



Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey Schools - 1999-2000

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

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

May 2001

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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, 1999 to June 30, 2000

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

Vito A. Gagliardi, Sr.
Commissioner

Prepared by staff of the
Division of Student Services

Gloria Hancock
Acting Assistant Commissioner

Catherine Crill, Acting Director
Office of Educational Support Services

New Jersey Department of Education
100 River View Plaza, P.O. Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500

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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 and Assembly of the New Jersey State Legislature. It provides the Legislature with data in four broad categories of incidents: violence, vandalism, weapons, and substance abuse. It also summarizes initiatives taken by the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) to address problem violence.

This year's report provides baseline data from a new Internet-based incident reporting system, the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System. The total number of incidents reported was 21,367. The report shows that acts of violence and vandalism occur primarily -- and to an extent -- in middle and high schools, with incidents of substance abuse occurring more frequently in high schools. Two-thirds of all schools report five or fewer incidents of any kind for the entire year.

DOE has aggressively pursued a variety of policy and program strategies to address the problem of disruption and violence since the inception of the *Safe Schools Initiative* in 1994. The department's most recent efforts to strengthen its approach to reducing school violence cover a broad array of policies, programs, and other strategic initiatives, including the following:

- Development and dissemination of guidance documents: *Curriculum Framework for Health and Physical Education*; *Guide for the Application, Operation and Approval of High School Alternative Education Programs* and *Guide for the Application, Operation and Approval of Middle School Alternative Education Programs*; Proposed new regulations governing school safety, violence and health services. These new regulations are delineated in N.J.A.C. 6A:16, titled *Programs to Support Student Development*.
- Programs such as the Intervention and Referral Services Initiative, the Safe Schools Communities Violence Prevention and Response Pilot Plan; 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, the Peer-to-Peer Transitions Pilot Project and the Sudden Violent Loss and Mediation Services Project (with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey – UMDNJ).

Planning is underway to develop regulations governing student discipline, identify effective strategies and alternatives to suspension and expulsions, and assess the impact of zero tolerance policies.

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

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[INTRODUCTION](#)

[A. Purpose of the Report](#)

The Commissioner's report is submitted annually to the education committees of the Senate 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 3 "Insure that schools are safe from violence") 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 recent actions 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. Additionally, the superintendent of the district must provide a summary of all such incidents annually to the local board of education. Thus the Legislature, in requiring local reporting, is focusing attention on the issue at the 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 weapons category was expanded to meet reporting requirements of the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) and the Gun-Free Schools Act.

C. Meeting the Legislative Charge

1. Information on the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS)
The department provides districts with a three-page form for reporting incidents that includes a page each for incident, offender and victim information. The EVVRS User Manual (on the system homepage at <http://homerom.state.nj.us/index.htm>) contains definitions and instructions for reporting of incidents at the local level. Incidents are recorded on the form (or on a local form with the same information) at the school, and that record of the incident is entered directly by school district staff onto the EVVRS database resident at DOE in Trenton. Use of a common form with clear definitions of incidents supports uniformity in reporting and interpretation of the data. However, the use of different standards in reporting by districts is evident when the data is examined. Accordingly, as described in the following section, the department has taken steps to reduce the variability in reporting by districts.

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 drawn principally from the juvenile justice system.

The department recognizes, however, that the way in which districts interpret and apply definitions in the manual varies greatly. The issue of interpretation of what student misconduct must be reported is evident in the district-level data for 1999-2000. 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 districts. Different standards for reporting are obviously being applied by the two types of districts. To reduce these differences, the department has scheduled training for district staff, made access to definitions easier through revisions to the EVVRS User Manual, and is considering further data analysis that will pinpoint the problem.

In addition to this type of inter-district variability, the number of incidents for any one district may not match the total number of disciplinary actions that the district takes for student misconduct. For example, a district may report 15 fights during a year, but suspend 60 students for 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 a shove or a match between students, or minor acts of vandalism, such as petty theft. At the local level, however, each district has its own procedures for reporting student behavior that results in a disciplinary action. The state system of reporting is designed to capture the more serious type of incidents, whereas the local reporting system covers the entire range of student misconduct. Therefore, differences between the totals for locally reported disciplinary actions and totals of incidents reported to the state are to be expected.

D. The Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS)

This year's report is the first to be based upon violence and vandalism data submitted through the Internet-based Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS). By 1998-99, it became clear that the paper system used for reporting incidents had become administratively burdensome in meeting the increased demand for unduplicated counts of incidents and type of offenders and victims, specific information on firearm incidents and, in the case of students with disabilities, a count of the number of students with disabilities suspended for more than ten days by race and type of disability. In response, a system by which each district submitted a record for 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 eliminates the need for districts to submit the following 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 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 email message within 24 hours.

District totals for the major reporting categories appear in Appendix D. Because the method of data collection was radically different from prior years, no comparisons with prior years' data will be made in this report. The reporting year 1999-2000 will be considered the baseline year, the starting point of a new system against which future years' figures will be compared. This year's report focuses on the distribution of incidents across the three levels of school building: elementary, middle, and high school.

and high school.

II. Findings

A. Background

1. Unduplicated Counts

This report provides unduplicated counts of incidents for the total number of incidents and the total by major reporting category. In previous years, the total of violence, for example, was the sum of each type of violence, e.g., threat, simple assault. This year, 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 of violence, 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). In the tabular data presented in this section, many of the totals do not appear "to add up." These totals, as indicated, are unduplicated counts of incidents.

2. Data Quality

In using the EVVRS for the first time, districts appear in some cases to have failed to identify and report on offenders associated with incidents. One incident might involve multiple offenders and another might be a case where the offender was unknown. This recording and entering information on each offender such as an Identification number, offender type (e.g., regular education student, special education student, length of suspension) was a new task for district staff. Thus, the total number of offenders may represent an undercount.

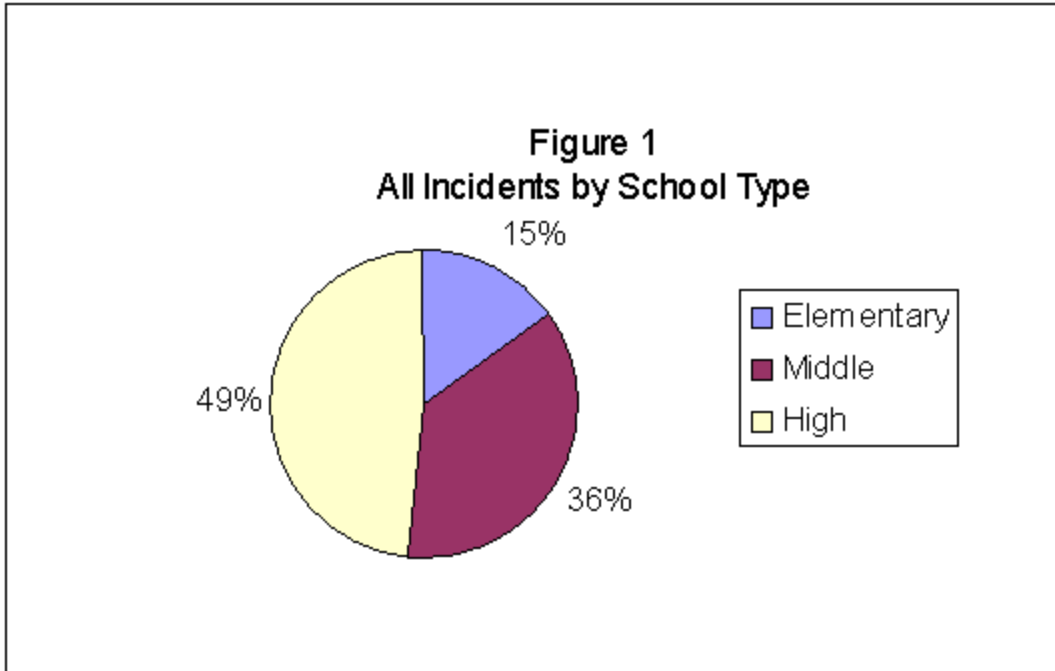
Factors related to the March start-up might have affected data quality. District staff were learning a new Internet-based reporting system using the on-line EVVRS User Manual and technical support made available through a dedicated email address (EVVRS@doe.state.nj.us). To address issues related to the use of this new system, the department will be offering regionally based training on the EVVRS in the spring of 2001.

A further issue related to data quality relates to cost of vandalism. The state total on costs of incidents of vandalism had been a part of prior reports. A few districts were not able to include cost data by the August deadline for data entry and, as a result, the state total is not included in this report. It will be included in future reports.

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 terminates at grade 6 or below; a middle school is any school that terminates in the 7 through 9 grade range, and a high school is defined as any school that terminates at grade 10 or above. Charter schools are included, as their grade range would indicate. Schools with only students with disabilities for which data on grade range were not available were classified as middle schools.

Districts reported an unduplicated count of 21,367 incidents in 1999-2000. Practically half (49% all incidents occurred in high schools (see Figure 1).



Two-thirds (67.4 percent) of schools reported either no incidents or between one and five incidents. Of the 2,365 public schools in the state, 250 (percent) had 25 incidents or more (see Figure 2).

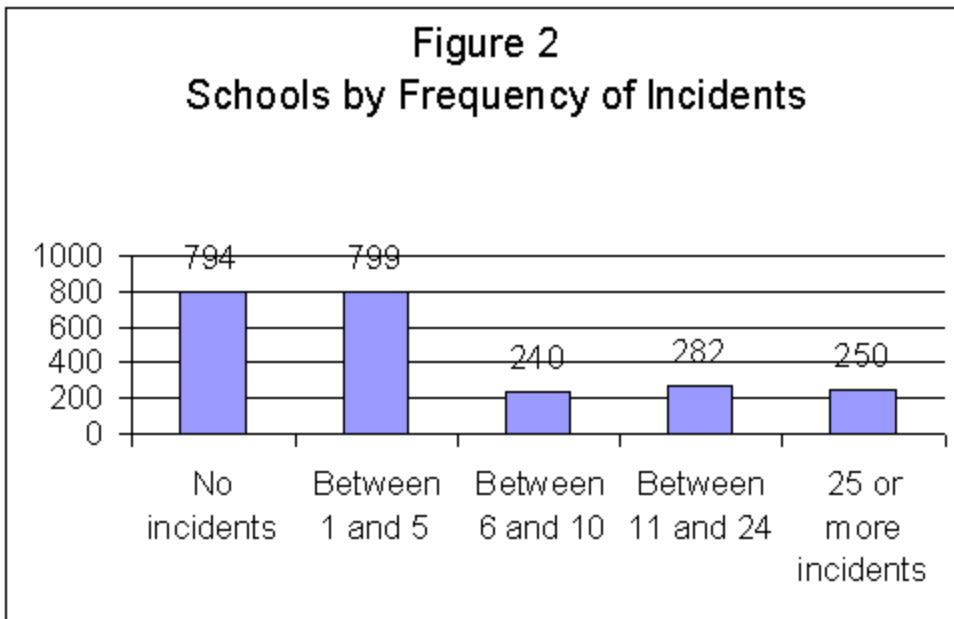


Table 1 breaks out the data in Figure 2 by school type. It is evident that a greater percentage of high schools have incidents of violence, vandalism, and substance abuse; nearly two-in-five experienced 25 or more incidents in 1999-2000.

[Table 1](#)

Number of Schools Reporting Incidents, by Interval and School Type, 1999-2000										
Interval	Elementary		Middle		High		Total			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
No incidents	588	48%	163	22%	43	11%	794	34%		
Between 1 and 5	509	41%	230	32%	60	15%	799	34%		
Between 6 and 10	83	7%	107	15%	50	12%	240	10%		
Between 11 and 24	49	4%	139	19%	94	23%	282	12%		
25 or more incidents	5	0%	88	12%	157	39%	250	11%		
Total Schools	1,234	100%	727	100%	404	100%	2,365	100%		

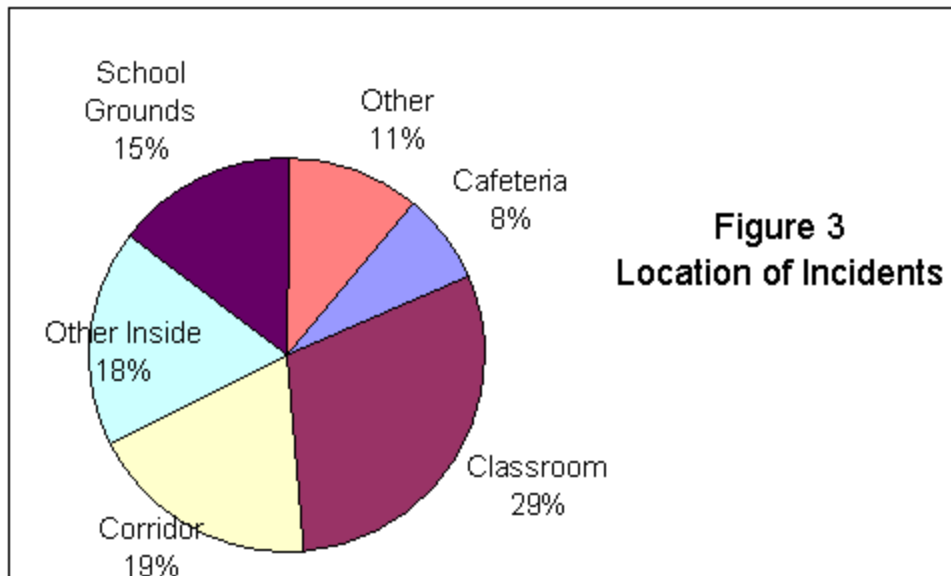
C. Header Information

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;
- whether or not police were notified and if a complaint was filed; and
- whether or not bias was involved.

Police were notified in one-third (34 percent) of all incidents reported by districts. No complaint was filed in 16 percent of the cases reported while a complaint was filed in 18 percent. The date and time data are primarily for local use and were not analyzed. Districts reported 376 incidents of bias in the 1999-2000 school year.

With regard to the location of the incident, nearly three-quarters (74%) of incidents took place inside the school building, with three incidents in ten occurring in the classroom (see Figure 3). Further detail on location is available in Appendix C.



D. Incident Frequency by Major Category

An unduplicated count by category indicates that incidents of violence occur at two and one-times the rate as incidents of vandalism and five times the rate of incidents of substance abuse. See Table 2.

<u>Table 2</u>	
Unduplicated Count of Incidents by Major Category, 1999-2000	
Violence	12,663
Vandalism	5,141
Weapons	1,424
Substances	2,455
Total (with duplicates)	21,683
Unduplicated Total	21,367
<p><u>Note.</u> Duplicate counts occur when one incident is classified in two categories, e.g. the case of a fight during which damage to property occurs. It would appear under violence (fight) and vandalism (damage to property). In the unduplicated total, the incident is counted as one incident overall.</p>	

E. Incident Frequency by Type within Major Category

The count of incidents by type is shown in the following table. The percent column in the table indicates the percentage of the type of incident reported in that row that occurred at elementary, middle and high school level. Data on firearm incidents is reported for handguns and rifles only. Since air guns and imitation guns are not classified as firearms under federal law, they are classified as "Other Weapons." (See Appendix C for detail on other weapons.)

The data indicate that middle schools and high schools have similar totals for the various types of violence, vandalism (except theft which is more prevalent in high schools), and weapons. Substance abuse incidents are far more prevalent in high schools. It is noteworthy that elementary schools experienced over one-third of the incidents of gang fights.

Table 3							
Number and Percent of Types of Incidents, by School Type, 1999-2000							
	Elementary		Middle		High		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Violence							
Simple Assault	846	19%	2,004	44%	1,683	37%	4,533
Aggravated Assault	38	11%	192	53%	129	36%	359
Fight	606	12%	2,033	39%	2,566	49%	5,205
Gang Fight	26	36%	27	37%	20	27%	73
Robbery	12	19%	16	26%	34	55%	62
Extortion	4	15%	16	62%	6	23%	26
Sex Offense	50	15%	175	51%	119	35%	344
Threat	419	19%	974	44%	842	38%	2,235
Vandalism							
Arson	39	19%	61	30%	104	51%	204
Bomb Threat ¹	11	5%	76	33%	142	62%	229
Burglary	72	36%	53	26%	77	38%	202
Damage to Property	740	28%	867	32%	1,078	40%	2,685
Fireworks	7	8%	47	55%	32	37%	86
Theft	258	15%	365	21%	1,109	64%	1,732
Trespassing	89	30%	100	33%	111	37%	300
Weapons							
Firearm	4	18%	4	18%	14	64%	22
Other Weapon	230	16%	650	47%	517	37%	1,387
Bomb Offense ²	2	13%	9	56%	5	31%	16
Substances							

Use	7	0%	256	14%	1,523	85%	1,786
Possession	14	2%	165	23%	551	75%	730
Distribution	2	2%	23	27%	61	71%	86
1. Total of 229 includes four fake bombs.							
2. Total of 16 includes seven bombs that exploded, nine that did not explode. Districts had the capacity, but not the requirement, to report injuries. None were reported.							

E. Actions Taken

Out-of school suspension was used in more than 7 cases in 10 (71 percent) to discipline offend. The average length of an out-of-school suspension was 8.5 days. As can be seen in Figure 4, 10,981 of the 10,981 suspensions were for less than five days. Alternative education (a program, school or setting such as home instruction) at 17 percent was the next most frequently used disciplinary measure after suspension. (See Appendix C for detail.)

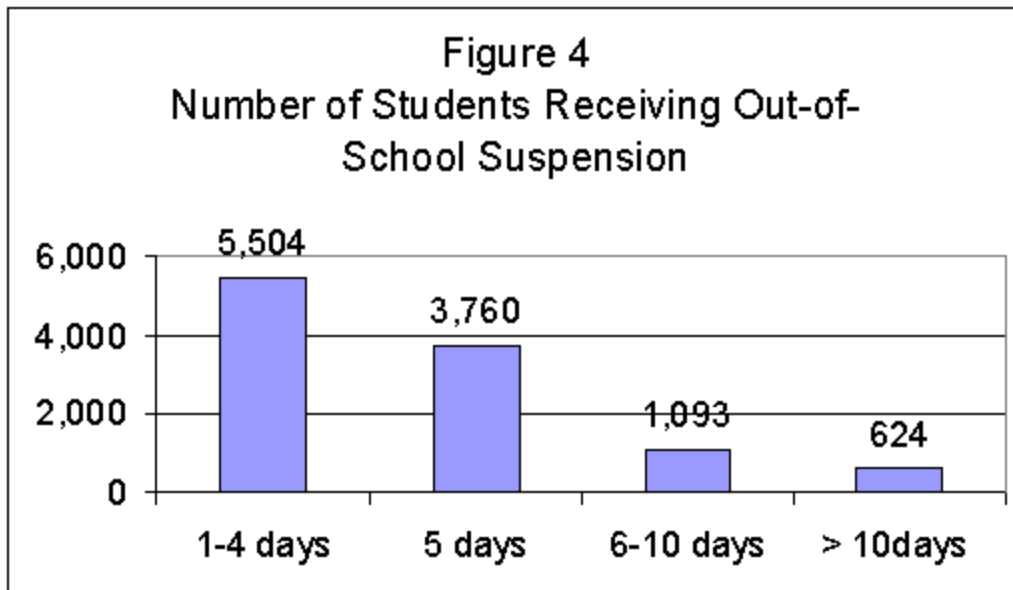
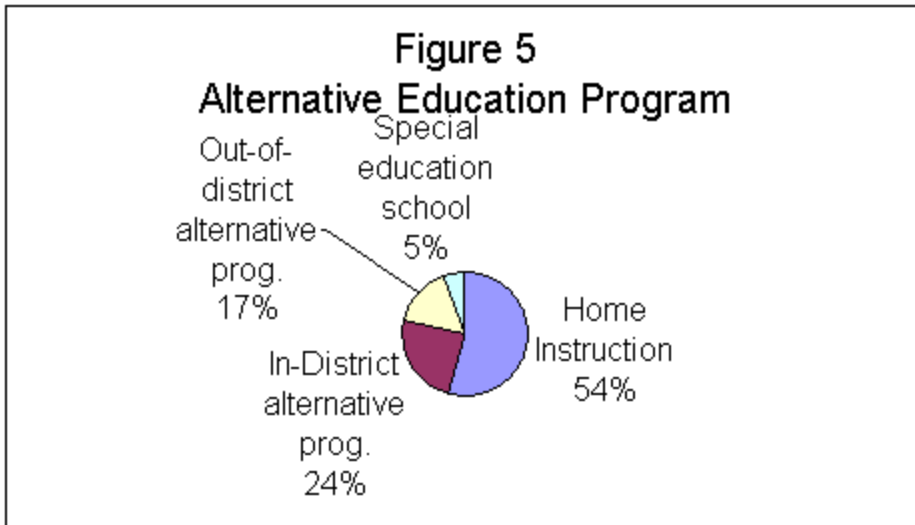
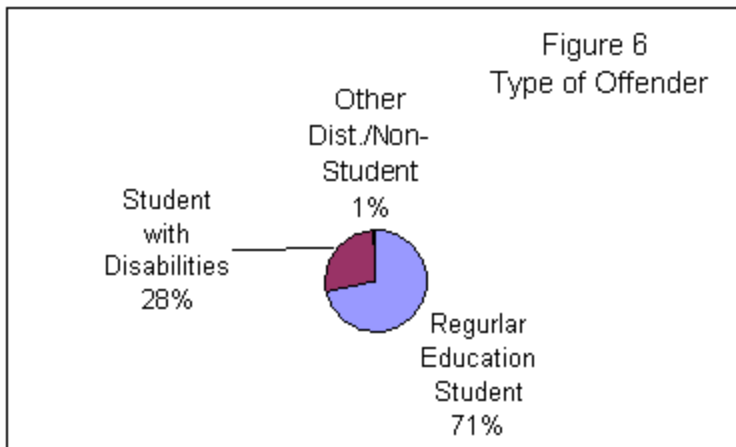


Figure 5 indicates that when students were removed to alternative education, they were most often placed in home instruction. An alternative district program was the next most frequently selected placement (see Appendix C for detail).



G. Offenders and Victims

Since 1995-96, the department had been able to report only the number of incidents for which a staff member was the victim. The EVVRS now allows the department to capture information on victim and offender types. In one case out of five (20 percent) the offender was unknown. (This high percentage may reflect two factors. In the first, in many cases of vandalism, such as *damage to property* and *bomb threat*, the offender is unknown to the district. In the second, unknown offender status may represent failure of school staff to complete the separate form for offender information. For those cases where the offender was known, general education students constituted more than seven in ten (71 percent) of the offenders (see Figure 6).



Data on victims are not reported in a sufficient number of cases to reliably report the distribution of victim types. It is noteworthy, however, that there were 1,6 incidents where school personnel (including contractual employees) were the victim. These, 623 (or 37 percent) involved the threat of violence, 603 (or 36 percent) involved simple assault, and 108 (or six percent) involved aggravated assault. Vandalism of some type, e.g., theft, damage to property, was involved in 340 (or 20

percent) of the incidents in which a victim was a staff member.

H. Data Summary

The department considers the 1999-2000 reporting year to be a starting point for the reporting trends in violence and vandalism. If one compares this report to last year's (i.e., 1998-99), one finds many examples of apparent reductions in violence and vandalism. For example, there were 6 fights reported last year and 5,205 this year. There were 3,529 incidents of *damage to property* last year and 2,685 this year. The department, however, believes the dramatic change in the me

for reporting (from paper to electronic reporting) precludes the making of reliable comparisons between this and prior years. The 1999-2000 school year will thus be considered a baseline. In future reports to the Legislature, the department will judge the progress it has made in creating a safe learning environment against this baseline.

III. PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSE

What the Department of Education Is Doing to Support Safe Schools

A. Introduction

Various types of school violence can be viewed as a continuum. At one end of the continuum is the bullying or shoving-match behavior between fellow students that must be curtailed before it escalates into something more serious. At the other end of the continuum is extreme violence such as the terrible tragedy that occurred in Littleton, Colorado in 1999. Such an incident creates the impression that violence is pervasive in our schools and instills fear in the minds of students and parents.

The programmatic response of each school district and the state must also follow this continuum. It should address prevention efforts that include the following: an assessment of the immediate surroundings of the school community; the development of clearly defined student behavior policies and codes of student conduct; the development of an emergency operations plan, with clearly defined policies and procedures; a plan to address a crisis; 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 a continuum of types of violence with appropriately designed plans and programs. They have put in place emergency management plans and have purchased security devices to provide 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, 401 school districts reported implementing conflict resolution programs and 335 school districts reported adoption of peer mediation programs in the 1998-99 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 and alcohol abuse prevention from the federal government. Under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) program, \$7.6 million dollars (approximately \$7 per student) is provided through the department to local districts for this purpose in 1999-2000. Districts supplement these federal funds with local monies. No state funds are specifically targeted to school districts for violence or substance abuse prevention.

B. Addressing School Violence: Current State-Level Activity

DOE has aggressively pursued a variety of policy and program strategies to address the problem of disruption and violence since the beginning of the *Safe Schools Initiative* in 1994. The department is developing a *School Safety Resource Guide* designed to provide schools with information for fostering safe and disciplined learning environments conducive to learning. It is anticipated that the guide will be distributed to school districts in the fall semester of 2001.

The following is a summary of the department's most recent efforts to strengthen the assistance offered to school districts to reduce school violence:

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

DOE is planning to fund an eighteen-month pilot program in the 2001-2002 school year, in which a contractor will work in collaboration with, at a minimum, three school districts, as well as community-based organizations and stakeholders, to develop effective violence prevention and intervention plans at the local level. A report that is designed to provide guidance to school districts on the processes and strategies developed under the pilot program, as well as current information on effective school responses to crises, will be developed and disseminated to all school districts.

2. Administrative Code

The proposed chapter of administrative code titled, *Programs to Support Student Development* (N.J.A.C. 6A:16), includes new subchapters which address school safety issues, including codes of student conduct, emergency and crisis management plans, incident reporting, access to juvenile information, firearms, weapons and assault offenses, as well as law enforcement operations, substances, weapons and safety. As a result of comments received about student discipline, the Commissioner will convene an internal workgroup to explore the following areas: definitions of school expulsion, suspension and removal of students; development and use of a student code of conduct; school staff and student responsibilities; graduated disciplinary responses relative to severity of the offense; and due process rights and responsibilities. The workgroup will solicit input from the field on these and other topics and will issue a discussion paper in the spring of 2001.

3. 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 toward 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 and improve their attitude toward school. The county probation division staff 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.

4. Intervention and Referral Services

The Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) Initiative supports implementation of the I&RS regulations (N.J.A.C. 6:26) by providing technical assistance to districts for the establishment of building-based interdisciplinary teams (grades K-12) for bringing solutions to bear on barriers to positive student behavior and development. The technical assistance provided by DOE includes a four-part videotape series and accompanying companion guide and flyer; a comprehensive *Resource Manual for Intervention and Referral Services*; and the provision of training to principal building administrators and building-based teams to implement the I&RS regulations. The materials were disseminated to all school districts in June 1999 and the *Resource Manual* was distributed

districts in February 2000. Approximately 120 building-based teams have been trained since 2000. In addition to providing training on an ongoing basis, supplemental training programs will be offered that are specifically designed to address the professional development needs identified by members of trained teams.

5. Alternative Education

The department has revised its *Guide for the Application, Operation and Approval of High School Alternative Education Programs*, using a special work group convened to assist with the project. A separate document titled *Guide for the Application, Operation and Approval of Middle School Alternative Education Programs* has been developed utilizing the same process that was used to develop the high school guide. The middle school guide was disseminated to schools in May 2000. Technical assistance sessions for districts on the use of the guide for high school and middle school alternative education programs were held in May 2000. Special assistance, including a videoconference in October 2000, has been provided to the Abbott school districts, which are required to have alternative education programs, as well as school security plans. Regulations for alternative education programs have been drafted for inclusion as a subchapter in the proposed chapter of administrative code titled *Programs to Support Student Development*.

6. V-Free Initiative

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 State. The program provides mini-grants to schools and community-based organizations to support student-initiated local efforts to prevent violence, vandalism and victimization.

7. Peer-to-Peer Transitions Pilot Project

This project is designed to reduce students' risk factors as they transition from middle school to high school. Under an interagency agreement, DOE has provided funds to the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services to pilot the Peer-to-Peer transitions program utilizing an existing network of peer leadership programs in New Jersey developed under the New Jersey Middle School Peer-to-Peer Program.

8. Sudden Violent Loss and Mediation Services and Materials

Through the Sudden Violent Loss and Mediation Services project with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), University Behavioral HealthCare, the department is working to build the capacity of all 21 counties to assist schools with the provision of prevention intervention, and postvention services when there are threats of violence or when tragedies occur. UMDNJ has developed a five-part videotape series designed to assist school personnel in planning and responding to sudden loss events. The videotapes will be disseminated to all schools in the 2000-2001 school year. UMDNJ's sudden loss services will remain available to schools through a contract administered by the Department of Human Services effective January 2001.

9. Core Curriculum Content Standards

The Core Curriculum Content Standards contain specific indicators under Standard 2.2 (students will learn health-enhancing personal, interpersonal and life skills) that will help students learn about conflict and develop the skills necessary to prevent violence. The Curriculum

Framework for Health and Physical Education was disseminated in October 1999 to all schools includes 140 sample lessons for educators to use to successfully implement instruction addresses topics related to violence prevention and positive social development.

10. School Search Training

In support of the distribution of the *New Jersey School Search Policy Manual* in June 1999, a statewide Search and Seizure Policy workshop took place in May 2000.

11. Memorandum of Agreement

The Attorney General and the Commissioner in 1999 issued a revised Uniform 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 school administrators have been made at county roundtable meetings, emphasizing the importance of the expanded agreement.

12. 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 formal relationship with VINJ to aid in identifying violence prevention resources for use by schools. The department cosponsored VINJ's second Youth Summit on Violence in 2001, which gave more than 350 youth from throughout the state the opportunity to discuss the issue of violence and how it affects their lives and to report their recommendations to cabinet members and federal and state officials who attended the summit.

13. School Security

A special focus group of educators and experts was convened in the summer of 1999 at Rutgers University to review the causes of school violence and make recommendations to the department regarding additional measures that schools should consider taking and what assistance the department can offer. The department's efforts in violence, vandalism and substance abuse incident reporting described in the introduction of this report is, in part, a response to the concerns expressed by focus group members around this issue. To address the need for curricular and programmatic responses expressed by focus group members, the department conducted regional workshops for the Abbott districts in February and March 2000 that focused on school security.

14. Character Education Initiative

The department is administering the \$4.75 million Governor's *New Jersey Character Education Partnership (NJCEP) Initiative*. The voluntary state aid initiative is designed to assist each public school district in its efforts to develop, implement or enhance character education programs in at least one school building. During the 2000-2001 school year, 99 percent of the public school districts participated in the character education initiative. The majority of participating schools chose Character Education Programs of Merit recommended by DOE. Other options included

following: 11 percent of schools chose alternative program providers; eight 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 and ongoing consultation to districts to support their program implementation efforts.

In addition, the department's federally funded character education pilot demonstration project completed its third year, during the 1999-2000 school year, in the Newark, Jersey City and Paterson school districts. Character education is being infused into the literature arts and social studies curriculum in grades one through eight in the Newark School District, which is the project 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 three years has continued to expand. There are 1,565 educators who belong to the professional development network established through this project.

15. Collaboration with Mental Health Agencies and Student Support Personnel

One of the recommendations that the former United States Secretary of Education made in response to the Littleton, Colorado tragedy is that schools should examine how they collaborate with local mental health agencies. DOE continues to forge the most effective links we can between New Jersey schools and mental health providers.

The effective use of student support personnel and the development of relationships between them and mental health providers is also an important component of schools' response to violence. DOE, therefore, has also begun discussions with 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. NJAMHA, NJASP and ASAPNJ have all assigned representatives to serve on an advisory board to help guide a DOE grant program, the Student Support Services Planning and Development Initiative, which will begin in June 2001. Through this initiative, 15 school districts will have the opportunity to study and refine the structure and operations of their student services, providing models from which other districts can learn.

C. Local School Violence Prevention Efforts

Improving school safety should be a priority for everyone concerned about the children of New Jersey. Ensuring school safety is not primarily a state responsibility. While the department provides support and guidance, local schools and communities have the main responsibility for attending to the safety needs of students.

School safety involves substantial attention to prevention efforts, as well as effective response to crises. Many public and nonpublic schools across New Jersey have taken this charge very seriously and are engaged in a number of promising prevention programs and activities. Described below are summaries of a few notable efforts:

- In Burlington County, the Clara Barton Elementary School in Bordentown City implemented "Connections Mentoring Program," which is an effective approach for addressing the immediate needs of disaffected and at-risk students. "Connections" has been awarded a Best Practice Award for Public Engagement (1999-2000) by the New Jersey Department of Education and a Classroom Grant and Award (1999) from the McDonalds Corporation. The program is

extension of the school's counseling program, in which mentors are provided with activities are specifically designed to meet the identified needs (e.g. self-esteem, anger control, organizational skills, coping skills) of their assigned students. Mentors meet with their students one-half hour each week during the school day and on school grounds. Results of program evaluation indicate that behavioral difficulties have dramatically decreased among participating students. The number of these students appearing on the honor roll has increased and many of them have received other school awards (e.g. peacemakers). Now in its third year, "Connections Mentoring Program" has reached approximately 100 children.

- In Camden County, Pennsauken High School has implemented "A World of Difference Project." The program has been identified by the Department of Education as a New Jersey Character Education Program of Merit. The project offers consultation and training for high school students and staff in anti-bias education, diversity, and critical thinking, in an effort to reduce student violence. Each year students in grades nine through twelve are selected, trained and invited to conduct anti-bias lessons in social studies classes throughout the school year. An Anti-Bias Study Guide has been developed and integrated into the social studies curriculum.
- In North Brunswick, Livingston Park Elementary School has developed a homegrown character education program designed to build a civil and caring community for all students. The program titled "Project Harmony," integrates cooperative learning techniques throughout the curriculum as a means of teaching the values of compassion, tolerance, responsibility and justice to over 500 students in grades K-5. To further augment this school wide effort, staff have developed another program titled "Family Circles." Under this program, opportunities are created for small cross-sections of students and teachers to meet throughout the year. The purpose of "Family Circles" is to enhance each student's sense of belonging through the use of creative and interactive learning activities designed to connect children with other students and staff outside of their classrooms.
- In Hudson County, Dr. Charles P. DeFuccio School, PS # 39, received the award for Exemplary Practices for Safe Learning Environment by the New Jersey Department of Education. The project, titled "Project Yellow Jackets: A Safe Passage," provides students with supervision on their way to and from school, as well as at lunchtime, by adults, referred to as "Safe Passage Workers," who are employed by the Jersey City Public Schools. They are trained in conflict resolution and are viewed as problem solvers, rather than enforcers. Workers are assigned to strategic areas identified by the school's Site Based Management Team. These posts are secured 45 minutes before the opening of school, 30 minutes after school begins, during three lunch periods, and one hour after the close of the school day. The program is a direct response to requests from the students, parents and school staff to increase safety before and after school and during lunch periods. A few objectives of the Safe Passage Program are to create a safe and secure school environment conducive to learning; assist students and families in dealing with anger and conflict; prevent incidents of violence in and around the immediate school community; and to foster school pride.
- In Union County, the New Providence School District has introduced a number of initiatives in grades K-12 for delivering effective messages about personal responsibility, respect, tolerance, as a means of preventing violence and substance abuse. The "Social Decision Making/Problem Solving Program" offered through the Institute for Quality Research Training, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, has been introduced in classrooms. This program is designed to enhance students' decision-making skills, which enable them to avoid serious social problems. Students in grades five and six have been

involved in the "Heroes and Cool Kids" program, through which high school students, trained professional and high profile amateur athletes, mentor younger students. This program focuses on themes of sportsmanship, conflict resolution, and positive lifestyle choices.

- The West Morris Regional High School District developed a program in the Fall of 2000 to identify at-risk youth and involve them in "Project Adventure" activities, which are designed to facilitate conflict resolution and problem solving skills. The challenging personal and team building activities build students' self-confidence, enhance mutual support, develop physical coordination and provide an alternative strategy for developing leadership skills. Participants include students who are either enrolled in the district's alternative education program, Bar Academy, identified as being "at-risk" by the Child Study Team and students who have been identified by one of the participating middle schools. Plans are underway to provide training for staff, develop additional adult/peer-led mediation and conflict resolution approaches, and provide job training and job coaching for participating students, as well as assisting them in locating and keeping jobs in the community. The New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission is providing assistance to the district through a grant funded by the Division of Behavioral Health and Youth Services.

IV. SUMMARY

A. Data

The report indicates that violence, vandalism and substance abuse continue to be an issue in a minority of schools in the state. Two-thirds of the state's 2,365 schools reported fewer than 10 incidents in 1999-2000, with one-third reporting no incidents at all. The vast majority of incidents (85%) occur at middle and high schools. High schools differ from middle schools in the far greater number of incidents of substance abuse that they report. The following section summarizes the department's response to the issue, which is described in greater detail in Section III of this report.

Overall, the successful implementation of the EVVRS in an abbreviated first year of operation indicates that the department is moving in the right direction with regard to the collection of data required for this annual report to the legislature. Local 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. This richer database has given the department new information to use in program planning and development such as the location of incidents, the types of offenders and victims, and the types of schools where incidents tend to cluster. An enhanced User Manual and 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 database to identify areas of need for departmental initiatives to ensure a safe learning environment for students.

B. Programmatic Response

The NJDOE has aggressively pursued a variety of policy and program strategies to address problems of disruption and violence since the beginning of the Safe Schools Initiative in 1994. The department's most recent efforts to strengthen our approach to reducing school violence cover a broad array of policies, programs, and other strategic initiatives. These include the following:

- Development and dissemination of guidance documents such as the proposed new regulations for school safety, violence and health services, N.J.A.C. 6A:16, titled *Programs to Support Student Development*;

Programs such as the Intervention and Referral Services Initiative and the Character Education Initiative; and

Collaborative initiatives with groups working to address the problem of school violence such as the Attorney General's Education and Law Enforcement Working Group; the Violence Institute of New Jersey of UMDNJ; the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - Sudden Violent Loss Project; and the New Jersey Association of Mental Health Agencies of New Jersey.

The Department of Education is committed to continuing its support for school district effort: further reduce the levels of violence, vandalism and substance abuse in New Jersey schools.

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