



## Christie Administration Announces Positive Trends in Annual Violence & Vandalism in Schools Reports

**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 2013-2014. 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.

In addition to the release of the *Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse Report*, the Department also announced the second year of anti-bullying grade reports and the availability of the 2014 New Jersey School Climate Survey.

"Our goal is to ensure that our children have a safe and supportive learning environment, and I'm pleased to see a decline in the number of incidents reported by school districts," said Acting Education Commissioner David C. Hespe. "The data provided from the *Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse Report*, the self-assessment, and the School Climate Survey can be integral to monitor and improve the culture and climate in our schools to promote conditions that support teaching and learning."

**Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse Report** Bullying has been a separate reporting category for the past three years. A third of all reported incidents were categorized as harassment, intimidation and bullying, although the total counts are down 16 percent compared to 2012-2013.

Other key findings from 2013-2014 include:

- School districts reported a total of 19,167 incidents through the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) electronic reporting system, a 9 percent decrease from last year.
- School districts provided 17,729 various programs and initiatives to students, staff and others to reduce harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB) incidents, a notable increase from the 13,718 programs reported the previous year and 8,760 reported in the 2011-12 school year.
- School districts offered 14,473 trainings to staff, students and others related to the reduction of HIB, a substantial increase from past years, when there were 11,445 trainings in 2011-12 and 11,199 trainings in 2012-13.
- Instances of bullying tended to peak at the middle school level.
- The most common disciplinary action following HIB incidents was out-of-school suspension. Remedial actions provided to the offender to prevent future occurrences of HIB primarily included conferences and individual counseling.
- The most commonly reported violent incident, fights, has declined over the past three years by 14 percent.
- There has not been a sizeable change in school reports of substance abuse from the previous two years. Seventy-six percent of substance abuse cases in 2013-2014 involved marijuana on school grounds.
- Police were notified in 30 percent of all reported incidents.
- Weapons and substance abuse incidents were more likely than other incidents to result in 10-day or longer suspensions.

In addition to collecting and reporting the data, the NJDOE has taken a number of steps to assist districts in identifying programs, practices and other resources to improve school climate and help reduce disciplinary incidents each year. School districts, county agencies and state agencies continue to coordinate and collaborate on efforts that promote safe and supportive conditions for learning and also prevent at-risk and disruptive behavior.

The *Violence and Vandalism Report*, which is presented annually to the Governor and Legislature, shows the changes in self-reported incidents from year to year but does not analyze the reasons for the changes. Changes

from one year to the next 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.

The [Violence and Vandalism Report web page](#) contains summaries of district-level and school-level data.

**Anti-Bullying Grades** The state's *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act* requires the Commissioner of Education to grade the efforts of each public school and school district to address bullying in the school environment. The Commissioner has released these anti-bullying grades to schools and districts, which are posted on each school and district website.

Each school's anti-bullying grade, from 0 to 78, was calculated from information provided through a 40-page self-assessment that measured how well each school achieved specific indicators for meeting state regulations and protocols.

In districts where the anti-bullying self-assessment scores indicate the need for improvement, the Department will reach out to offer assistance to clarify the self-assessment core elements and provide guidance in the implementation of the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act*. School safety team and district leaders are expected to be involved in the self-assessment and guide improvements to anti-bullying efforts each year.

**School Climate Survey** The NJDOE also today announced that the School Climate Survey is available for school districts to download and administer to its students, parents and staff. The survey is a tool for local school districts to get feedback on what the school community thinks about their school in areas such as community engagement, morale and the academic climate. Some of the questions also touch upon the emotional environment and physical safety, as well as relationships and communications between the school and its stakeholders.

The survey is not administered by the NJDOE. While the NJDOE encourages schools to conduct a school climate survey as one tool to assess school climate, the state does not require schools to use the survey, and it does not monitor which districts decide to use it. The School Climate Survey was created two years ago in partnership with the Bloustein Center for Survey Research at Rutgers University.

Additional information on the free resource is available on the [NJDOE's School Climate Survey webpage](#).