



## Christie Administration Announces Annual Report of Violence & Vandalism in Schools

**For Immediate Release**

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**Trenton, NJ** – The New Jersey Department of Education today released the Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in the Schools Report for 2012-2013. The report is produced each year to share self-reported incidents from districts that include violence, vandalism, weapons offenses, substance offenses, and harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB). With the enactment of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act in January 2011, the 2012-2013 school year represents the second full year of districts' reporting HIB incidents in a separate category.

"We are pleased to see positive trends this year. Safe and secure learning environments are a crucial part of preparing kids for college and career, and we have invested significant time to provide support and coaching to districts to reduce incidents of bullying and other forms of violence," said Education Commissioner Chris Cerf. "We applaud all of our districts for working to create safer schools for our students."

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 that occur on school grounds during school hours, on a school bus, or at school-sponsored events. Amended by Governor Christie in 2011 through the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act*, districts are required to report all incidents confirmed by the school board that meet the definition of HIB, including those that occur off school grounds. In addition, they must report 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.

**Key Findings** The Violence and Vandalism Report summarizes two- and three-year trends in the data which are presented below. Key findings include:

- The total number of incidents reported by districts decreased by nearly 5,000 (19 percent) from 26,139 in 2011-12 to 21,170 in 2012-13. This decline is due principally to districts reporting 4,284 (36 percent) fewer incidents of harassment, intimidation and bullying in 2012-13 than the year before. While part of the decline may be attributed to bullying prevention programs in schools, part of the decline can also be attributed to Department of Education working with local districts over the past two years to provide a clearer understanding of the criteria for reporting incidents of HIB. (Examples of the DOE's outreach and training of local school officials is provided below.)
- Compared to last year, the number of incidents reported in the other incident categories decreased as well: Violence (down 4 percent); Vandalism (down 9 percent); Weapons (down 7 percent) and Substance Abuse (down 4 percent).
- Three-year trends are similarly positive:
  - *Violence*: Assaults, fights, robbery/extortion and sex offenses all declined between 10 and 15 percent while incidents of criminal threat, i.e., expressing the intent to commit aggravated assault (or similarly serious violent criminal offense), decreased by 106 (40 percent).
  - *Vandalism*: Bomb threat, burglary, damage to property and theft offenses all showed moderate declines of 10 to 16 percent; while fire alarm offenses declined 44 percent.
  - *Weapons*: The 1,048 incidents represent 5 percent of all incidents reported, with little change in any of the types of weapons involved, except knives, which showed a decrease over the three-year period of 14 percent.
  - *Substance Abuse*: Use of substances decreased 6 percent to 2,500, possession decreased 5 percent to 1,065, and the sale/distribution of substances decreased 21 percent to 138. Marijuana continues to account for the vast majority of the total number of substance incidents reported (69 percent).

**HIB Data** In addition to statewide violence and vandalism information, the report summarizes additional data related to harassment, intimidation and bullying:

- More than a third (35 percent) of HIB incidents occurred in the classroom;
- Student HIB offenders in grades five through eight were responsible for the majority (56 percent) of HIB offenses committed in 2012-13. This population accounts for only 29 percent of all students enrolled in grades K-12 statewide;
- Fifteen percent of HIB incidents targeted students because of their race or color, while three in five targeted students for other distinguishing characteristics. A large majority (73 percent) of HIB offenses committed in 2012-13 had the effect of insulting or demeaning a student or group of students; and

- Districts conducted 21,934 investigations into reported HIB offenses, a decline of nearly 40 percent from the 35,552 investigations conducted in 2011-12.

**DOE Outreach & Training** 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. Those programs include:

- Provided four training sessions for 300 district anti-bullying coordinators and specialists;
- Provided eight separate trainings to 900 members of school districts on "Improving School Climate and the Conditions for Learning: Support for the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act;"
- In collaboration with the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association and the New Jersey State Police, provided seven separate trainings for over 500 school staff on "The Essentials of HIB Investigations;"
- Provided seven additional HIB trainings and presentations, upon request;
- Continued support for school district efforts to create a positive school climate for all students, including the development and implementation of the New Jersey School Climate Survey, and;
- Provided technical assistance, visits and webinars on the use of the violence/vandalism and the HIB reporting systems and their respective reporting requirements to increase consistent and accurate reporting. As with other changes in HIB data, this decline in investigations can likely be attributed both to bullying prevention programs in schools, and also to the DOE working with local districts over the past two years to provide a clearer understanding of the criteria for investigating incidents of HIB.

A copy of the report and summaries of district/school data in the Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse report can be found on DOE's website at [www.nj.gov/education/schools/vandv/](http://www.nj.gov/education/schools/vandv/).

While the Violence and Vandalism report transparently communicates the changes in self-reported incidents from year to year, the report does not identify the reasons for the changes. Changes from year to year may reflect more accurate reporting from districts, or may reflect the results of local school policies and programs to address violence, vandalism, substance abuse and bullying. Changes in all categories require continuous monitoring to ensure that the Department of Education and the local districts are making progress in ensuring safer schools for their students and community.