



# VIOLENCE, VANDALISM AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS

2000-2001

The Commissioner's Report to the Education Committees of the Senate  
and General Assembly

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

April 2002

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Commissioner's Report to the Education  
Committees of the Senate and General Assembly  
On Vandalism, Violence, and Substance Abuse  
In the Public Schools of New Jersey  
July 1, 2000 to June 30, 2001

Based on the Electronic Violence  
and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS)

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### **Executive Summary**

The Commissioner of Education's *Report on Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey Public Schools* is submitted annually to the education committees of the Senate Assembly of the New Jersey State Legislature. It provides the Legislature with data in four bi

categories of incidents: violence, vandalism, weapons, and substance abuse. It also summarizes initiatives taken by the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) to assist schools in addressing problems of violence.

This year's report is the second to provide data from a new Internet-based incident reporting system, the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS). The total number of incidents reported by school districts in 2000-2001 was 24,973. This represents an increase of 10 percent over last year. There were increases in three of the four major categories of reporting. The largest increases occurred in the violence category (26 percent), with the number of simple assaults increasing by 29 percent and fights by 19 percent. Incidents of substance abuse increased by 20 percent with all three types of incidents (use, possession, and distribution) increasing. The number of weapons incidents increased slightly (seven percent) while vandalism declined 10 percent.

Two-thirds of all schools reported fewer than five incidents again in 2000-2001 -- as was reported last year -- with more than one-third reporting no incidents at all. The distribution of the locations of incidents also mirrored that of 1999-2000 with nearly a third (32 percent) taking place in the classroom and another 19 percent in the school corridor. Bias was involved in fewer incidents in 2000-2001; the total of 172 represents a decline of 52 percent from 1999-2000.

Out-of-school suspension is the action taken in response to incidents in 85 percent of cases. Short-term suspensions are the mode; suspensions of 1-4 days are given in 54 percent of the cases. Students with disabilities constitute a larger percentage of the known offenders (27 percent) than they do of the student population in general (16 percent). They constitute 19 percent of the victims in those cases where a victim was reported. School personnel were identified as victims in 10 percent of cases, as well.

DOE has aggressively pursued a variety of strategies to address the problems of student disruption and violence since the inception of the Safe Schools Initiative. The department's most recent efforts to strengthen its approach to reducing school violence and improving school safety cover a broad array of policies, programs and other strategic initiatives, including the following:

- Development and dissemination of guidance documents: *A Guide for the Development of a Districtwide School Safety Plan*; *A Guide and Application for the Operation and Approval of Middle School Alternative Education Programs*; *A Guide and Application for the Operation and Approval of High School Alternative Education Programs*; and *Curriculum Framework for Health and Physical Education*;
- New regulations addressing school safety, violence and health services in the new Chapter administrative code, *N.J.A.C. 6A:16, Programs to Support Student Development*;
- Programs such as the Intervention and Referral Services Initiative, Student Discipline for Project SERV, Safe Schools and Communities Violence Prevention and Response Pilot I and the Character Education Initiative; and
- Initiatives such as collaboration with the Violence Institute of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), the New Jersey Association of Mental Health Agencies, the New Jersey Association of School Psychologists and the Association of Student Assistance Professionals of New Jersey; the V-Free Initiative; and the Peer-to-Peer Transitions Project.

Planning is underway to address the recommendations of the student discipline policy forum conducted in the fall of 2001: development of regulations, guidance documents and public information provision of training and technical assistance; increased interagency and intra-age collaboration; and convening an advisory panel to consider consistent uses of alternative education policies and programs for general education students who are suspended or expelled from school.

DOE is committed to providing ongoing support for school district efforts to improve their comprehensive school safety programs and further reduce the levels of violence, vandalism and substance abuse in New Jersey schools. Continued refinement of the Internet-based reporting system and analysis of these data will assist local districts and the department to accurately track progress in making schools safe for all students and staff.

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Purpose of the Report

The Commissioner's report is submitted annually to the education committees of the Senate and Assembly. It provides the Legislature with data in four broad categories of incidents: violence, vandalism, weapons and substance abuse. It also notifies the Legislature and the public of actions taken by the Commissioner, State Board of Education and the Department of Education (DOE) to alleviate the problem.

Since 1994 when the State Board of Education adopted a resolution supporting implementation of the Department of Education's Safe Schools Initiative, the department has embarked on various actions designed to respond to the increase in school violence and disruption documented in the incident reporting system. Actions range from including this initiative in the department's "Strategic Plan for Systemic Improvement of Education in New Jersey" (Goal 5: "To ensure that policies and programs promulgated by the State Board and the Department of Education will positively improve the health, social and emotional well being of all students, and to foster the delivery of services which effectively address the needs of the whole child.") to developing grant programs aimed at the prevention of incidents of violence, weapons use and possession, vandalism and substance abuse in our schools. In addition, the department continues to partner with other state entities to provide collaborative approaches to address these issues. The department's recommendations under the Safe Schools Initiative are described in Section II of this report.

### B. Legislative Charge

The Commissioner of Education shall each year submit a report to the Education Committees of the Senate and General Assembly detailing the extent of violence and vandalism in the public schools and making recommendations to alleviate the problem.  
(*N.J.S.A. 18:53*).

As indicated by the requirements of *N.J.S.A. 18:53* (see Appendix A), violence and vandalism in the schools have been an expressed concern of the state Legislature since 1978. Along with the requirement of a report by the Commissioner, the law requires that school staff who witness or have knowledge of an incident of violence must file a report of the incident with the school principal. That section of the law requiring the superintendent of the district to provide a summary

of all such incidents annually to the local board of education was recently amended to require a public hearing, in lieu of the public meeting, be held in the third week of October, and to submit transcript of the proceedings to the department. Thus the Legislature, in strengthening requirements on local reporting, is further focusing attention on the issue of school violence at local level.

In 1984, the Commissioner of Education added substance abuse to the incident reporting system because of the seriousness of the problem of substance use in schools. In 1995, the weapon category was expanded to address new reporting requirements of the federal Gun-Free Schools Act.

## C. Meeting the Legislative Charge

### 1. Incident Definitions and Reporting Forms

This year's report is the second to be based upon violence and vandalism data submitted through the Internet-based Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS). The EVVRS User Manual contains definitions and instructions for the reporting of incidents at the local level. The department provides districts with a three-page form that includes a page each for incident offender and victim information. These pages mirror the image on the computer screen. Incidents are recorded on the form at the school, and that record of the incident is entered on-line directly by school (or district) staff onto the EVVRS database resident at DOE in Trenton. Use of a common form and clear definitions of incidents supports uniformity in reporting.

### 2. Changes to Promote Consistency in Reporting

Over the years, the types of incidents reported and their definitions have been modified to bring greater clarity to the reporting process. In 1995, at the recommendation of a task force on school violence, the department convened a working group to review the reporting forms and instructions. Responding to the working group's recommendations, DOE established a number of procedural changes in 1995-96. These changes included the simplification of the district summary reporting form, clarification of the definitions of each type of incident, and the production and distribution to districts of videotape that explained how to use the new form and reinforced staff responsibilities to report incidents to school officials. To further promote consistency of reporting across districts, the EVVRS User Manual included a broader definition of *fight* and clarifying language derived principally from the juvenile justice system.

The department recognizes that the way in which districts interpret and apply the definitions in the manual varies greatly. Some medium-sized districts without a history of severe problems report totals for violence that approach the totals for violence reported by the state's largest district. It appears that different standards for reporting are being applied by the two types of districts. To promote consistency in reporting, the department conducted training for district staff; made access to definitions easier through revisions to the EVVRS User Manual; expanded the Frequently Asked Questions document resident on the EVVRS homepage; and has conducted a preliminary analysis of the data. However, the issue of interpretation of what student misconduct must be reported as an incident again in this year's data. The DOE plans to continue data analysis in order to pinpoint the problem.

In addition to this type of inter-district variability, the number of incidents for any one district do not match the total number of disciplinary actions taken by the district in response to student

misconduct. For example, a district may report 15 fights during a year, but suspend 60 students fighting. This difference is a result of the distinction between requirements for district reporting to the state and to their local boards of education. Districts, as the law stipulates, must report all acts of violence and vandalism to the state. They are not required to report minor incidents, such as shoving match between students, or minor acts of vandalism, such as petty theft. At the local level however, each district has its own standards and procedures for reporting student behavior that results in disciplinary action. The state system of reporting is designed to capture the more serious types of incidents, whereas the local reporting system covers the entire range of student misconduct. Thus, differences between the totals for locally reported disciplinary actions and total incidents reported to the state are to be expected.

#### D. The Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System

By 1998-99, it had become clear that the paper system used for reporting incidents had become administratively burdensome in meeting the increased demand for unduplicated counts of incidents and types of offenders and victims, specific information on firearm incidents and, in case of students with disabilities, a count of the number of students with disabilities suspended more than ten days, by race and type of disability. In response, a system by which each district submitted a record of each single incident and associated offender and victim information was created.

In March 2000, the department's Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS) (<http://homeroom.state.nj.us/index.htm>), opened for the Internet-based collection of data on incidents of violence, vandalism, weapons, and substance abuse that occur in or on school property. The 1999-2000 school year marked the first period for which data, previously submitted by schools on paper forms, were collected electronically.

Use of the EVVRS reduces administrative burden on districts who no longer need to submit the following reports to DOE:

- Annual District Reports for Violence, Vandalism, and Substance Abuse (Sections I, II, or III);
- Gun-Free Schools Act Report;
- Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) Title IV Performance Report; and
- Parts of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) Impact Data Report

Using data that schools enter into the EVVRS, the DOE has the capacity to generate these reports – as well as the report required by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) on suspension or removal of students with disabilities for reasons not related to violence, vandalism, weapons, or substance abuse. The EVVRS thus eases the end-of-the-year state and federal reporting responsibilities of districts, while making data entry as easy as possible. Within the EVVRS, districts may order local summary reports of data they have entered onto the system. Reports arrive as an e-mail message within 24 hours.

District totals for the major reporting categories (violence, vandalism, weapons and substance abuse) appear in Appendix D. The summary of the data that follows includes comparisons to last year's figures as data for both years are based on the same definitions of incidents and the same reporting system i.e., the EVVRS. However, as the districts varied in their ability to adjust to the new system, some districts likely became more proficient in reporting only this year. Thus, as would expect, more incidents have been reported in the current year, 2000-2001, than in the previous year.

## Findings

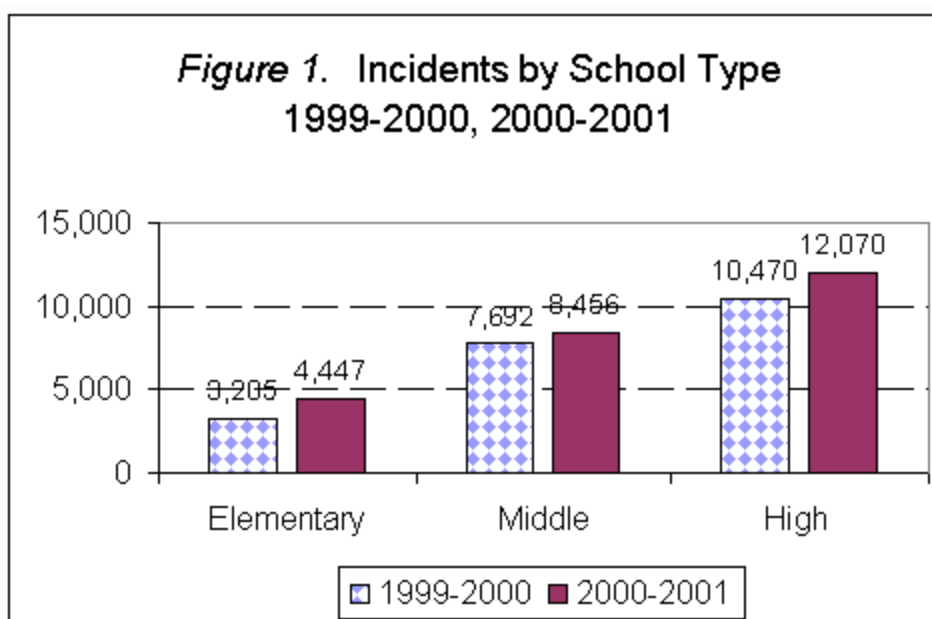
### A. Background: Unduplicated Counts

This report, like last year's, provides unduplicated counts of incidents for the total number of incidents and the total by major reporting category. Thus, the grand total of all incidents and total for incident categories will not appear to add up. In prior years, the total number of incidents of violence, for example, was the sum of each type of violence, e.g., threat, simple assault. Beginning with the introduction of the EVVRS in 1999-2000, if a single incident included threat and simple assault, each type would be recorded and counted, but in deriving a total for the number of incidents of violence, the incident that included both a threat and a simple assault would be counted once. Similarly, in calculating an unduplicated count of the total number of incidents, an incident that included a fight and damage to property would count as one incident (as well as one incident of violence and one incident of vandalism). A bias incident that included violence and vandalism would be counted as one bias incident. Totals, as indicated, are unduplicated counts of the number of incidents within a category.

### B. Results by School Type

This analysis examines differences in the number of incidents by the type (i.e., grade range) of school. For the purposes of this analysis, an elementary school is defined as any school that ends at grade 6 or below; a middle school is any school that ends in the 7 through 9 grade range, and a high school is defined as any school that ends at grade 10 or above. Charter schools are included as their grade range would indicate. Schools with only students with disabilities for which data by grade range were not available were classified as middle schools.

Nearly half the incidents (48%) took place in high schools, an identical percentage to last year's figure. A third (34 percent) occurred in middle schools (vs. 36 percent in 1999-2000) and 18 percent at elementary schools (vs. 15 percent in 1999-2000). Figure 1 below shows that the number of incidents occurring in each type of school increased in 2000-2001.



Overall, two-thirds of schools (66 percent) reported five or fewer incidents. Six to ten incidents occurred in ten percent of schools, 11-24 in 12 percent and 25 or more also in 12 percent of schools.

### C. Header Information

Header information is the data that a district records on every incident and includes:

- the date and time of the incident;
- the location of the incident (optional field);
- whether police were notified and if a complaint was filed; and
- whether bias was involved.

The date and time data are primarily for local use and were not analyzed. The distribution of incidents on the location of incidents is very similar to that reported for 1999-2000 (see Table 1). The incidents in ten occur in the classroom.

Table 1

#### Location of Incidents

	<u>1999-2000</u>		<u>2000-2001</u>	
Cafeteria	1,459	8%	1,847	8%
Classroom	5,726	30%	7,153	32%
Corridor	3,645	19%	4,214	19%
Other inside school	3,440	18%	3,649	16%
School grounds	2,924	15%	3,049	13%
Bus	744	4%	894	4%
Building exterior	182	1%	433	2%
Other outside	<u>1,175</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>1,439</u>	<u>6%</u>
Total	19,295	101%*	22,678	100%
Missing**	2,241		3,205	

\* Total exceeds 100% due to rounding.

\*\* Districts are not required to provide information on the location of incidents.

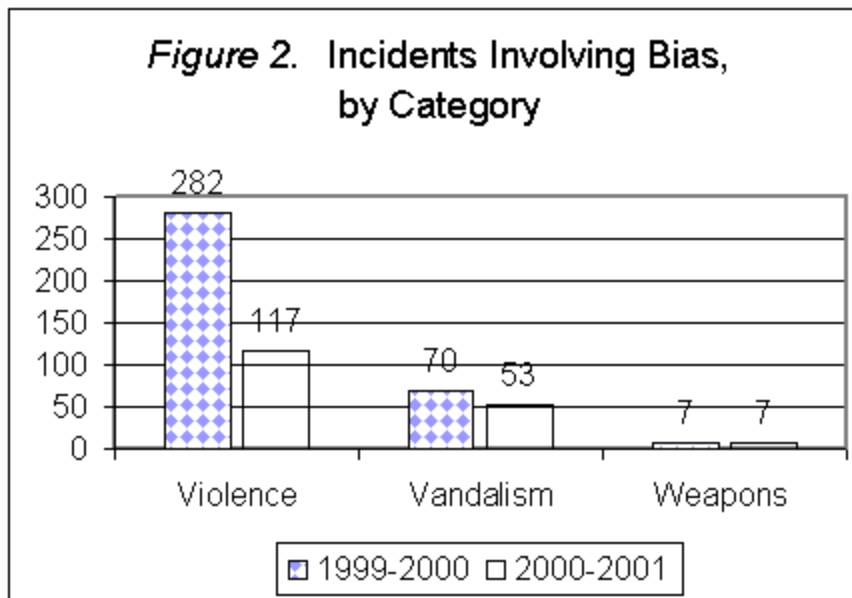
Police were notified in one-third (33 percent) of all incidents reported by districts. No complaint was filed in 16 percent of all incidents while a complaint was filed in 17 percent. These percentages are nearly identical to last year's. See Table 2.

Table 2

#### Police Notification

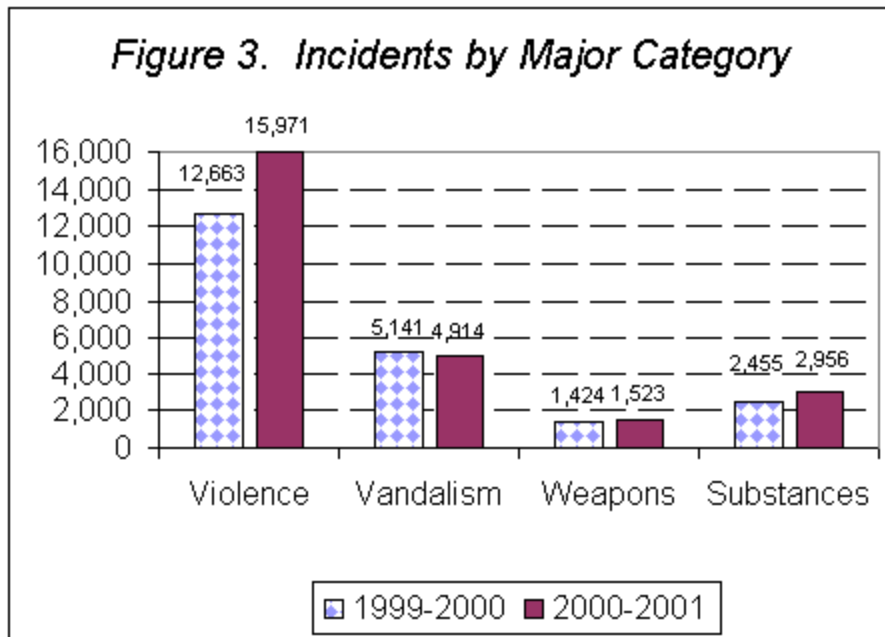
	<u>1999-2000</u>		<u>2000-2001</u>	
None	14,037	66%	16,827	67%
Notified, no complaint	3,314	16%	3,975	16%
Notified, complaint filed	<u>3,901</u>	<u>18%</u>	<u>4,170</u>	<u>17%</u>
Total	21,252	100%	24,972	100%

Districts reported 172 incidents of bias in the 2000 - 2001 school year, which is a drop of 52 percent from the total number of incidents of bias in 1999-2000. Figure 2 shows that the biggest decline came in the violence category. (Sum of incidents in figure exceeds unduplicated total (s *Background: Unduplicated Counts*) in this section.)



#### D. Incident Frequency by Major Category

Figure 3 displays the total unduplicated count of incidents by each of the four major report categories for the past two years. Substantial increases occurred in the violence and substance categories, while weapons incidents increased marginally and vandalism declined. Although strict comparison to data reported prior to the advent of the EVVRS is not possible<sup>1</sup>, such comparisons can be informative. As the number of incidents of violence has been increasing, number of incidents of vandalism has been declining. This trend can be observed in the increase in the ratio of violence incidents to vandalism incidents. In the figure below, the ratio of violence to vandalism incidents in 1999-2000 is 2.5:1 and 3.25:1 in 2000-2001. In 1995-96 there were 111 incidents of violence and 8,402 incidents of vandalism for a ratio of 1.4:1. Thus the number of incidents of violence has also been increasing relative to the vandalism count.



⊥ Comparability is compromised by the method of calculating (unduplicated) totals, the dropping/adding of a violence category, and slight modifications in incident definitions.

### E. Incident Frequency by Type within Major Category

The count of incidents by type is shown in Table 3. Data on firearm incidents is included handguns and rifles only. Since air guns and imitation guns are not classified as firearms under federal law, they are classified as "Other Weapons." The overall increase in violence is indicated by the 29 percent increase in simple assault, 19 percent increase in the number of fights and 10 percent increase in the number of threats reported. Only the gang fight category showed a decline. In the vandalism category, there were 11 percent fewer incidents of damage to property and 10 percent fewer incidents of arson. The increase in fireworks incidents may be an artifact of reporting: many districts reclassified incidents from the bomb category to the fireworks category when they learned that "cherry bombs" and similar sized explosives belonged in the fireworks category. This same review process explains the reduction in bomb offenses under the weapons category. All types of substance incidents increased. See Appendix C for a list of the types of substances reported by districts.

Table 3

#### Incidents by Type, 1999-2000, 2000-2001

	<u>1999-2000</u>	<u>2000-2001</u>	<u>Change</u>	
			<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Violence</b>				
Simple Assault	4,533	5,832	1,299	29%

Aggravated Assault	359	419	60	17%
Fight	5,205	6,193	988	19%
Gang Fight	73	49	-24	-33%
Robbery	62	66	4	6%
Extortion	26	29	3	12%
Sex Offense	344	399	55	16%
Threat	2,235	3,203	968	43%
<b>Vandalism</b>				
Arson	204	160	-44	-22%
Bomb Threat <sup>1</sup>	229	266	37	16%
Burglary	202	159	-43	-21%
Damage to Property	2,685	2,378	-307	-11%
Fireworks	86	135	49	57%
Theft	1,732	1,784	52	3%
Trespassing	300	226	-74	-25%
<b>Weapons</b>				
Firearm <sup>2</sup>	22	10	-12	-55%
Other Weapon	1,387	1,512	125	9%
Bomb Offense <sup>3</sup>	16	1	-15	-94%
<b>Substances</b>				
Use	1,786	2,140	354	20%
Possession	730	873	143	20%
Distribution	86	127	41	48%

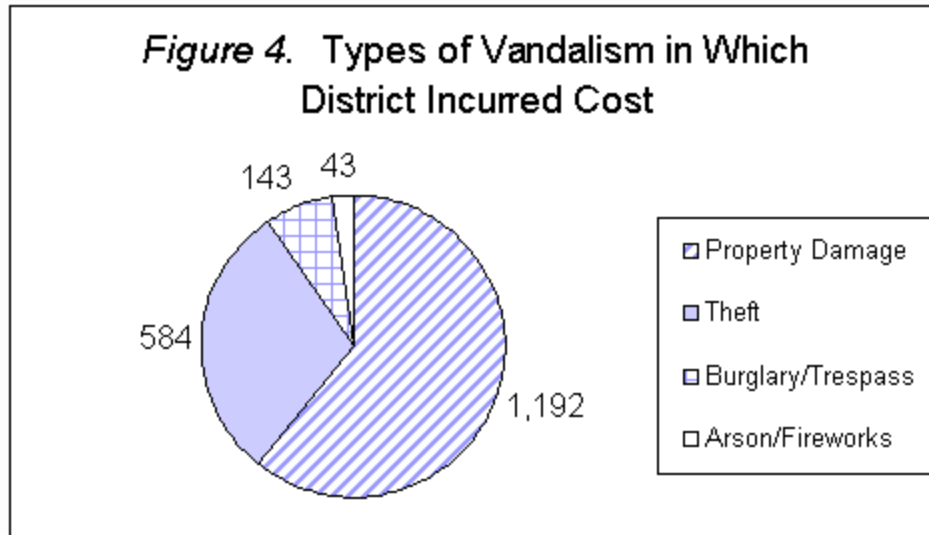
<sup>1</sup> For 1999-2000, 229 includes four fake bombs. For 2000-2001, total of 266 includes six fake bombs.

<sup>2</sup> Firearm incidents include handgun and rifle incidents only. Incidents involving air guns and imitation guns are classified as "Other Weapons" as federal law does not classify them as firearms.

<sup>3</sup> A check of bomb incidents in 2000-2001 revealed that many incidents did not meet the criteria of a bomb; many were more appropriately reclassified as fireworks incidents.

## F. Cost of Vandalism

A total of 1,854 incidents of vandalism were recorded in which the district incurred a cost. The total cost to all districts was \$1,143,782. The figure below indicates that property damage (64 percent) and theft (32 percent) accounted for nearly all incidents related to cost. As multiple types of vandalism were involved in a few incidents, the total by type of vandalism in Figure 4 exceeds the unduplicated total of 1,854 incidents.



G. Actions Taken

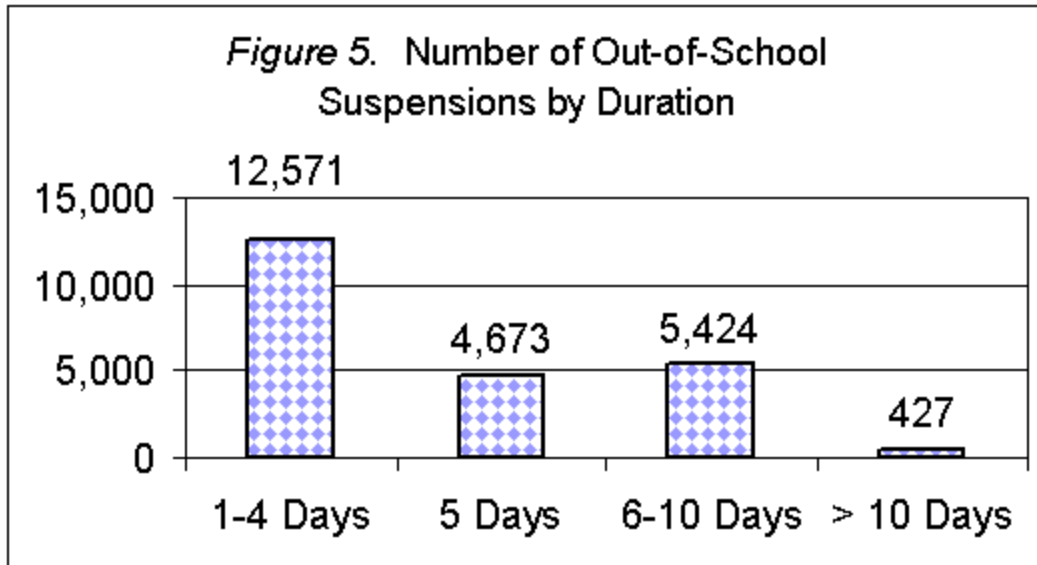
In the preponderance of cases (85%), students who committed an offense received an out-of-school suspension. Removal to an alternative program was used in only three percent of cases (see Table 4). There was very little change in the distribution of actions taken from 1999-2000.

Table 4

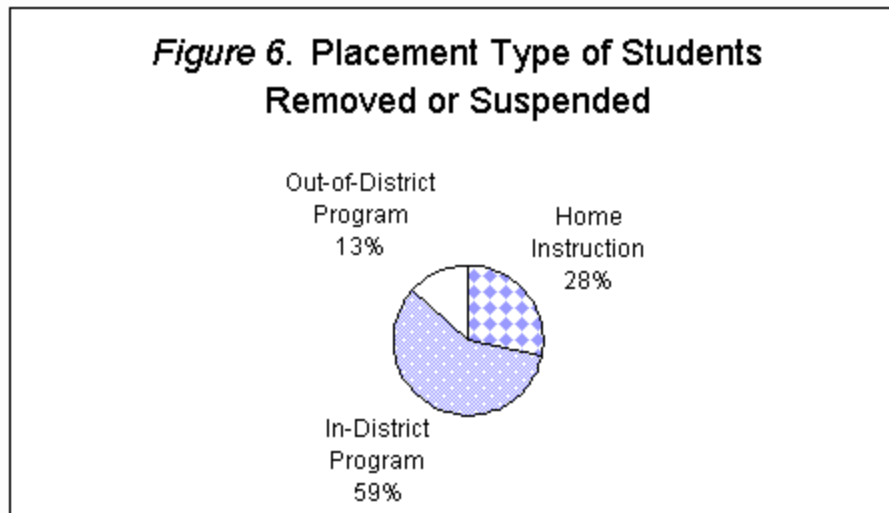
Disciplinary Actions Taken

	<u>1999-2000</u>		<u>2000-2001</u>	
Expulsion	53	0.3%	65	0.3%
Removal	750	3.9%	696	2.9%
In-School Suspension	1,473	7.7%	1,624	6.8%
Out-of-School Suspension	15,771	83.0%	20,326	84.9%
Other	961	5.1%	1,238	5.2%
Total	19,008	100.0%	23,949	100.0%

The modal duration of an out-of-school suspension was from one to four days (see Figure 5). Only two percent (n=427) of suspensions exceeded ten days in duration.



Of the 1,256 students placed in an alternative setting, most were placed in an in-district alternative program or school (639), or another type of alternative setting (94). Of the 167 students placed in an out-of-district program, 12 attended a county alternative education program. See Figure 6.



#### H. Offenders and Victims

In 2000-2001 in the cases where the offender was known, regular education students constituted nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of the offenders. Students with disabilities, who represent percent of the student population, constituted slightly more than one quarter (27 percent) offenders. Only one percent of offenders were students from another district or non-students. distribution of offender types was nearly identical to last year's. See Table 5.

Table 5

## Offender Type

	<u>1999-2000</u>		<u>2000-2001</u>	
Regular Education Student	14,626	71%	15,689	72%
Student with Disability	5,652	28%	5,861	27%
Student from Other District, Non-Student	<u>198</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>194</u>	<u>1%</u>
Total	20,476	100%	21,744	100%

Note. Omits cases where offender is unknown.

Regular education students constitute 60 percent of the victims in incidents where a victim reported (see Table 6). While the number of school personnel who are victims increased by (or eight percent) over 1999-2000, the total of 1,810 represents a slight decrease in the proportion of victims who are school personnel. The proportion of victims who were students with a disability increased slightly.

Table 6

## Victim Type

	<u>1999-2000</u>		<u>2000-2001</u>	
Regular Education Student	4,563	60%	5,819	60%
Student with Disability	1,243	16%	1,863	19%
Student from Other District, Non-Student	149	2%	127	1%
School Personnel	<u>1,673</u>	<u>22%</u>	<u>1,810</u>	<u>19%</u>
Total	7,628	100%	9,619	100%

## I. Data Summary

As the districts varied in their ability to adjust to the EVVRS that was initiated in March 2000, some districts likely became proficient in reporting only this year. Thus, as one would expect, more incidents have been reported in the current year, 2000-2001, than in the prior year. The total number of incidents of 24,973 represents an increase of 17 percent over the total of 21,300 reported in 1999-2000. There were increases in three of the four major categories of reporting. The largest increases occurred in the violence category (26 percent), with the number of simple assaults increasing by 29 percent and fights by 19 percent. Incidents of substance abuse increased by 20 percent with all three types of incidents (use, possession, and distribution) increasing. The number of weapons incidents increased slightly (seven percent) while vandalism declined four percent.

Two-thirds of all schools (66 percent) reported fewer than five incidents again in 2000-2001 -- as was reported last year -- with more than one-third (36 percent) reporting no incidents at all. The distribution of the location of incidents also mirrored that of 1999-2000 with nearly a third (30 percent) taking place in the classroom and another 19 percent in the school corridor. Bias incidents were involved in fewer incidents this year; the total of 172 represents a decline of 52 percent from 357 in 2000.

Out-of school suspension is the action taken in response to incidents in 85 percent of cases. Short-term suspensions are the mode; suspensions of 1-4 days are given in 54 percent of cases. Students with disabilities constitute a larger percentage of the known offenders (27 percent) than they do of the student population in general (16 percent). They constitute 19 percent of victims in those cases where a victim was reported. School personnel were identified as victims in 19 percent of cases, as well.

Overall, the successful implementation of the EVVRS in a second year of operation indicates that districts have become acclimated to reporting individual incident data over the Internet. Local school staff have adapted to its use and no longer spend time completing reports to the federal government that the department submits with data from the EVVRS. An enhanced User Manual, training and the use of the e-mail technical support system will continue to influence positively the reliability of the data. Reports in successive years will be able to utilize the enriched databases to identify areas of need for departmental initiatives to ensure a safe learning environment for students.

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## **PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSE**

### **What the Department of Education Is Doing to Support Safe Schools**

#### **A. Introduction**

Types and degrees of school violence should be viewed as various points on a continuum. At one end of the continuum is the bullying or shoving-match behavior between fellow students that needs to be curtailed before it escalates into something more serious. At the extreme end are rare incidences, such as the terrible tragedy that occurred in Littleton, Colorado in 1999, as well as the threat to our homeland security with the events of September 11, 2001. Such incidences instill fear in the minds of students and parents and can create the impression that violence is rampant and that our schools are being threatened.

Despite this perception, New Jersey's schools are basically safe places with school districts across the state implementing programmatic responses along the continuum. Comprehensive responses include the following: the development of clearly defined student behavior policies and code of student conduct; an assessment of the immediate surroundings of the school community; development of an emergency operations plan, with clearly defined policies and procedures to address a crisis, both internal and external; and a plan for the effective use of available community resources.

Data on programs reported to the state by districts indicate that educators have matched the type of violence with appropriately designed plans and programs. They have put in place emergency management plans and have purchased security devices to provide a surveillance capacity to protect against intruders. They also have put in place specific programs to enhance their ability to intervene early when students are disruptive. For example, 407 school districts reported implementing conflict resolution programs and 353 school districts reported the adoption of peer mediation programs in the 1999-2000 school year, strategies that have been recommended as part of the department's Safe Schools Initiative.

The capacity for local response is enhanced by funding for violence prevention and drug

alcohol abuse prevention from the federal government. Under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Communities Act (SDFSCA) program, \$7.6 million dollars (approximately \$7 per student) provided through the department to local districts for this purpose in 2000-2001. Districts supplement these federal funds with local monies. While no state funds are specifically targeted to all school districts for violence or substance abuse prevention, state funds have been appropriated to support the following initiatives:

- Character Education Initiative (\$4.5 million); and
- Safe Schools and Communities Violence Prevention and Response Plan Initiative (\$150,000)

In addition, legislation has been passed to strengthen school reporting requirements for incident violence and vandalism (P. L. 2001, Chapter 299) and to designate a week for school violence awareness in New Jersey schools (P. L. 2001, Chapter 298).

### B. Addressing School Violence: Current State-Level Activity

DOE has aggressively pursued a variety of policy and program strategies to address the problem of school disruption and violence since the beginning of the *Safe Schools Initiative* in 1994. The following summary of the department's most recent efforts to strengthen the assistance offered to school districts to increase school safety and reduce school violence:

#### 1. Safe Schools and Communities Violence Prevention and Response Pilot Plan

DOE has awarded a grant to The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey to implement an eighteen-month pilot program in the 2001-2002 school year in which the grant program is collaborating with three school districts in Atlantic County, as well as community-based organizations and stakeholders, to develop effective violence prevention, intervention and postvention plans. One outcome of the pilot program will be a report prepared for dissemination to all school districts. The report will provide guidance on the processes and strategies developed under the pilot program, and current information on effective school responses to violence and management of crises.

#### 2. Administrative Code

The State Board of Education approved a new Chapter of administrative code titled *Program Support Student Development (N.J.A.C. 6A:16)* in April 2001. The new Chapter includes several subchapters that address school safety issues, including:

- Codes of student conduct;
- Emergency and crisis management plans;
- Incident reporting;
- Access to juvenile information;
- Firearms, weapons and assaults offenses; and
- Law enforcement operations for substances, weapons and safety.

The regulations also contain subchapters on comprehensive substance abuse programs, substance abuse intervention, reporting allegations of child abuse and neglect, intervention referral services, alternative education, home or out-of-school instruction for general education students and school health services.

### [3. Student Discipline](#)

An internal working group was established by the Division of Student Services to review student discipline in response to issues that were raised during the public comments on *N.J.A.C. 6A Programs to Support Student Development*. A major activity of the working group was administration of nine policy forums in the fall of 2001 that were designed to engage representatives from statewide education associations and constituency groups in identifying a broad range of student discipline concerns and possible remedies for department consideration.

The report on the outcomes of the policy forums titled *Final Report and Recommendation: Student Discipline for Consideration by the New Jersey Department of Education* is available on the DOE website. The department is considering implementation of the recommendations from student discipline policy forums, which include the following activities:

- Development of a regulatory framework for student discipline;
- Development or revision of guidance documents and publications;
- Provision of training and technical assistance;
- Increased interagency and intra-agency collaboration; and
- Convening an advisory panel to explore consistent uses of programs and policies regarding alternative education for general education students who are suspended or expelled from school.

### [4. The Community Service Learning for Adjudicated Youth Grant Program](#)

In 2000-2001 the DOE provided \$300,000 to the Administrative Office of the Courts to implement this grant program in five county probation divisions. The program, which began in 1997, encourages drug- and violence-free lifestyles in school-aged adjudicated youth by combining community service learning opportunities with cognitive and behavioral learning. Participation in community service experiences helps offenders develop a sense of responsibility to their community. The cognitive skills curriculum helps offenders to understand and evaluate their behavior, test new ways of thinking, learn behavioral strategies that apply to real-life situations, improve their attitudes toward school. The county probation division staff members who are assigned to the program receive training in the delivery of the cognitive skills curriculum. Each participating county receives grant funding for two years. To date, all six counties that implemented the program but no longer receive grant funding continue to operate the program.

### [5. Intervention and Referral Services](#)

The Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) Initiative supports implementation of the new I&RS regulations (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7*) by providing technical assistance to districts for the establishment of building-based multidisciplinary problem solving teams (grades K-12) that are designed to address

students who are experiencing learning, behavior or health difficulties and to assist staff who have difficulties in addressing students' learning, behavior or health needs. The technical assistance provided by DOE includes a four-part videotape series and accompanying companion guide flyer; a comprehensive *Resource Manual for Intervention and Referral Services*; and the provision of training to prepare building administrators and building-based teams to implement the IEP regulations. The tapes were disseminated to all school districts in June 1999 and the *Resource Manual* was distributed to districts in February 2000. The *Resource Manual* has been updated to reflect the provisions of the new regulations and will be forwarded to schools in the spring of 2001. Approximately 180 building-based teams have been trained since April 2000. In addition to providing team training annually, supplemental training programs will be offered that are specifically designed to address the ongoing professional development needs identified by members of training teams.

## [6. Alternative Education](#)

Regulations for alternative education programs have been adopted by the State Board of Education as a subchapter (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8) in the new Chapter of administrative code titled *Programs to Support Student Development (N.J.A.C. 6A:16)*. The provisions of the new subchapter regulate the application process and approval criteria for the operations of alternative education programs. DOE staff provided technical assistance on the establishment of alternative education programs at the annual conference of the Alternative Education Association of New Jersey in 2001. The department's current guidance documents titled *A Guide and Application for Operation and Approval of Middle School Alternative Education Programs* and *A Guide and Application for the Operation and Approval of High School Alternative Education Programs* were revised in 2002, in accordance with the provisions of the new administrative code. Technical assistance on the use of the revised guides for middle school and high school alternative education programs will be provided to schools and districts once the guidance documents are revised. Special assistance will be provided to the Abbott school districts, which are required to have alternative education programs in middle and high schools.

## [7. V-Free Initiative](#)

Since September 2000, DOE has provided funds to supplement the V-Free Initiative, which is administered through the Center for Youth Policy and Programs of the New Jersey Department of Education. The program provided mini-grants to schools and community-based organizations to support student-initiated local efforts to prevent violence, vandalism and victimization. Since September 2001, there have been eleven (11) mini-grant award recipients from all over New Jersey.

## [8. Peer-to-Peer Transitions Project](#)

This project is designed to reduce factors that place students at risk for substance abuse and other negative behaviors as they transition from middle school to high school. Under an interagency agreement, DOE has provided a second year of funding to the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) to expand the Peer-to-Peer Transitions Project. The project utilizes the existing network of peer leadership programs in New Jersey that has been established under the New Jersey Middle School Peer-to-Peer Program, a collaborative effort among DOE, DHSS, the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and the Department of Law and Public Safety. Under the project, a survey will be conducted of all middle schools and high schools to learn how schools design their peer education programs and determine what services are needed to support the development and maintenance of peer education programs in New Jersey schools.

## [9. Core Curriculum Content Standards](#)

The Core Curriculum Content Standards in Comprehensive Health and Physical Education cover specific indicators under Standards 2.1 (health promotion and disease prevention concepts and skills) and 2.2 (health enhancing personal, interpersonal, and life skills) that require public schools to teach violence prevention skills including media resistance, peer pressure resistance, leadership, problem-solving, conflict resolution and stress management. These standards were further refined by a standards revision panel during 2001 to provide progress indicators at grades two, four, six, eight, and twelve. The proposed revisions were disseminated for public comment in January 2002. The Curriculum Framework for Health and Physical Education was disseminated in October 1999 to all schools and includes 140 suggested sample lessons for educators to use to address topics related to violence prevention and positive social development. In a survey conducted in 2000 of all New Jersey public schools enrolling students in grades 6-12, health teachers report that schools were teaching the following: violence prevention knowledge (87%); stress management (89%); conflict resolution (92%); and resisting peer pressure (99%).

## [10. Memorandum of Agreement](#)

The Attorney General and the Commissioner in 1999 issued a revised *Uniform State Memorandum of Agreement between Education and Law Enforcement Officials*. Sections on weapons offenses, bias crimes and sexual harassment have been included in the revised memorandum. The memorandum, which is reviewed and signed annually by local education and law enforcement officials, forms the basis for sharing information between education and law enforcement representatives and sets parameters for law enforcement investigations. Presentations to county school administrators have been made at county roundtable meetings, emphasizing the importance of the expanded agreement, and the Commissioner forwarded a memo to all chief school administrators in January 2002 reminding them of their obligations regarding the memorandum.

## [11. Violence Institute of New Jersey](#)

The Violence Institute of New Jersey (VINJ), University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), was established to provide resources to state government, as well as coordinate violence prevention and research activities within UMDNJ. The department has established a relationship with VINJ to help identify violence prevention resources for use by schools and, where appropriate, coordinate with VINJ on addressing violence issues in schools. DOE and VINJ regularly share information and resources. For example, VINJ staff represented DOE at a federally sponsored national conference titled *School Safety: Technologies, Research and Emerging Concepts*, and will provide a report to DOE on new information and recommendations for development of safe school campuses.

## [12. Character Education Initiative](#)

The department is administering the \$4.75 million Governor's *New Jersey Character Education Partnership (NJCEP) Initiative*. This voluntary state aid initiative is designed to assist public school educators in their efforts to plan, implement and enhance character education programs *in at least one school building* in each district. During the 2000-2001 school year, 99 percent of the public school districts participated in the character education initiative. The majority of participating schools (59 percent) chose Character Education *Programs of Merit* recommended by DOE. Other options included the following: 11 percent of schools chose alternative program providers; 12 percent of schools elected to implement their own homegrown programs; and 12 percent of schools

selected combinations of program choices. The department provided technical support ongoing consultation to districts to support their program implementation efforts.

In addition, the department's federally funded character education pilot demonstration project completed its fourth year, during the 2000-2001 school year, in the Newark, Jersey City and Paterson school districts. Character education is being infused into the language arts and social studies curriculum in grades one through eight in the Newark School District, which is the pilot site. A youth leadership development and service-learning program called the Community Coach program, created by the Do Something Fund, and successfully piloted in the Newark School District for the past four years, has continued to expand and has become a national program. There are approximately 1,550 educators who belong to the professional development network established through this project.

### [13. Project SERV](#)

Under emergency response funds from the United States Department of Education, DOE provided \$1.5 million in grants to 35 New Jersey school districts for supportive grief and trauma counseling and other services for students and educators as a direct result of the terrorist attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The funds were made available to meet the immediate and long-term crisis. These grants also provided for equitable participation of affected nonpublic school students and staff.

### [14. Disaster Fund for the Children of New Jersey](#)

The DOE and the State Chamber of Commerce have established the Disaster Fund for Children of New Jersey which has \$3 million, with \$1.5 million donated by Panasonic Corporation. As of December 2001, 40 school districts in New Jersey donated money that will go to children and families affected by the September 11, 2001 tragedy.

### [15. Drug Abuse Education Fund Project](#)

Per the provisions of C:2C:43-3.5 and C.54A:9-25.12 et. seq, a Drug Abuse Education Fund (DAEF) has been established comprised of portions of taxpayer-designated refunds and penalties assessed against individuals adjudicated or convicted of certain crimes. The resources accumulated in the fund are appropriated annually to DOE for distribution to non-governmental entities for the utilization of law enforcement personnel in providing drug abuse education on a statewide basis. DOE has received the first appropriation under these statutory provisions and plans to issue a contract for the first year of services in the spring of 2002.

### [16. Education Law Enforcement Partnerships Grant Program](#)

This grant to D.A.R.E. New Jersey, Inc. is designed to assist in the development of partnerships between law enforcement personnel and local educational agencies to expand, modify and implement statewide substance abuse and violence prevention program activities. The programs provided under the grant are intended to give students the skills to recognize and resist pressures that place them at risk for substance use and violence, as well as stimulate community interest and encourage family involvement in substance abuse prevention and positive health practices.

### [17. Student Support Services](#)

The Student Support Services Planning and Development Initiative will provide support to school districts interested in refining or reforming their student services programs. A not-for-profit private vendor will work with participating districts to evaluate existing student support services, assess the support needs of students and design and implement the optimum configuration of systems for delivering and sustaining student support services for their school populations. The foundation of the project is the self-study with each district, which will encompass the identification of existing programs, an analysis of student services in relation to identified student needs, assessment of effectiveness and efficiency of existing programs and recommendations for reforming or refining these programs.

This program is scheduled to begin in the 2002-2003 school year. The two-year effort will provide each participating district a small incentive grant of approximately \$5,000 per year to help support district participation; substantial technical assistance from a consultant contractor; and a collaborative process for evaluation, review and revision of how student services are organized, staffed and delivered. The districts were selected based on an articulation agreement with the Office of School to Career and College Initiatives, which is initiating a complementary project with pilot sites, under their New Jersey School Counseling Initiative. Exemplary work products resulting from the initiative will be showcased regionally and statewide.

#### [18. Collaboration with Mental Health Agencies and Student Support Personnel](#)

One of the conclusions to be drawn from the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the Littleton, Colorado school tragedy is that schools should examine how they collaborate with local mental health agencies. The effective use of student support personnel and the development of relationships between them and mental health providers are important components of school responses to violence. Therefore, DOE continues to forge effective links between New Jersey schools and mental health providers.

Specifically, DOE staff continues to have discussions with the leadership of the New Jersey Association of School Psychologists (NJASP) and the Association of Student Assistance Professionals of New Jersey (ASAPNJ) to establish effective working relationships, identify areas of concern and consider strategies for improving the delivery of student support services. NJASP, ASAPNJ and the New Jersey Association of Mental Health Agencies (NJAMHA) have all assigned representatives to serve on an advisory board to help guide the Student Support Services Planning and Development Initiative (SSSPDI). In addition, DOE staff provided an orientation to the new regulations under *N.J.A.C. 6A:16, Programs to Support Student Development*, at the annual NJASP conference in December 2001.

#### [19. A Guide for the Development of a Districtwide School Safety Plan](#)

In November 2001 the New Jersey Department of Education, in support of the Strategic Plan for Systemic Improvement of Education in New Jersey established by the State Board of Education, developed and disseminated A Guide for the Development of a Districtwide School Safety Plan. The purpose of the Guide is to provide New Jersey schools with background information addressing school safety in a comprehensive manner.

The Guide is intended to provide schools with a general framework for planning and an inventory of supportive resources for the development of comprehensive school safety plans and programs designed to effect positive behavior in schools in order to ensure a safe school climate. The Guide describes a continuum of strategies and activities that are key to establishing safe and secure schools.

educational environments, ranging from the physical makeup of school buildings, to prevention and intervention programs and services, to community involvement, to responding to the aftermath of a crisis. The publication was distributed to all county superintendents and is also posted at following websites:

<http://www.nj.gov/njded/atoz.htm> - Subjects A to Z

<http://www.nj.gov/njded/parents/info.htm> - Parents' Circle

### C. Local School District Violence Prevention Efforts

Districts use many curricular and non-curricular programs in their efforts to prevent violence among students. The most frequently cited programs (in 1999-2000) were programs developed locally: Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), Here's Looking at You 2000, and Social Problem Solving Program. See Table 7.

It is interesting to note that many districts use more than one violence prevention program: nearly two-in-five (38 percent) use three different programs, and another 20 percent use four curricula. Districts also report engaging in numerous violence prevention and/or gang resistance activities such as targeting of populations, training of district and school staff, development of program materials and public awareness activities.

Table 7

#### Number of Districts Using Selected Violence Prevention Curricula, 1999-2000

<u>Item</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Locally Developed Program	439	77.6%
Drug Abuse Resistance Ed. (D.A.R.E.)	423	74.7%
Here's Looking at You 2000	274	48.4%
Other	219	38.7%
B.A.B.E.S. Program	131	23.1%
Social Problem Solving Program	131	23.1%
Bullying Prevention Program	98	17.3%
Life Skills Training	86	15.2%
McGruff's Drug Prev. & Child Protect.	81	14.3%
Quest: Skills for Growing/Adolescence/Action	58	10.2%
Teaching Students to be Peacemakers	44	7.8%
Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents	40	7.1%
Resolving Conflict Creatively (RCCP)	21	3.7%
Second Step	19	3.4%
PeaceBuilders	17	3.0%
Keys to Innervations	15	2.7%

Strengthening Families Program	14	2.5%
Interpersonal Creative Problem Solving (ICPS)	12	2.1%
Reconnecting Youth	11	1.9%
Child Development Project	7	1.2%
SANKOFA	7	1.2%
All Stars	6	1.1%
Discovery: Skills for Life	6	1.1%
Fast Track (Families & Schools Together)	6	1.1%
Linking the Interests of Families & Teachers	5	0.9%
Project ACHIEVE	4	0.7%
Safe Dates	3	0.5%
Viewpoints	3	0.5%
Promoting Alt. Thinking Strategies (PATHS)	2	0.4%
Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders (AVB)	1	0.2%
Positive Adolescent Choice Training (PACT)	0	0.0%
Seattle Social Development Project	0	0.0%

### Future Directions

The recent history of violent tragedies in our nation's schools and communities has strengthened the resolve of the department to provide policies, programs and other strategic initiatives that support local district efforts to develop and maintain safe and disciplined school environments. DOE is committed to providing schools with supportive resources for the improvement of comprehensive school safety programs and helping schools to further reduce current levels of violence, vandalism and substance abuse. In light of our commitment, DOE plans to implement and maintain the following:

Disaffected Youth Grant Program – The goal of this planned program is to help schoolchildren and adolescents who are at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system remain in school or return to school and to achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The program is intended to address the identified academic and nonacademic needs of these youth and their families in targeted school districts.

Violence Awareness Week – On January 3, 2002, a state law was passed designating the first week of October each year as "School Violence Awareness Week." During this week, school districts will be required to organize such activities as age-appropriate forums for student discussions on conflict resolution, issues of student diversity and tolerance. The department will provide guidelines and information to local boards of education for use in planning the activities and observance of the week.

Principals and Parents Promoting Youth Development and Discipline – The goal of this plan project is to assist schools through a collaborative effort among DOE, The College of New Jersey and the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association to effectively engage parents and families in promoting positive youth development, with particular attention given to discipline issues. The project includes the development of a state-of-the-art manual for school principals.

provide them with relevant research, strategies and materials to use with parents in promoting positive youth development, and the provision of principals institutes supporting use of the man

Showcasing Exemplary and Promising Practices – One of the responsibilities of administering the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) funds is to encourage school districts to adopt research-based programs as a way of implementing the Principles of School Effectiveness that schools are required to use as the basis for the planning and selection of programs funded under SDFSCA. The department plans to invite selected developers of programs designated as exemplary or promising by the United States Department of Education to showcase their programs to New Jersey educators. The presentations will be videotaped and made available to all New Jersey school districts.

Technical Assistance – The department intends to provide technical support for implementation of the new regulations addressing school safety, violence and health services found in the new Chapter of administrative code, *N.J.A.C. 6A:16*, Programs to Support Student Development.

The DOE, in conjunction with the New Jersey Education Association, the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey is planning three regional conferences for the spring of 2002 designed to provide educators with state-of-the-art information on school safety and crisis prevention and response.

Collaborative Partnerships – DOE aims to continue to collaborate with the following groups: the Violence Institute of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), the New Jersey Association of Mental Health Agencies, the New Jersey Association of School Psychologists and the Association of Student Assistance Professionals of New Jersey, and intends to continue to support the Peer-to-Peer Transitions Project in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.

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## **Appendix A: Public School Safety Law**

### **Pertinent Sections**

AN ACT concerning violence in the public schools and amending P.L.1982, c.163.

#### **C.18A:17-46 Reporting of act of violence by school employee; annual report; public hearing.**

Any school employee observing or having direct knowledge from a participant or victim of an act of violence shall, in accordance with standards established by the commissioner, file a report describing the incident to the school principal in a manner prescribed by the commissioner, and copy of same shall be forwarded to the district superintendent.

The principal shall notify the district superintendent of schools of the action taken regarding the incident. Annually, at a public hearing in October, the superintendent of schools shall report to the board of education all acts of violence and vandalism which occurred during the previous school year. The proceedings of the public hearing shall be transcribed and kept on file by the board of education, which shall make the transcript available to the public. Verification of the annual report on violence and vandalism shall be part of the State's monitoring of the school district, and the State Board of Education shall adopt regulations that imp

a penalty on a school employee who knowingly falsifies the report. A board of education shall provide ongoing staff training, in cooperation with the Department of Education, in fulfilling the reporting requirements pursuant to this section. The majority representative of the school employees shall have access monthly to the number and disposition of all reported acts of school violence and vandalism.

The board of education shall file the transcript of the public hearing with the Division of Student Services; the Department of Education by November 1. The division shall review the transcript to ensure compliance with this section of law. The costs of staff training and transcribing the public hearing and printing the transcript shall be paid by the Department of Education.

Approved January 2, 2002.

**18A:17-47. Discharge of, or discrimination against, school employee who files report**

It shall be unlawful for any board of education to discharge or in any manner discriminate against a school employee as to his employment because the employee had filed a report pursuant to section 1 of this act. Any employee discriminated against shall be restored to his employment and shall be compensated by the board of education for any loss of wages arising out of the discrimination; provided, however, if the employee shall cease to be qualified to perform the duties of his employment he shall not be entitled to restoration and compensation.

L.1982, c. 163, s. 2, eff. Oct. 28, 1982.

**18A:17-48. Annual report to legislature**

The Commissioner of Education shall each year submit a report to the Education Committees of the Senate and General Assembly detailing the extent of violence and vandalism in the public schools and making recommendations to alleviate the problem.

L.1982, c. 163, s. 3, eff. Oct. 28, 1982.

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[Appendix B: Data Forms \(PDF !\[\]\(daf9f7fb6177031140c023ac5965c985\_img.jpg\)\)](#)

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[Appendix C: Substance and Weapons Detail, 2000-2001](#)

<b>Weapons</b>		
Handgun	10	0.6%
Rifle	0	0.0%
Air Gun	29	1.9%
Imitation Gun	120	7.7%
Bomb- Exploded	0	0.0%
Bomb-Unexploded	1	0.1%
Knife	963	61.9%

Pin	12	0.8%
Chain	12	0.8%
Mace	20	1.3%
Other	388	25.0%
<b>Total (duplicated)</b>	<b>1,555</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Substances</b>		
Alcohol	449	14.2%
Marijuana	2,188	69.4%
Amphetamines	36	1.1%
Crack	5	0.2%
Cocaine	58	1.8%
Hallucinogens	29	0.9%
Narcotics	46	1.5%
Depressants	54	1.7%
Steroids	0	0.0%
Prescription Drugs	131	4.2%
Inhalants	18	0.6%
Drug Paraphernalia	140	4.4%
<b>Total (duplicated)</b>	<b>3,154</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Note. More than one type of weapon, or type of substance, may be involved in an incident, resulting in a duplicated total.

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### [Appendix D: District Totals, by County](#)

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