts on Obama's priorities.

Fear for the turtles

Deadly disease also plaguing tadpoles and salamanders could devastate Md. ecosystem

BY KATHERINE SHAVER

Maryland biologists studying box turtles rescued from the bulldozers on the Intercounty Connector construction site have made a grisly find: An alarming number of the tiny turtles later died, and biologists say their demise appears to be unrelated to the highway.

Worse yet, the cause of their death — an animal disease called ranavirus taking root across the United States — also is thought to have killed nearly every tadpole and young salamander in the study area in Montgomery County's North Branch Stream Valley Park since spring 2010.

The discoveries have alarmed state wildlife officials and biologists, who worry about how far ranavirus has spread, how widely it has affected the ecosystem, and how it apparently jumped between turtles — which are reptiles — and amphibians. If the virus



SCOTT FARNSWORTH/TOWSON UNIVERSITY

A transmitter attached to a box turtle's shell by researchers at Towson University is temporarily held in place with duct tape.

spreads or goes unchecked for long, wildlife experts say, it could devastate some local populations of box turtles, frogs and salamanders. That loss, biologists say, would ripple along the food chain to other animals.

In all, 31 adult turtles were found dead near the ICC construction site between 2008 and 2011. Three had been hit by cars or construction equipment. The rest, apparently dead from illness, amounted to

about one-quarter of the turtles monitored by Towson University researchers via radio transponders secured to the tiny shells. Twenty-six of the deaths resulted from suspected or confirmed cases of ranavirus, which left some turtles gasping for breath as they gradually suffocated in their own mucus, researchers said.

"Finding even one dead turtle is unusual," said Richard Seigel, the Towson biology professor who led the ICC study. "Finding over 27 dead turtles in a two-to-three-year period was bizarre."

Box turtles can live 50 years or more in the wild. The ability of their hard shells to withstand predators usually affords them a 98 percent survival rate from one year to the next before they die of old age, usually alone and undetected beneath brush, Seigel said.

"This is a major concern to see these emerging pathogens,"

TURTLES CONTINUED ON A4

IN THE NEWS



THANASSIS STAVRAKIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Greece approves cuts Parliament backed far-reaching austerity measures even as protesters set nearby buildings ablaze. All

Arabs seek U.N. help on Syria As the Arab League wound down its monitoring, it called for a joint peacekeeping mission. A9

NATIONAL POLITICS
White House Chief of Staff Jacob J. Lew defended President Obama's budget on the Sunday talk shows as Republicans criticized the projected deficit. A2
The Obama administration has slowed issuing new environmental regulations as it weighs the political costs. A4

VIRGINIA
State legislators have begun battling over whether to eliminate seniority-based job protections for schoolteachers, with votes expected this week. B1

THE WORLD
Venezuelan voters, in the country's first opposition primary, chose Henrique Capriles over four other candidates to challenge Hugo Chavez for the presidency. A11
Crews began pumping fuel from the Costa Concordia, nearly a month after the ship ran aground off Italy. A9



THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY
President Obama's 2013 budget proposal is released, and he discusses it in a speech at Northern Virginia Community College. The Westminster Kennel Club dog show begins.

TUESDAY
Valentine's Day. Obama meets with Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping. Administration officials give Senate testimony on the budget.

WEDNESDAY
Obama travels to Milwaukee and Los Angeles. House Judiciary

Committee hearing on the constitutionality of Obama's recess appointments to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and National Labor Relations Board.

THURSDAY
Obama travels to Coronado, Calif., and San Francisco.

FRIDAY
Obama travels to Seattle, then returns to Washington.

SATURDAY
Carnival begins in Rio de Janeiro.

SUNDAY
Greece votes in general elections.

INSIDE

THE REGION
A new push for rail safety
More than 2½ years after Metro's deadliest accident, two congressional proposals address the issue. B1

STYLE
Sex lives, unveiled
In a new book, "Love, InshAllah," 25 American Muslim women open up about a taboo topic. C1

SPORTS
In the spotlight, Caps fall short
In a nationally televised game at Madison Square Garden, they lose to the Rangers, 3-2. D1

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The biggest night in music juggles solemnity and joy

GRAMMYS FROM A1

not feel like a missed opportunity.

The awards themselves had a sense of clarity thanks to Adele, the 23-year-old British soul phenom who swept all six categories she was nominated for, including album of the year for her sophomore smash "21."

"This record is inspired by something that's really normal," the singer said between sobs, cradling the night's most coveted trophy. "A rubbish relationship."

She performed her hit single "Rolling in the Deep" — which won record of the year and song of the year — earlier in the program, making her first appearance on stage since vocal-cord surgery that had sidelined her for months. It provided an understated counterpoint to the stage pyrotechnics that accompanied singer Katy Perry and the outlandish costumes of rapper Nicki Minaj, whose exorcism theatrics felt worlds away from earlier performances by Paul McCartney and the reunited Beach Boys.

As in Grammys past, this year's ceremony put an emphasis on the performance over the awards. Bruce Springsteen kicked off the show his new up-by-the-boostraps single "We Take Care of Our Own" — and, given Houston's death, an ill-considered opening line: "America, are you alive out there?"

The show's host, rapper-turned-actor LL Cool J, aimed to put joy over solemnity immediately after Springsteen's show-starting number, leading a group prayer in honor of Houston and encouraging the audience to enjoy the evening. "This night is about something much bigger than any one of us," he said. "This night is about music!"

Unfortunately, the music amounted to a slew of performances from artists who felt ill-matched. Maroon 5 and Poster the People joined the Beach Boys for a stiff performance. Tony Bennett and Carrie Underwood delivered a completely forgettable duet. Rapper Lil Wayne, R&B singer Chris Brown, rock band Foo Fighters and DJs David Guetta and Deadmau5 all shared the stage, as if their names had been drawn in a raffle.



MATT SAYLES/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Adele, back after surgery, won the coveted Grammys for album of the year and record of the year. Her "21" is at the top of the charts.

Not every performance was a team effort. McCartney sang a soppy ballad from his new album, Foo Fighters banged their heads and Taylor Swift sang "Mean," a tune many believe was written about music journalist Bob Lefsetz, who criticized Swift's vocal performance on the Grammys two years ago. Swift sounded much better this time around, but the song itself felt like sour grapes. "Someday, I'll be singing this at the Grammys," she sang, tweaking the lyrics for the occasion.

Others had even more to prove. Brown hopped up and down a terraced stage like a pop-locking Q*bert, trying to dance his way to America's forgiveness. He was arrested for assaulting his then-girlfriend Rihanna on the eve of the 2009 Grammys, but his acceptance speech after winning best R&B album included no act of contrition. When Chris Brown is getting more airtime than Whitney Houston, there's a serious problem.

Kanye West led the evening's nominations with seven, and was awarded four, beating himself for two of them. But neither he nor Jay-Z materialized after winning best rap performance for "Otis" from their excellent collaboration album "Watch the Throne." Apparently, they chose to watch the Grammys from their home thrones.

And let's be clear: West was unfairly snubbed for an album of the year nomination. His opus "My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fan-

tasy" was one of the most acclaimed albums in recent memory and felt far more deserving of the prize than any of the nominees.

The voters of the Recording Academy did manage to show their in-touchness with the recognition of Bon Iver, the nom-du-rock of singer-songwriter Justin Vernon.

"It's really hard to accept this award," said Vernon from the stage, accepting the Grammy for best new artist. He said that he made music for "the inherent reward of making songs, so I'm a little uncomfortable up here."

Vernon beat out Skrillex, the 24-year-old DJ-producer who carves bass into riotous forms and who took home three awards early in the night.

"I guess there's no formula or format anymore and we can do whatever we want!" Skrillex said from the stage during a the pre-telecast ceremony at the neighboring Los Angeles Convention Center. He also noted that he used to live in a warehouse not far from the Convention Center.

Dave Grohl boasted about how he recorded his latest album in his Los Angeles garage. His band had picked up five Grammys early in the night. "The human element of music is what makes it most important," he said from the stage. "It's not about what goes on in a computer, it's about what goes on in here and what goes on in here," pointing to his heart and his head.

The only Grammy Grohl and company lost was to Adele for



KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

LL Cool J pays tribute to singer Whitney Houston during the 54th Annual Grammy Awards. The host led a group prayer, then encouraged the Staples Center audience to enjoy the celebration.

album of the year; "21" is enjoying its 19th week at the top of the Billboard albums chart — right behind Houston's 1993 soundtrack to the "The Bodyguard," which shares the 20-week record with Elvis Presley's "Blue Hawaii."

Just how much has the beleaguered music business changed over those 19 years? "The Bodyguard" soundtrack has sold more than 17 million copies. "21" only

recently topped 6.3 million. But the tide could be changing ever-so-slightly.

Nielsen SoundScan reported 330.6 million albums sold in the United States last year, up 1.3 percent from 2010. It's the first uptick since the industry entered a slow-motion free-fall in 2004. Between 2000 and 2010, revenue from recorded music fell by more than half.

And TV viewership has been up for the Grammys, with 26.7 million viewers watching the 2011 awards, up from 25.8 million the year before. It was also the Grammys' highest ratings since 2000, a year when the recording industry was about to make an unexpected pivot from boomtimes into end-times.

Sunday at the Staples Center, it was only weird times.

richardsc@washpost.com

A disciplinary quandary for D.C. area educators

SUSPENSIONS FROM A1

crosses the line. Many parents, too, suggest that students who cause a disruption in class, no matter what age, need to be removed. Especially when a child or teacher has been physically hurt, many principals view suspension as an important tool.

A Washington Post analysis of data for 13 of the region's school systems found that last school year more than 6,112 elementary students, from pre-kindergarten through grade 5, were suspended or expelled for hitting, disrupting, disrespecting, fighting and other offenses.

The total includes 433 kindergartners, 677 first-graders, 813 second-graders and 1,086 third-graders. More than 50 pre-kindergartners were suspended.

In all, those cases represent a small segment of suspensions in the region, and affect from 1 percent to 3 percent of elementary children in most school systems. But some experts say that age sets them apart.

For children younger than 7 or 8, "all they understand a couple of days into this is they are having snow days — and nobody else is," said Walter S. Gilliam, author of a national study on pre-kindergarten expulsions and director of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at the Yale Child Study Center.

Gilliam said suspension is at odds with teaching the social and behavioral skills many young students lack. "We would never send a child home because that child was struggling at reading," he said. "We would never send a child home if that child was struggling with math. Why would we send a child home for struggling with social-emotional skills?"

On those removed from school, the effect is complex. They lose instruction time and slip behind in classes. But there may be other fallout, too: lower regard from peers or teachers, a shift in identity, an alienation from school. "I would be worried it would set in motion a negative trajectory that would gather momentum across the next years of schooling," said Anne Gregory, a Rutgers University assistant professor and education researcher.

School officials said they try to

avoid suspensions of the very young and use positive-behavior initiatives to prevent discipline problems. They said that relatively few students are suspended and that those cases often involve safety issues or repeated misbehavior.

"To me a suspension is for something so unprovoked, or something so out of the norm, that I, as the adult, had no other option," said Judy Brubaker, principal at Spark M. Matsunaga Elementary School in Germantown. Brubaker and other principals said they carefully consider each case and often look to other options — involving parents and counselors, creating behavior plans — before suspension.

It is "absolutely not our default," said Kimberly Willison, principal of Clearview Elementary School in Herndon, who recalled several cases, each with escalated circumstances. "It's not

"It's not something we ever do lightly."

Kimberly Willison, principal of Clearview Elementary School in Herndon, commenting on suspensions of elementary school students

something we ever do lightly," she said.

In Alexandria, Lawrence Jointer, director of hearings, investigations and student alternative services, said discipline problems appear to have intensified during his career of four decades. "We see aggressive behavior from kindergarten on up," he said, and it is tough to affect that behavior when parents are disengaged.

"I understand it gets to a point where principals and teachers feel they've tried everything they can," he said. Sometimes, suspension is a way to "drive the point home: This is serious behavior we're dealing with at school, and we need your support."

Nationally, suspension practices are being debated and rethought. The Maryland State Board of Education is considering proposals to end suspensions for nonviolent offenses. Last summer, federal officials launched a broader discipline reform effort as new research highlighted

harmful effects.

Many experts say no research indicates that suspensions improve a child's behavior or make schools safer. But studies have shown that suspended students are more prone to low achievement, dropping out of school and landing in the juvenile justice system.

In elementary school, behavior problems can be rooted in academic gaps — being unable to read, for example, when classmates are poring over books, said Sara Rimm-Kaufman, associate professor of education at University of Virginia. "It's an emotional response to not knowing what everyone else knows," she said.

Suspensions have markedly increased nationwide since the 1970s, and some experts suggest that suspensions of younger children reflect, in part, a zero-tolerance culture that has taken hold in schools during the past 20 years.

Among cases that attracted national attention was the 2010 suspension of a Michigan 6-year-old who formed his hand into the shape of a gun. A year earlier, a Delaware 6-year-old was ousted for having a Cub Scout camping tool that included a knife.

Last spring, an 8-year-old boy in Fairfax pocketed a pill for his attention deficit disorder as he rushed to leave for school. After he went to take the medication during a restroom break, he was suspended for possession of a controlled substance, his mother said.

Fairfax, which was under fire at the time for its discipline policies, has since eased its approach to prescription medication, allowing principals more discretion in punishment. The 8-year-old was out of class for 10 school days, his mother said. "It was extreme," she said.

Fairfax School Board member Elizabeth Schultz (Springfield) said the key to suspension is "proportionality." Some families have complained about elementary-age students suspended for disrupting class and going to the bathroom repeatedly, she said. "To me, it has to be really significant," she said, such as imminent danger.

Psychologists and researchers say suspensions can send the

wrong message.

"At that age, most of them go home, and if they are allowed to watch TV or play video games, it can be more fun than school and reinforce the behavior that is negative," said school psychologist Melissa Reeves, who teaches at Winthrop University in South Carolina.

Some schools, Reeves said, rely on suspension because they lack funding for other options. "The challenge," she said, "is having the resources for alternatives," programs that teach anger management, social skills, problem-solving and conflict resolution.

In Prince George's, A. Duane Arbogast, chief academic officer for county schools, said suspension is one of many tools to improve student conduct. Sometimes, it is also needed to set a tone in a school or to be responsive to victims. "It should be used tactically and strategically," he said.

Arbogast said the 94 kindergartners suspended in Prince George's last year represent a small share of those enrolled. "About 1 percent," he said. "... Ten percent would be crazy. One percent does not surprise me."

In Arlington County, Assistant Superintendent Meg Tucillo said that elementary-age suspensions are rare — 13 last year across 22 schools — but that one might occur when, for example, "a youngster has significantly hurt another youngster." She added: "Sometimes, either we need time to develop a plan or we need a breathing period."

Advocates and parents say behavior problems are sometimes signs of undiagnosed disabilities. A second-grader with autistic-like behaviors, prone to meltdowns, was suspended for more than 10 days of kindergarten in Prince George's, his mother said, and several days of first grade. Now in second grade, the child has qualified for special education services, but he already has lost nine days to suspension and informal send-homes, his mother said.

"It was like he was being suspended for his disability," she said.

In general, the school system is cautious about such designations, said Arbogast, the academic chief. "You don't want to necessarily put a label on a kid at age 5," he said.

How many of the young fully

grasp their punishment is hard to know.

"Some can understand the conversation, but others are looking at me, kind of smiling, like, 'What is all this about?'" said Jointer, of Alexandria, who presides over serious suspension cases and every so often sees a kindergartner or first grader.

Teachers describe classroom difficulties with some children lacking basic social skills, said Tim Mennuti, president of the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County.

In the District, Judith Sandalow, executive director of the Children's Law Center, said recent suspension cases include a kindergartner who pulled a fire alarm, a second-grader with multiple suspensions for fighting, and a third-grader accused of sexually harassing an aide.

"It is never the right answer to suspend an elementary-age child," she said.

In young children, particularly, she said, misbehavior is a sign of something deeper — family problems, learning disabilities, academic gaps. "It is a sign they are experiencing something in their lives, and they should be helped," she said.

For parents, suspensions have ripple effects.

Thompkins, whose pre-kindergartner was suspended from Imagine Hope Community Charter School, missed work when her son was suspended and when he was less formally sent home early. "He was suspended so often I lost my job," she said.

Several calls to the charter school for comment were not returned.

D.C. Public Charter School Board member Darren Woodruff said that charter schools have their own disciplinary practices but that suspensions in the early grades may be an issue to examine. "We support best practices and research-based practices," he said.

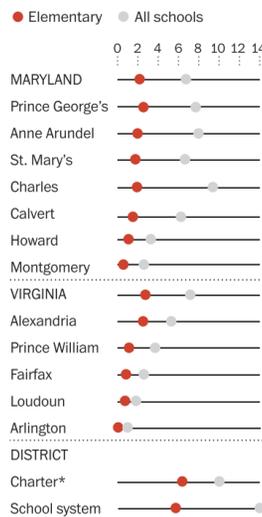
A majority of Washington area school systems suspended at least one pre-kindergartner last year, the data show.

Last year, The Post profiled a pre-kindergarten case in Arlington in which a 3-year-old in a public Montessori program was removed for having too many pot-

Elementary suspensions

Thousands of students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5 were suspended from the region's public schools in the last academic year. Here's a look at area suspension rates.

Suspensions per 100 students, 2010-11



*Data reflects 2009-10.

Sources: Maryland State Department of Education, Virginia Department of Education, District of Columbia public schools, Office of the D.C. State Superintendent of Education

THE WASHINGTON POST

ty accidents. Arlington officials said that the child was not suspended but that the family was asked to work on toilet skills at home for a period.

In Prince William, Todd Erickson, associate superintendent for central elementary schools, said he finds the suspension totals "rather small," which "shows us we're doing a good job with the other students." He cited anti-bullying and positive-behavior efforts.

Brian Butler, a veteran Fairfax principal, said the goal of elementary-level discipline is "a teachable moment for the child."

Age is a factor, he said. "If I had a kindergartner who hit somebody," he said, "I would call the parents."

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Staff writer David Fallis contributed to this report.