



Department of Education Releases Violence and Vandalism in Schools Report

The 2011-2012 Report Includes For the First Time Data Collected in Accordance with the Implementation of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act Signed in 2011

For Immediate Release

Contact: Barbara Morgan
Rich Vespucci
609-292-1126

Date: October 2, 2012

Trenton, NJ – The Department of Education today released the Violence and Vandalism Report for the 2011-2012 school year. The report is produced each year to transparently share self-reported incidents from districts of violence, vandalism, harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB), weapons offenses, and substance offenses. With the enactment of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, by Governor Christie in January 2011, the 2011-2012 school year represents the first full year of districts' implementation and the separate reporting category for incidents of harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB).

"We are committed to being as transparent as possible about circumstances that impact the health and safety of our students with the goal of ensuring every child in New Jersey can learn in a safe and supportive learning environment," said Commissioner Chris Cerf. "This report provides important information to districts, schools, parents and the public about the areas where programs and policies are having a positive impact, or where more support may be needed."

The Public School Safety Law, passed in 1982, requires the Commissioner of Education to file an annual report detailing the extent 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. Amended by Governor Christie in 2011 through the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR), districts are now required, beginning in September 2011, to report all confirmed incidents of HIB that meet the definition, including those that occur off school grounds, as well as the number of HIB investigations conducted; the trainings provided to prevent and reduce incidents of HIB; and the programs designed to create school-wide conditions to prevent and address HIB.

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

Second, the department provides guidance, trainings and funding to districts towards supporting the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act. In April 2011, the department released a *Model Policy and Guidance For Prohibiting Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying*. Additionally, in late winter and early spring 2011, 30 trainings were provided in each county to orient school staff to the requirements in the ABR along with 10 state-wide trainings in September 2011. At the district level, there were a total of 11,445 trainings related to the reduction of HIB conducted during the 2011-12 school year. Additionally, districts reported that there were 8,760 programs, approaches or initiatives, other than trainings, designed to reduce the occurrence of HIB incidents during the 2011-12 school year. The vast majority of these—approximately 89.8 percent—targeted students.

"Awareness is a necessary first step to taking actions to create safer learning environments for our students," said Commissioner Cerf. "We must remain vigilant in our efforts to work towards better identification and reporting from our schools and districts in order to provide the most accurate information to the public and inform our programmatic and policy decisions."

Summarized below are the changes in the number of self-reported incidents within each category over the three-year period from the 2009-10 school year through the 2011-12 school year:

- The **total number** of incidents reported increased approximately 50% from 17,386 in 2010-11 to 26,139 in 2011-12. This indicates that the ABR has shed light on the issues of HIB and has led to better identification and reporting of incidents. This is a positive development that will ultimately lead to better interventions.
- In the newly-defined **HIB** category, there were 12,024 incidents of HIB reported in 2011-12. As previously noted, the 2011-12 school year was the first year of the new HIB category and therefore this reflects a new baseline upon which to compare in future years.

- In the **violence** category, there were 2,009 fewer total incidents, from 10,407 in 2009-2010 to 8,398 in 2011-2012. However, incidents of HIB are now reported as a separate category when previously these incidents were included in this category. As such, it is more appropriate to compare the following sub-categories over the three-year time period:
 - Reported assaults declined by 102 from 2009-2010 to 2011-2012, which represents a decrease of approximately 3.2 percent.
 - Reported fights decreased by 356, from 2009-2010 to 2011-2012, which represents a decrease of approximately 9.2 percent.
 - Reported criminal threats decreased by 66, from 2009-2010 to 2011-2012, which represents a decrease of approximately 32 percent.
 - Reported incidents of robbery/extortion have decreased by 20, from 2009-2010 to 2011-2012, which represents a decrease of approximately 20.8 percent.
 - There were 1,263 reported incidents of threat in 2011-12. As incidents of HIB and threat were a combined category prior to the passage of the ABR, there is no comparison data available for previous years.
- In the **vandalism** category, the reported number of total incidents declined by approximately 14.4 percent over the three-year period as follows: burglary (11 or approximately 30.6 percent), property damage (234 or approximately 23.4 percent), fire alarm offenses (23 or approximately 31.1 percent), fireworks (14 or approximately 28.6 percent), theft (27 or approximately 2.9 percent), trespassing (14 or approximately 15.8 percent), and bomb threats (13 or approximately 23.2 percent). The one exception was the number of arson incidents which increased from 60 in 2009-10 to 64 in 2011-12, or approximately 6.7 percent.
- In the **weapons** category, reported firearms incidents (handguns and rifles) increased from five incidents reported in 2009-10 to nine in 2011-12. In addition, incidents in the "other weapons" category increased by 55 during the same three-year period or approximately five percent.
- In the **substance** category, the number of incidents of possession of substances increased by 149, or approximately 15 percent from 995 in 2009-10 to 1,144 in 2011-12. Marijuana accounts for the majority (67.9 percent) of the total number of substance incidents reported in 2011-12, and the number of incidents involving marijuana decreased from 2,543 in 2010-11 to 2472 in 2011-12, or a decrease of approximately 2.8 percent.

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.

A copy of the report and summaries of district/school data can be found on DOE's Web site at:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/vandv/index.html>.