



## Department of Education Releases Violence and Vandalism in Schools Report

**To support districts in decreasing incidents, the Department of Education also releases additional guidance to districts to support the implementation of the new Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights law**

**For Immediate Release**

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**Trenton, NJ** - The Department of Education today released the Violence and Vandalism Report for the 2009-2011 school years. The report is produced each year to transparently share self-reported incidents of violence, vandalism, weapons, and substance use and possession from districts. To support districts as they work to reduce incidents of Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, the department also provided additional guidance to aid districts in implementing the new law, P.L.2010, Chapter 122, known as the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act.

"Students learn best and achieve their full potential in safe and orderly classrooms. This report empowers parents with access to information in the most transparent way possible. We are committed to being as open and forthcoming as possible about circumstances that impact the health and safety of our students with the goal of ensuring that every child in New Jersey can learn in a safe and supportive learning environment," said Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf.

A 1982 state law requires the Commissioner of Education to file with the Legislature an annual report detailing the level of violence and vandalism in the state's public schools. Districts are required to report incidents if they occur on school grounds during school hours, on a school bus or at a school-sponsored event. The department uses data reported by the districts to produce the annual report. The department encourages districts to use the data to identify problem areas and to measure the impact of implemented policies and programs.

Summarized below are the changes in the number of reported incidents within each category over the three-year period from 2008-09 through 2010-11:

- In the **violence** category, total incidents increased by 5.6 percent during this time period. There were 276 fewer *assaults* (a decline of eight percent). Incidents of *harassment/intimidation/bullying/threat* (HIBT) increased by 566 from 2,846 in 2008-09 to 3,412 in 2010-11 (19.9 percent)
- In the **vandalism** category, the reported number of incidents declined by more than 30 percent over the three-year period as follows: property damage (463 or 35.2 percent), fireworks (7 or 16.3 percent), theft (473 or 35.2 percent), and trespassing (59 or 45.4 percent). In addition the number of reported incidents of burglary declined from 63 reported in 2008-09 to 44 in 2010-11, a 30.2 percent change.
- In the **weapons** category, reported incidents of firearms remained essentially level over the three-year period. However, incidents involving a weapon other than a firearm increased by 248 or 25.1 percent. The most notable of which were incidents involving unidentified weapons (up 96 or 98 percent), knives (up 79 or 10.5 percent) and air guns (39 or 81.3 percent).
- In the **substance** category, the number of incidents of possession of substances increased by 302, or 37 percent from 817 in 2008-09 to 1,119 in 2010-11. Marijuana accounts for 69 percent of the total number of reported substance incidents in 2010-2011. The use of unauthorized prescription drugs is trending down. Alcohol-related incidents are up over the three-year period after having decreased in 2009-10. Alcohol accounts for 14.8 percent of the total number of reported substance incidents this year, second only to marijuana.

While the Violence and Vandalism report transparently communicates the changes in reported incidents from year to year, the report does not identify the reasons for the changes. Changes from year to year may reflect an actual increase or decrease in the number of incidents, or it may reflect more accurate reporting from districts. Similarly, decreases in the number of incidents may reflect the results of policies or programs the district put in place leading to a decrease in incidents or simply changes in how they are reported.

"Though we cannot be certain whether the change in numbers reflects real increases or decreases in incidents or simply better reporting, we do know that the new statewide anti-bullying law has put a focus on violence and bullying in schools, which is leading to better identification and reporting from schools and districts. As the law emphasizes, awareness is a necessary first step to taking they type of action that will create safer learning environments for children," said Acting Commissioner Cerf.

In addition to collecting and reporting the data, the department has taken a number of steps to assist districts in identifying programs, practices and other resources to help them reduce the number of incidents each year. First, the department regularly provides information for schools and parents at the Keeping Our Kids Safe, Healthy and in School Web site, linked below.

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/>

Second, the department today released additional guidance for districts in implementing the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act. The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act was signed on January 5, 2011, and requires the department to also collect data on the status of investigations, the nature of the bullying based on the protected categories, the name of the investigators, the type and nature of any discipline imposed and any other measures imposed, and training conducted or programs implemented to reduce bullying. The department previously released a *Model Policy and Guidance For Prohibiting Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying* for districts on April 11, 2011, and has provided ongoing training and support to help districts implement the new law. In late winter and early spring 2011, 30 trainings were provided in each county to orient school staff to the requirements in the ABR. Additionally, the department conducted 10 state-wide trainings for 833 district staff and trainers in September. The PowerPoint presentations from the trainings were subsequently posted on the department's Web site for use by schools and the public.

A link to the guidance can be found here: <http://www.nj.gov/education/students/safety/behavior/hib/guidance.pdf>.

The statistics in this report were collected before this law took effect, and, therefore, any new data required by that law is not included in this report. This data required by the new law will be included in next year's report.

A copy of the report can be found on DOE's Web site at:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/vandv/0911/vandv.pdf> and summaries of district/school data can be found at: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/vandv/index.html>