



NJDOE News

For More Information Contact the Public Information Office:

Richard Vespucci
Kathryn Forsyth, Director
609-292-1126

For Release: September 15, 2008

DOE Releases Report to the Legislature on Violence and Vandalism in the Public Schools

The total number of incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse in New Jersey public schools declined by approximately one percent between the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, according to the annual report to the Legislature released today by the Department of Education.

Seventy percent of the state's schools reported five or fewer incidents and 915 schools (37 percent) reported no incidents at all, DOE officials said.

In accordance with the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, the department announced that one school, Plainfield High School, has been identified as meeting the state's policy definition of a "persistently dangerous school." The district has been made aware of the designation and parents have been notified. DOE officials are working with the district to develop a corrective action plan to address the issue.

New Jersey school districts and charter schools have been required to report incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse to DOE over the Internet using the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS) since the 1999-2000 school year. The department analyzes the data and produces the annual Report to the Legislature on Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse.

The analysis in the 2008 report includes data from the 2000-01 through 2006-07 school years. In general, over the past seven years, the numbers of reported incidents of violence and vandalism have declined, although there have been fluctuations in various categories. Overall reported incidents of weapons possession and substance abuse declined slightly.

"New Jersey schools remain fundamentally safe places where teachers can teach and children can learn," said Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy. "The department, the districts, the communities and families all view the safety and security of our children as our highest priority. The many programs and policies that have been developed to ensure that this atmosphere is maintained have been a cooperative effort."

"Throughout the state, we are working to protect the health, safety and welfare of children while they are at school, foster climates of civility, prevent and remediate risky behavior, provide support for staff, students and their families and address crisis situations," the Commissioner said.

Reported incidents of violence remain lower than those reported in 2000-01, even though there has been a slight increase over the past two years. In the past two years, there has been little change in the number of fights and assaults (the two most frequent types of reported violence).

Within the category of violence, there were increases between 2004-05 and 2006-07 in the incidents reported in the category of threats, including terroristic threats and in the category of harassment, intimidation and bullying (each increased by 28 percent). DOE officials noted that in recent years, there has been a greater public focus on issues like harassment, bullying and threats.

"The department has taken incidents of harassment, intimidation and bullying very seriously, developing model policies, offering teacher training and implementing programs to identify and deal with matters like this," said Assistant Commissioner for Student Services Barbara Gantwerk. "It's probable that the increased number of incidents reported is a result of this heightened awareness in this area. Our programs to address social-emotional and character development are all designed to create classrooms and schools in which these types of behaviors are unacceptable."

Under the substance category, the use of marijuana remains the most frequently reported substance type but the number of incidents has declined, while incidents involving the use of alcohol and all other substances combined have remained relatively unchanged. Incidents of substance possession have declined from a high of 873 in 2000-01 to a low of 719 in 2006-07 (18 percent.).

School districts are required to have comprehensive drug and alcohol programs that focus on prevention, intervention and referral for treatment.

“We are providing support in this area through technical assistance projects with Rutgers and studying a prevention strategy through a social norms project with Rowan University,” said Assistant Commissioner Gantwerk. “Of course, we would like to see all incidents prevented, but the identification of problems is the first step in helping our students.”

Districts are required to publicly report their EVVRS data and are encouraged to use it as a tool to assess the effectiveness of their policies, programs and practices and to identify other school-level needs.

DOE continues to promote supportive, safe and civil schools by encouraging efforts to implement improved codes of student conduct and programs in the areas of social-emotional and character development, positive behavioral supports and positive school climates. Currently, 193 schools are involved in a special DOE/Rutgers University project to coordinate school efforts in this area.

For the 2007-2008 reporting period, the department had clarified reporting definitions for the various offenses and distributed a training video to districts to promote consistent reporting.

- A copy of the 2008 report can be found [here](#)
- District-by-district data can be found [here](#)
- PDS information can be found [here](#)
- District and School Summary Data can be found [here](#)