



Christie Administration Announces Release of Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey Public Schools Report

For Immediate Release

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Trenton, NJ – The New Jersey Department of Education today released the Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey Public Schools report for 2015-16.

The report is produced each year to give an account of self-reported incidents from districts that include the numbers of offenses involving violence, vandalism, and weapons; substance abuse; and harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB). The 2015-16 school year represents the fifth full year of school districts' reporting of HIB incidents in a separate category.

"We are committed to finding ways to build a safer school climate and culture for our students," said Acting Education Commissioner Kimberley Harrington. "The data in the report can be useful in helping schools improve the learning environment for students."

Understanding that year-to-year fluctuations in the data can be erratic, reviewing the past five years of reporting can help explain longer-term trends. The data show that over the last five years from 2011-12 to 2015-16, offenses in four of the five major reporting areas – Vandalism, Weapons, Substance Use, and HIB – have declined.

Notably, HIB incidents have decreased, accompanied by an increase in trainings related to the reduction of HIB.

- In 2015-16, 5,995 HIB incidents were reported by schools. This is lower than in 2014-15, with 6,214 HIB incidents, and significantly lower than the first year of HIB incident reporting in 2011-12 when it was 12,024.
- 1,452 schools reported at least one affirmed incident of bullying in 2015-16. Among schools with no affirmed HIB cases, 50 percent reported at least one HIB investigation during the school year. A majority of the schools reporting no affirmed bullying incidents were elementary schools. This number is lower than in 2014-15, when 1,520 schools reported HIB incidents.
- Schools reported providing 17,671 trainings related to the reduction of HIB – a substantial increase from the previous year's report of 14,810 trainings. The number of trainings focusing on "social skills/relationship improvement, characteristics or needs of individuals or groups at risk for HIB," and "social norms" grew the most from 2014-15 to 2015-16, increasing by 28, 25, and 25 percent, respectively.
- School districts offered 25,114 programs, approaches, or initiatives to reduce HIB incidents in the 2015-16 school year – a substantial increase from the 20,725 in 2014-15.

There has been some decline in the past five years in reports of substance use, possession, or distribution on school grounds.

- There were 3,010 incidents of substance abuse cases in 2015-16 compared to 3,482 in 2011-12.
- 75 percent of substance cases in 2015-16 involved marijuana on school grounds with 2,270 incidents. Alcohol is the substance with the next highest frequency of use on school grounds, with 468 cases representing 16 percent of the total substance abuse incidents.

Vandalism has dropped slowly and steadily every year.

- Vandalism incidents dropped from 1,924 in 2011-12 to 1,423 incidents in 2015-16.
- Theft has decreased since 2011-12, while damage to property has increased slightly.

The number of incidents involving weapons has been relatively stable over the past five school years with some declines overall.

- In 2015-16 there were 1,000 incidents involving weapons reported, while in 2011-12 there were 1,125 incidents.
- There were two handgun incidents in 2015-16 compared to six in 2014-15, 99 incidents with air guns in schools in 2015-16 compared to 110 in 2014-15, and 30 incidents with imitation guns in 2015-16 compared to 28 from 2014-15. There have been no rifle incidents reported by schools in the past three years.

The 8,261 violent incidents reported this year are nearly identical in number to the 8,252 reported in the 2011-12

school year. In the three years following the 2011-12 school year, reports of violent incidents had slightly decreased annually. However, it is unclear whether the increase in reports of violent incidents from 2014-15 to 2015-16 is related to an actual increase in violence in schools, or whether it reflects an increase in accuracy of reporting at the local level. Updated training manuals, targeted monitoring visits, and additional outreach to districts during the 2015-16 school year may have resulted in more accurate reporting by school districts. The Department is closely monitoring this data and is prepared to assist schools in implementing programs and training to address local issues.

The Department has been working with districts to ensure accurate reporting, as well as helping them identify programs, practices and other resources to improve school climate. Some examples of this work include the following: developing a new data-collection system to track violence and bullying; implementing recommendations of the Anti-Bullying Task Force; examining evidence-based practices and research in the fields of social-emotional learning; and providing a tiered system of supports to develop approaches that serve New Jersey students.

The Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey Public Schools report, which is presented annually to the Governor and Legislature, transparently communicates the changes in self-reported incidents from year to year. However, the report does not analyze the reasons for the changes.

The Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey Public Schools report and summaries of district- and school-level data are available on the [NJDOE's website](#).