

Safe Schools

Report 2001-2002

Formerly titled
Violence & Vandalism Report



Produced by
The New Mexico Public Education Department
in partnership with
The University of New Mexico
Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dr. Veronica García
Secretary of Education

Safety in New Mexico's schools is one of the most important issues facing our communities. Every school and school district in the state make it a priority to identify and implement ways to increase the safety, security and integrity of students, teachers, staff, parents and visitors at our schools on a daily basis. Safety is critical for fostering an environment that is conducive to learning and growing, and for building healthier relationships.

This report provides details about safety data that were collected from each of New Mexico's school districts for the 2001-02 school year. It examines key areas of concern across the state, and demonstrates trends in incidents of violence and vandalism. Formerly titled the "Violence & Vandalism Report," its new name reflects the emphasis on safety issues, safe school plans and school safety initiatives.

Among the highlights of this report are the number of areas in which safety has shown steady improvement. The total number of incidents of violence and vandalism was at its lowest point in four years. Violent incidents were down 10% from the previous school year, and incidents of vandalism were down 9%. As a result of the decrease in vandalism, the financial losses resulting from vandalism were half what they had been in previous years.

The number of incidents involving weapons was dramatically lower, as was the number of incidents requiring law enforcement. Gang-related activities were half what they had been the previous year, and drug incidents were likewise less common.

School personnel have worked hard to achieve these safety successes. Some of their stories about designing and implementing safety plans have been included in this report. Their ideas and experiences offer new insights into the activities that occur in each school that can improve safety for everyone.

What the statistics and raw data cannot show, however, are the terrible costs of violent incidents in the schools. While we celebrate the decrease in the number of such incidents, we recognize that even one act of violence is too many. When violence occurs, it disrupts or destroys a life, and the repercussions are felt across the state. In the year following the data reported in this volume, a teacher at an elementary school in Albuquerque was murdered while working after school to grade papers. Her death shocked the entire state, and again raised concerns over how best to increase safety further. The state's Senate and House both passed joint memorials (Senate Joint Memorial 66, House Joint Memorial 66, and Senate Joint Memorial 59) to address school safety. Out of these memorials has come a School Safety Advisory Task Force composed of members of the School Health Unit (Public Education Department), Office of School Health (Department of Health), Office of Emergency Preparedness, Department of Public Safety, School Health Advocates, School Mental Health Advocates, School Nurses Association and the Legislative Education Study Committee. This Task Force will be developing recommendations to address safety awareness and to implement strategies for new safety features in our schools.

Safety will continue to be a priority issue for all of us, and it will continue to be a work in progress. We can see through the stories that are told in this report, as well as through recent legislation and the creation of the School Safety Task Force, that New Mexico is responding to all safety concerns in a compassionate and effective manner, while developing proactive measures to protect everyone in our schools.

INTRODUCTION

Each year since 1989, New Mexico's 89 local school boards have reported incidents of violence and vandalism to the Public Education Department (PED)¹, for the period of July 1 through June 30. This report is for the year 2001-2002, and represents data from all of the 89 districts. Eleven districts reported no violence or vandalism incidents at all. Formerly entitled *The Violence and Vandalism Report*, this report is intended to reflect the preeminence of concerted and coordinated efforts of the past few years to ensure safe schools, and thus it is named the *Safe Schools Report*. This report contains information about how schools are addressing the issue of school safety through the development and implementation of comprehensive Safe School Plans. It contains the data reported by the school districts as well as insights and perspectives from principals, assistant principals and staff from schools and school districts around the state about how to achieve and maintain safe schools.

The purpose of this report is to provide pertinent data for use by policy and decision makers at all levels of the educational process. It contains existing information for the 2001-02 school year about incidents and trends of violence and vandalism, and resources to offer easy access to those involved in prevention and intervention measures. As such, the purpose of statutory measures that initially required the production of this report was merely to gather important information. In the past few years, the PED* initiated a more proactive approach in order to prevent and respond to the occurrence of such incidents. These efforts began with a statewide safe schools forum that resulted in recommendations for school safety. In response to the safe schools forum recommendations, school safety became one of the five accountability indicators for New Mexico schools. To work towards meeting this indicator, every school district in New Mexico has developed and is implementing comprehensive Safe School Plans. These plans address the areas of prevention, policies and procedures and emergency response.

HISTORY OF THE REPORT

New Mexico Statutory Law

The filing of this report was mandated by the State of New Mexico in 1978, through Statutory Law (Article 1, Chapter 22, Sections 1-7, amended 1989). The statutory provisions require school districts to submit an annual report of incidents of vandalism and violence that occur in the schools to the PED*, using the reporting procedures established by the department.

State Board of Education Task Force

In 1996 the State Board of Education (SBE) and the State Superintendent appointed a task force to review the New Mexico Student Rights and Responsibilities regulation, SBE Reg. No. 81-3. The objective of the task force was to determine how well the regulation supports the efforts of local school districts to ensure student safety and to provide an environment that is conducive to learning. The task force concluded that SBE Reg. No. 81-3 (now entitled SBE Reg. 6.11.2 NM AC) was still functional, but recommended several changes. As a result of those recommendations, the SBE made the following changes to the regulation in 1997:

¹ Formerly State Department of Education (SDE)

1. Provisions were made for appropriate state, local agency, and/or community input into the formulation and enforcement of school rules, including those related to corporal punishment.
2. Prohibitions against gang-related activity, sexual harassment, and the possession of weapons in school.
3. The SBE² updated and/or provided general provisions dealing with protected free speech and expression, search and seizure, attendance requirements, and discipline of students for out of school conduct that affects the school.
4. The SBE* made clarifications/amendments of certain provisions dealing with procedures for detention, suspension and expulsion of students.

Planning for Safe Schools in New Mexico

In February 1997, a two-day planning forum was held in Albuquerque with more than 150 participants statewide, including youth, to prepare a set of strategic goals and plans for safe schools. Organized into 15 planning groups, each of which addressed a specific issue, they completed a strategic planning process, as each group assessed the status of the question before it and proposed goals, action steps and measures of success. Public Education Department staff then translated the results of group discussions at the forum into goals, objectives, activities and measures of success, as well as resources.

To make sure that the plan was comprehensive—incorporating all issues that impact the school environment—they included features of other plans and identified various resources from other state offices that can assist in ensuring a safe school environment. The goals resulting from the safe schools planning forum are:

- Goal 1: All students in New Mexico will have access to public educational services in a safe, healthful, caring, and respectful learning environment.
- Goal 2: All school personnel in New Mexico will be able to carry out their duties in a safe, healthful, caring, and respectful work environment.
- Goal 3: Students, school staff, parents, and communities will understand that safe schools are everyone's responsibility.

"Everyone is rising to the challenge and doing a better job."

A Comprehensive Approach that is Unique

All fifty states are required to have emergency preparedness plans that include procedures for schools in the event of a national or local disaster or foreign aggression. New Mexico was the first state in the nation to require all schools to develop and implement *comprehensive safe schools plans* that include prevention, policies and procedures as well as emergency response. In addition, the Public Education Department is currently in the process of developing guidance for safe schools plans to include a section on how to respond after an incident has occurred (postvention). There are, therefore, three components that comprise the *Safe School Plan*.

² Now called Public Education Commission (PEC)

1. The *Prevention* component is designed to provide instructions for school staff about how to prevent potentially harmful situations. This section includes information about health education, various prevention programs, counseling and mental health services, traffic safety, and elements of secure schools and environmental design inspections.

2. The *Policies and Procedures* component provides directions for school staff about how to intervene in potentially harmful situations. It includes policy and procedure guidelines about what kinds of discipline to impose for various infractions; about the need for dress codes, maintaining attendance, reporting suspected cases of abuse and neglect; and about alternative education options.

3. The *Response* component prepares schools for potential emergency situations, with guidance for how to identify security needs, develop prevention and intervention techniques, evaluate physical facilities and communicate with staff and students in times of crisis and in preparing for possible incidents. It also includes, in addition to planning directives, instructions for training school personnel and students with practice drills. For this section, each school is expected to have at hand emergency phone numbers and instructions for emergency management team personnel, examples of various kinds of emergency situations and procedures for how to handle those situations, and the function of crisis counseling.

The development of this comprehensive plan with these components meets the requirement of the Accountability Program for New Mexico Schools, which was adopted by the State Board of Education (now the Public Education Commission) for one of the five indicators, specifically School Safety. The New Mexico plan was first implemented during the 1998-1999 academic year, with directives sent to each school district to prepare a comprehensive plan, and to submit this to the SBE (now PEC). The planning should take into account unique features of the school environment or location and to incorporate these in preparing for the full range of possible activities necessary to ensure a safe and respectful learning environment.

The School Health Unit of the PED prepared a template to assist school districts with meeting this requirement, which they could use to prepare their plans. As part of this process, district planning meetings included school personnel, parents and relevant community groups to obtain input for identifying unique conditions in order to develop detailed response plans for various situations in each school. To meet the accountability requirements for safe schools, districts identified goals and benchmarks to measure future progress and to document significant changes that they planned and/or that occurred. The plan also required a staff development section outlining training plans for school staff about how to respond if an incident or event occurred. As a working document, school districts will continually review and update or revise their Safe School Plans. Most school districts have a safety committee or task force in place that is responsible not only for developing and updating the original plans but also for conducting these reviews. Administrators are being asked to share their success stories about responding to special situations that occurred during the prior year. These can provide valuable insights for other district administrators and state officials.

With a comprehensive approach, vast improvements have been made in most schools in preparing for possible incidents. Rather than merely conducting fire drills, the only activity required by law, many districts now practice evacuations and shelter-in-place drills. In addition, schools are implementing a variety of prevention activities to defuse potential confrontations, such as mentoring programs, mediation programs, and anti-bullying programs and policies. Schools also reviewed the

impact of seemingly extraneous issues such as dress codes, and conducted assessments to identify what is necessary for a comprehensive approach as, for instance, fences to keep coyotes out of a school yard, procedures if a hot air balloon lands on or a bear wanders onto the school grounds.

An exceptionally valuable outcome of this approach is the strengthening of partnerships among state and local agencies to support safe school efforts. Through these collaborative efforts, schools have sought and successfully obtained funds to enhance campus security and to purchase other equipment to promote safe and drug-free schools. With assistance from local law enforcement personnel, some schools established a code system to alert others through the public address system about a potential danger or incident. Because of the enhanced partnership efforts in conjunction with preparing safe schools plans, and the comprehensive nature of the plans, schools are much more efficient and effective in responding to incidents than they were in the past.

State Board of Education Strategic Issue #4: Safe Schools and Respectful Learning Environments

The following strategic goals expressly recognize the responsibility of the State Board of Education (now the Public Education Commission) and its schools to ensure safe schools and provide classroom environments that promote learning and mutual respect.

Goal 4.1. Create school environments that protect children and teachers from harm originating from any source; eliminate theft, intimidation, harassment, threats and possession of weapons, alcohol and other drugs. Set high expectations for self-discipline.

Goal 4.6. Review school safety plans and their implementation.

Fulfilling the Provisions of the 2002 *No Child Left Behind* Act

This proactive approach of the PED, and of the school districts as they work with local constituencies and agencies, is consistent with the provisions of *No Child Left Behind*. Under this act, the “Unsafe School Choice Option” directs the states to define and identify schools that are “persistently dangerous,” and to offer alternative schools within the local education agency both to victims of violent offenses and to families if their children attend a school that meets the definition. A provision is also included that supports teachers and principals with maintaining order and discipline in the classroom without fear of litigation. States must certify to the Secretary of Education of the U.S. Department of Education that they are in compliance with this act as a condition of receiving funds under *No Child Left Behind*.

Joint Memorial Legislation

In 2003 (the year following this data report), the New Mexico state legislature passed three joint memorials addressing school safety. All three were written in response to the violent death of Carolyn Thurman Rustvold, a teacher at Montezuma Elementary School in Albuquerque early in the year. Senate Joint Memorial 66 requested the Legislative Education Study Committee to identify methods to enhance security at schools. House Joint Memorial 66 requested the State Board of Education and the Public Education Department to review school safety plans to assess the ability of those plans to ensure the safety of school employees and students at school. Senate Joint

Memorial 59 requested the public school Capital Outlay Council to study the need for emergency notification systems in schools and to calculate the costs and feasibility of implementing such a system in every school within 3 years.

At the time of the publication of this report, the School Health Unit of the Public Education Department has begun to review these legislative initiatives, and has convened a School Safety Advisory Task Force to produce practical recommendations for enhancing school safety.

Greatest Safety Issues Faced by New Mexico Schools

Schools face a number of issues that relate to the safety and security of their students. Because the majority of this report focuses on the data provided by school districts about violent incidents, possession of weapons, reports to law enforcement, vandalism and thefts, it can leave the impression that these are the most common safety concerns in the schools. However, in discussions with a number of school principals, assistant principals and staff around the state, it became apparent that issues of criminal behavior, violence or weapons possession were the rare exception.

We interviewed a number of school principals and district staff about school safety. We asked them what were the greatest safety issues faced by schools today. Bullying behavior was mentioned by several schools as their biggest or most common safety problem in the schools. One school principal told us that their school has had to develop bullying interventions to decrease fighting, even on the buses. A safety coordinator discussed bullying behavior at length, describing how important it is to address it correctly in order to avoid escalating potential problems of violence. In their experience, the correct response to bullying is not just punitive but also educational. According to this person, building a school-wide policy of service-based learning can help school personnel to identify the causes of bullying and to address them at the individual level: “Bullying comes from a child that hasn’t had an opportunity to do things for other people outside of himself.” A third individual agreed that dealing with bullying should begin before the behavior is observed by “making kids aware of appropriate behavior.” According to another principal, this involves being aware of student needs and monitoring their emotional well-being.

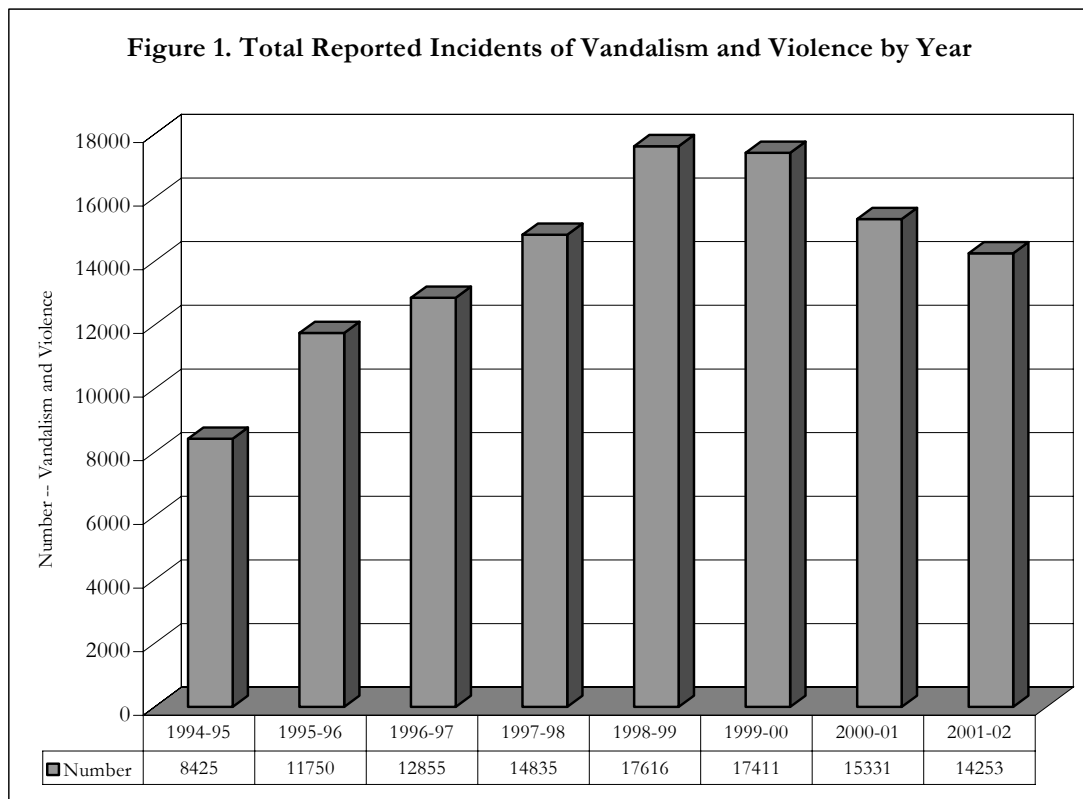
The principals also identified a number of outside influences that can impact student safety and well-being. They reported being vigilant about outsiders coming into the school without valid reasons. They also talked about the impact on students’ well-being of the presence of drugs and alcohol in the community or homes, along with the lack of parental supervision at home. A couple of principals mentioned their concern about national safety issues such as terrorism, but thought that these were not the most immediate safety issues that ordinarily face the schools.

Additional safety issues that schools face range from the daily concerns about traffic safety when parents pick up and drop off children to the rare possibility of wildfires in the area. Schools have had to devise far-ranging safety plans to include appropriate responses to all of these concerns, and they have done a remarkable job. As one middle school principal said, “Safety is important to all of us. That’s why we are working on ways to improve it all the time, to make our schools a better place.”

“Bullying comes from a child that hasn’t had an opportunity to do things for other people outside of himself.”

OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS IN ENSURING SAFETY IN NEW MEXICO SCHOOLS

Across the State of New Mexico, 89 school districts are responsible for educating 350,827 students, in 750 public and 292 nonpublic schools. The quality of the educational experience of these students, and of their more than 21,000 teachers and 12,200 other school officials, is directly affected by the school environment, not merely whether it is a stimulating learning place, but whether they feel secure. As Figure 1 shows, New Mexico's schools have made significant strides in the past three years in reducing the number of incidents of violence and vandalism that can disrupt students' learning.



These results may be partially attributed to the comprehensive approach that has been taken toward ensuring safe schools, with the development and implementation of safe school plans.

A decrease occurred in 2001-02 from the previous year in the total number of incidents, a decrease of 1,078 or 7.03%. This change continues the trend that began in the 1999-00 school year of having decreasing incidents, with 3,363 less or nearly 19.1% fewer incidents in 2001-02 over that three-year period.

How Schools are Addressing Safety

New Mexico schools have been developing detailed and thoughtful plans for addressing safety issues. These plans go well beyond the standard fire drills and often include shelter in place or evacuation drills, as well as plans to address natural disasters or man-made incidents. Many schools have implemented systems of codes for various levels of emergencies or evacuations and they train teachers, staff and students how to behave in the event of a code situation. The codes themselves vary from school to school, but all include fire, bomb threats, evacuation, and shelter in place.

Having these plans in place and training everyone about their roles has helped the entire school community feel more prepared and safer. One of the principals we spoke with described having to put their evacuation plan in place because of a chemical situation that arose from a construction project. The staff implemented the safety plan to the letter. The school was evacuated quickly, safely and with no problems. In fact, the school received commendations for its smooth and speedy response.

Open communication between the staff, teachers, students and parents is an important ingredient for safe schools. Students need to be comfortable reporting safety concerns to teachers. Parents need to be informed and involved, and the community needs to be included in planning for contingencies in the event of emergencies. Several schools reported having regular safety committees, composed of staff, teachers and parents. These committees meet regularly to review safe school plans and develop new measures. Some invite students to participate in identifying and reporting safety concerns, and developing creative solutions. They encourage regular reports of any safety concerns, and make certain to address the issues immediately.

Additional steps that schools take to improve safety include training teachers in CPR and first aid, emphasizing *Character Counts* training, involving parents in improving parking lot safety, and working closely with fire and police departments to monitor and improve plans and drills. Safety measures also include diversity training, frequent communication with parents through newsletters and parent surveys, open forums, mentoring, and visitor badges.

"We don't have anything that happens that we're not prepared for."

"Communication is strong."

"Trust issues are big."

Safe School Plans

Components of a Safe School Plan include (1) prevention; (2) policies, procedures, training and drills; and (3) response. These plans can make the difference between being ready for an emergency and being caught unprepared. The schools with well developed and implemented Safe School Plans did not necessarily report fewer incidents or problems, but they did report quicker, more effective responses to those incidents.

“Everything went according to plan, and the plan was robust.”

At the minimum, Safe School Plans included instructions for appropriate responses for fires, emergency drills and evacuation plans. Schools train staff and teachers in emergency responses, regularly conduct fire drills and practice the response time for everyone in the schools. Rural schools are particularly concerned about the dangers of wildfires and the challenges of evacuation for large-scale fire dangers. Thus, rural schools especially stressed the importance of working closely with the fire marshals, and park and forest service personnel for devising appropriate evacuation strategies.

Beyond the response measures, many schools include additional policies and procedures for safety issues, including discipline, reporting violence or abuse, dress codes, bicycle and parking lot safety, visitor sign-in and badges, absence home calling programs, environmental checks and inspections. Prevention components in the Safe School Plans, beyond training and drills, included training in health and life skills, conflict resolution, peer mentoring, credentialing programs, counseling, traffic safety and health fairs. These components focused on the physical and emotional health of students, helping them to develop appropriate skills and behaviors, and helping them to understand their roles in enhancing school safety.

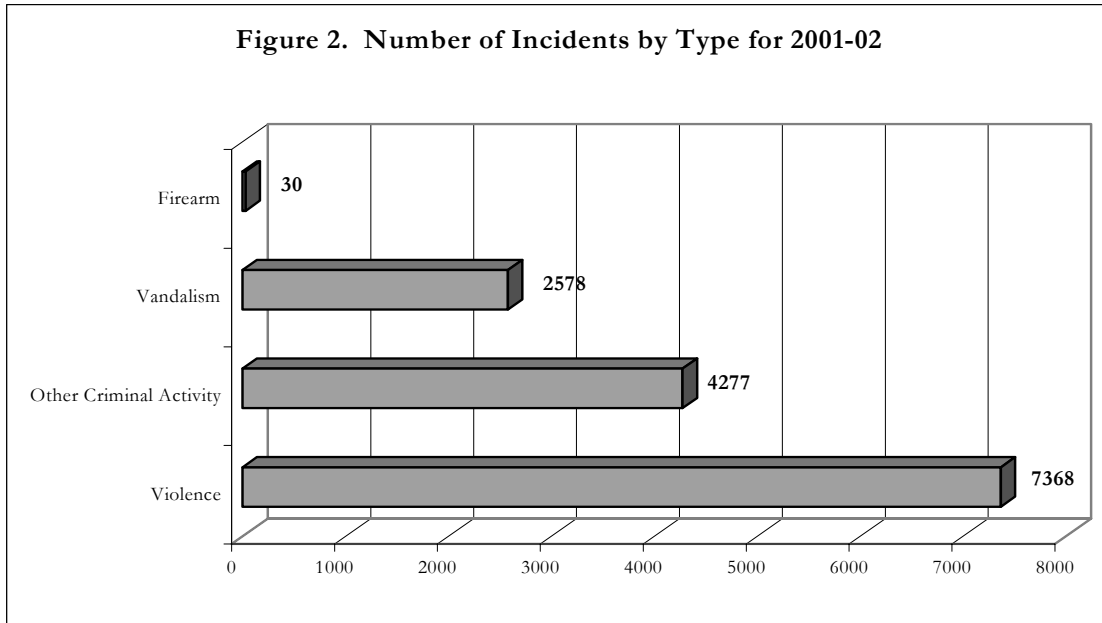
As a result of the Safe School Plans, the school officials we spoke with described their staff and students as being more comfortable and feeling safer because of the increased awareness and seriousness with which school safety issues were being addressed. Parents appreciated the increased communication, and had a better understanding of the steps the schools were taking in keeping their children safe. Building trust among all participants has been an important aspect of the increased communication, which is a key component of school safety.

“Several years ago it happened, and it was a chaotic mess. Now with the plan, things go a lot more smoothly.”

“Everyone got home safely.”

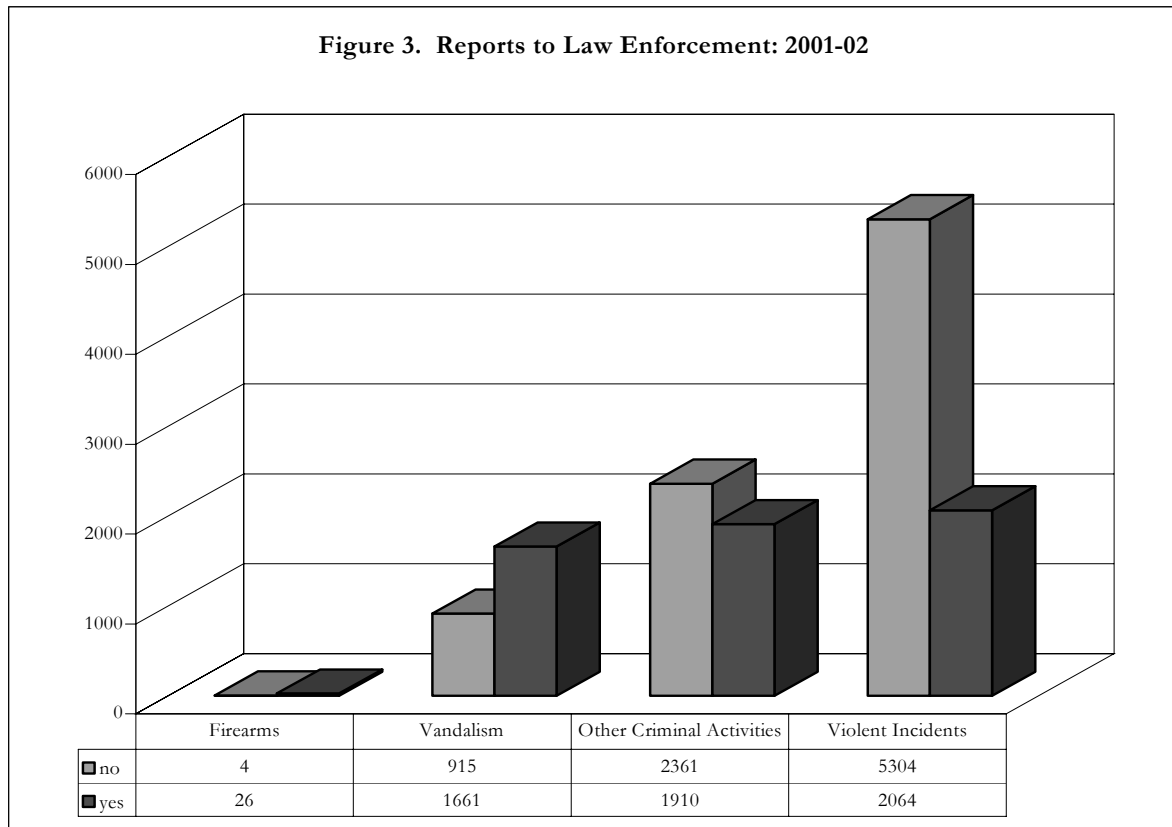
VIOLENT INCIDENTS IN THE SCHOOLS

Overall, incidents of violence and vandalism in New Mexico schools in the 2001-02 school year were 7% lower than in the previous year. Violent incidents alone were down 10%, other criminal activity was down 3%, and vandalism was down 9% from the previous year. The number of firearm incidents was higher than the previous year, with 30 incidents in 2001-02 compared with 20 incidents the previous year.



Although the number of firearm incidents was higher than the previous year, it is clear from Figure 2 that firearm incidents were by far the least frequent of the 14,253 incidents in New Mexico schools, accounting for only 0.21% of all incidents. Violent incidents (fights and assaults of various kinds) comprise nearly 52% of all reported incidents for the year. Vandalism accounts for 18% and other criminal activities account for 30% of the reported incidents.

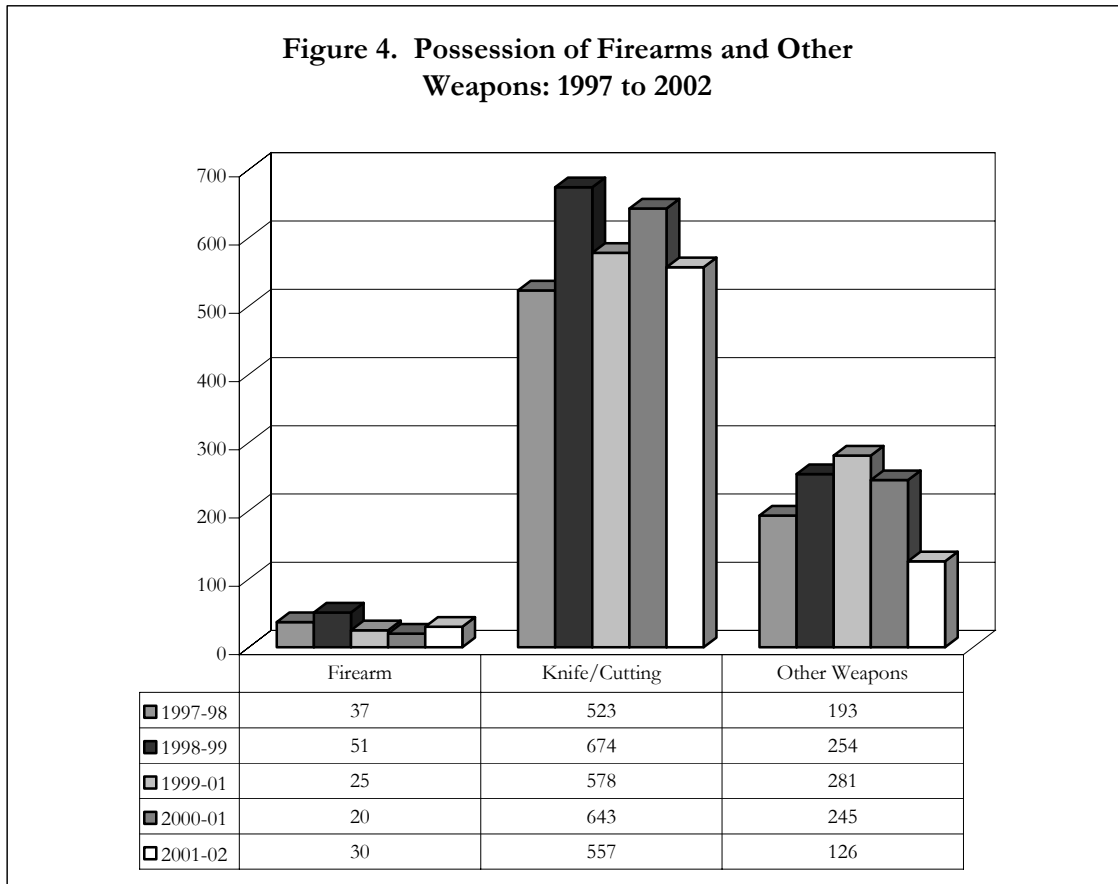
Schools reported about 14% fewer incidents of violence, vandalism or firearms to law enforcement agencies than had been reported in the previous year. Figure 3 provides data about the number of incidents of each kind that were reported and not reported to law enforcement personnel.



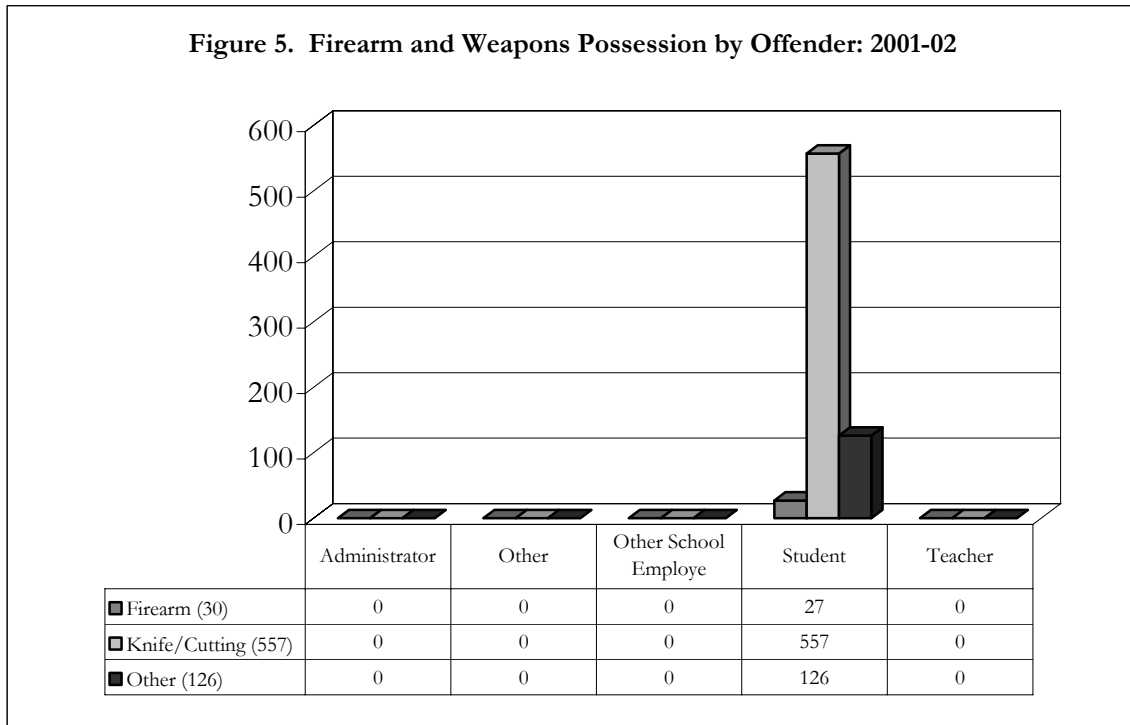
Continuing the trends of recent years, the data for 2001-2002 show a significant decrease for nearly all types of incidents of violence, vandalism and other criminal activities. These trends indicate the breadth and quality of the measures taken by school districts statewide in actively addressing these issues in order to create safer and healthier schools.

WEAPONS POSSESSION AND THE GUN-FREE SCHOOLS ACT

Firearm possession in the schools, although serious, remained rare (30 incidents of firearm possession were reported in 2001-2002, or 4.2% of all weapons incidents), slightly greater than the previous two years. Figure 5 shows that, in contrast, the number of incidents concerning knives or other weapons were lower than the previous three years.



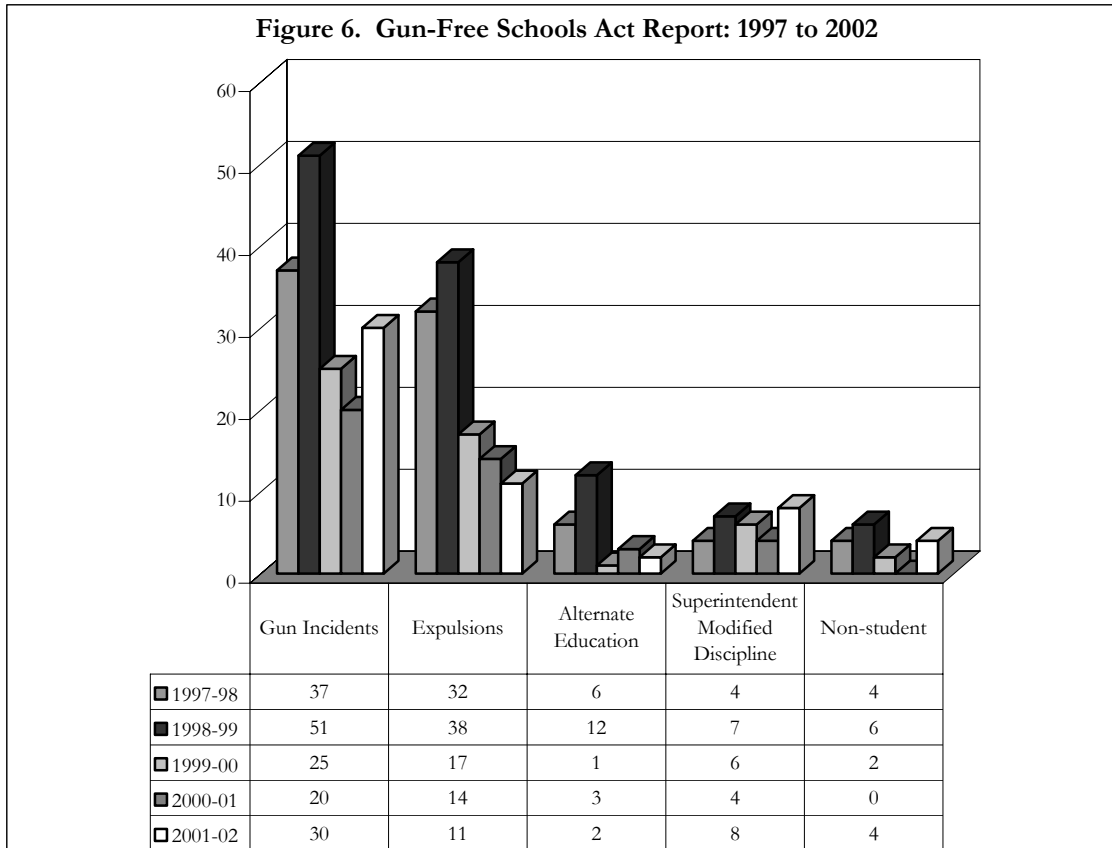
The information contained in Figure 5 identifies who possessed these weapons. The chart indicates the number of incidents but it is not corrected to eliminate repetition for individuals who possessed a weapon on more than one occasion. That is, some individuals may have been the offenders in more than one incident, but the data are not corrected to reflect this.



Students were reported as being responsible for all of the reported weapons incidents. In the previous school year, about 2% of the weapons incidents were caused by someone other than students.

Gun-Free Schools Act Report

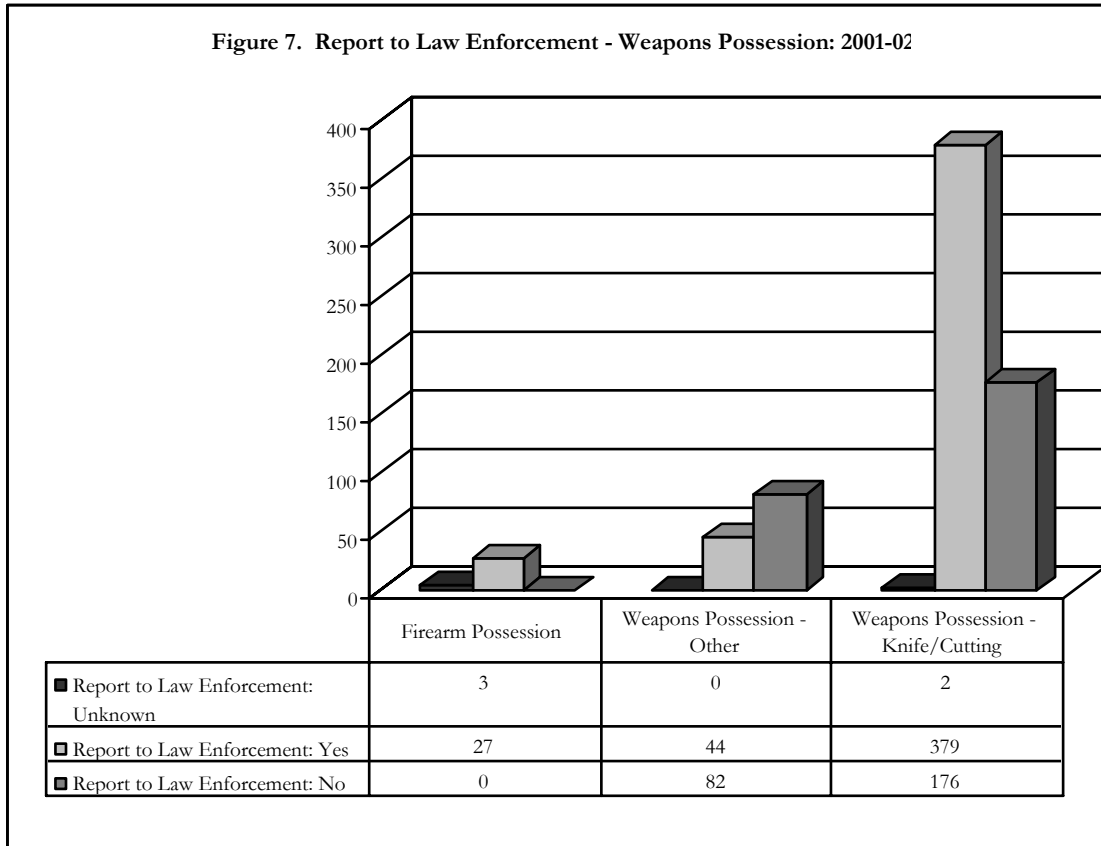
The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA), Part F of Title XIV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, requires each state to have in effect a state law that requires school districts to expel any student who has brought a firearm to school, for a period of not less than one year. Any district receiving ESEA funds must refer these students to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system. The state law must allow the chief educational administrative officer to modify the expulsion order on a case-by-case



basis, and to elect to provide educational services to the student in an alternative setting. Each state must provide an annual report in December about the prior school year to the Secretary of Education about the implementation of the Act's requirements. The data in Figure 6 constitute the information that was gathered for the report for school year 2001-02 and, for purposes of comparison, the data for four previous years are also included.

Reports of Weapons Possession to Law Enforcement

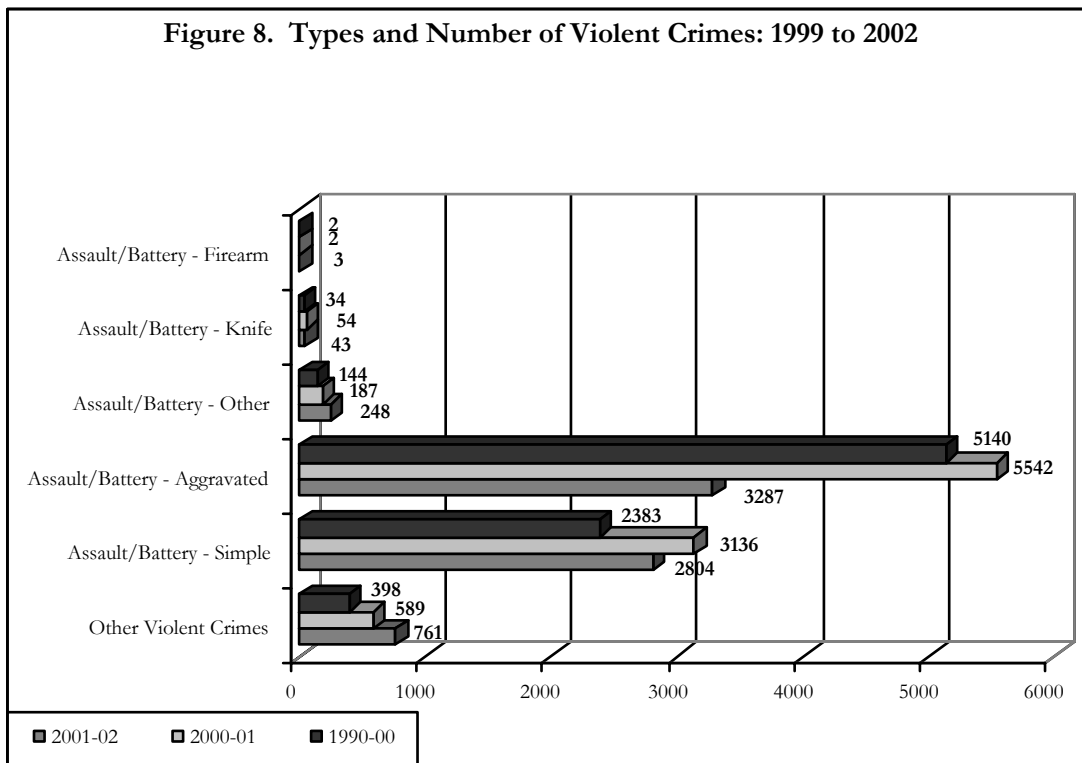
Figure 7 identifies the number of weapons incidents reported to law enforcement during school year 2001-02. Twenty-seven of the 30 firearm incidents were reported (90%), more than 68% of knife incidents were reported, and 35% of other weapons possessions were reported.



The policy and practice of reporting the majority of such incidents to law enforcement agencies may be an effective deterrent to prevent further incidents of weapons possession in the schools.

INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE

A total of 7,146 incidents of violent crimes in the schools were reported during 2001-2002, nearly 12% fewer than were reported in the previous year. Nearly half of the incidents (46% of all reported incidents) were aggravated assault/battery, followed by simple assault/battery (39% of all reported incidents); this is nearly 11% lower than the previous year. Slight increases were seen in the number of reported incidents of violent crimes in the “other violent crimes” category (761 incidents were reported, or 29% more than the previous year), and in the “assault/battery – other” category (248 incidents reported, or 33% more than the previous year).

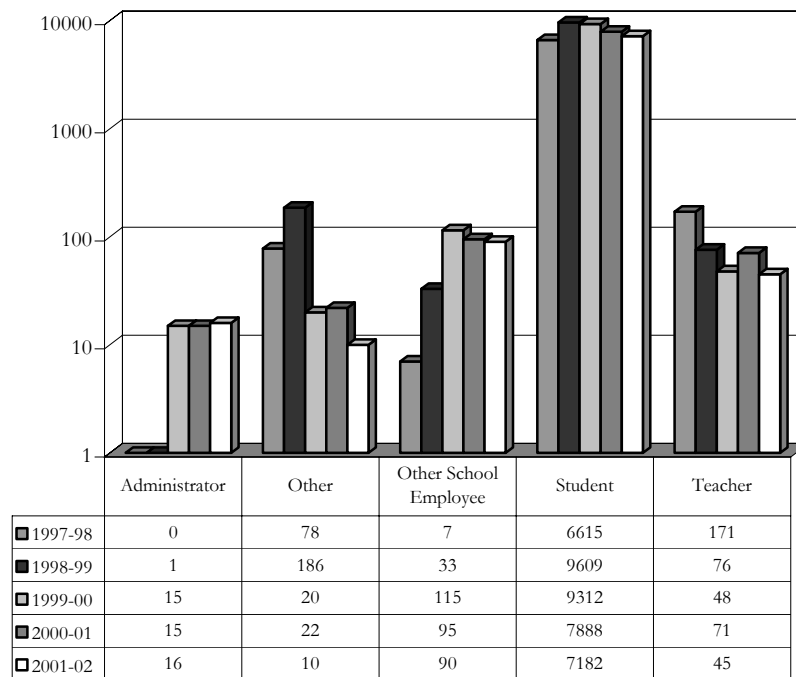


The following pages provide details about the victims and offenders of these violent crimes.

Students comprised the vast majority of offenders for the reported violent crimes. As Figure 9 shows, in 2001-2002, 97.8% of the offenders were students, 1.23% were other school employees, 0.61% were teachers, 0.14% were individuals from outside the school, and 0.22% were school administrators. These percentages are nearly identical to the previous year.

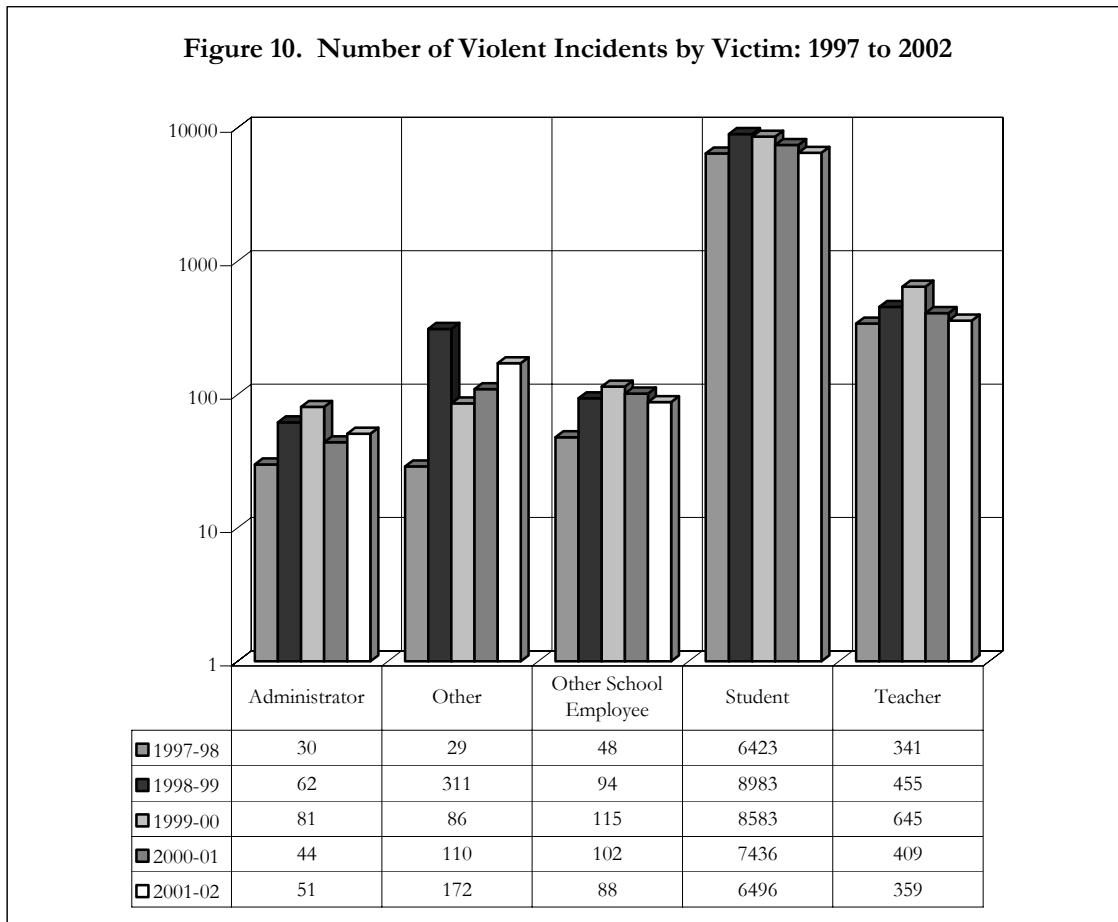
The largest change during the four years since 1997-98 has been in the number of incidents of violent crime committed by individuals outside the school. The number of such incidents dropped from a high of 186 in the 1998-99 school year to only 10 in 2001-02. Schools have been very conscientious in designing and enforcing campus security systems to prevent individuals who are not students or school personnel, or with legitimate reason to be there, to gain entrance to school grounds and buildings and cause disruptions and violent incidents. Each school district has included in its Safe Schools Plan methods to monitor the entry of non-school individuals onto school property, and these plans appear to be effective.

Figure 9. Number of Violent Incidents by Offender: 1997 to 2002



In addition to being the primary offenders, students accounted for the majority of the victims of these violent crimes. Of the 7,166 incidents of violence in 2001-02 where the victim was reported, 90.65% were students, 5.01% were teachers, 2.4% were individuals from outside the school, 1.23% were other school employees and .71% were administrators (see Figure 10).

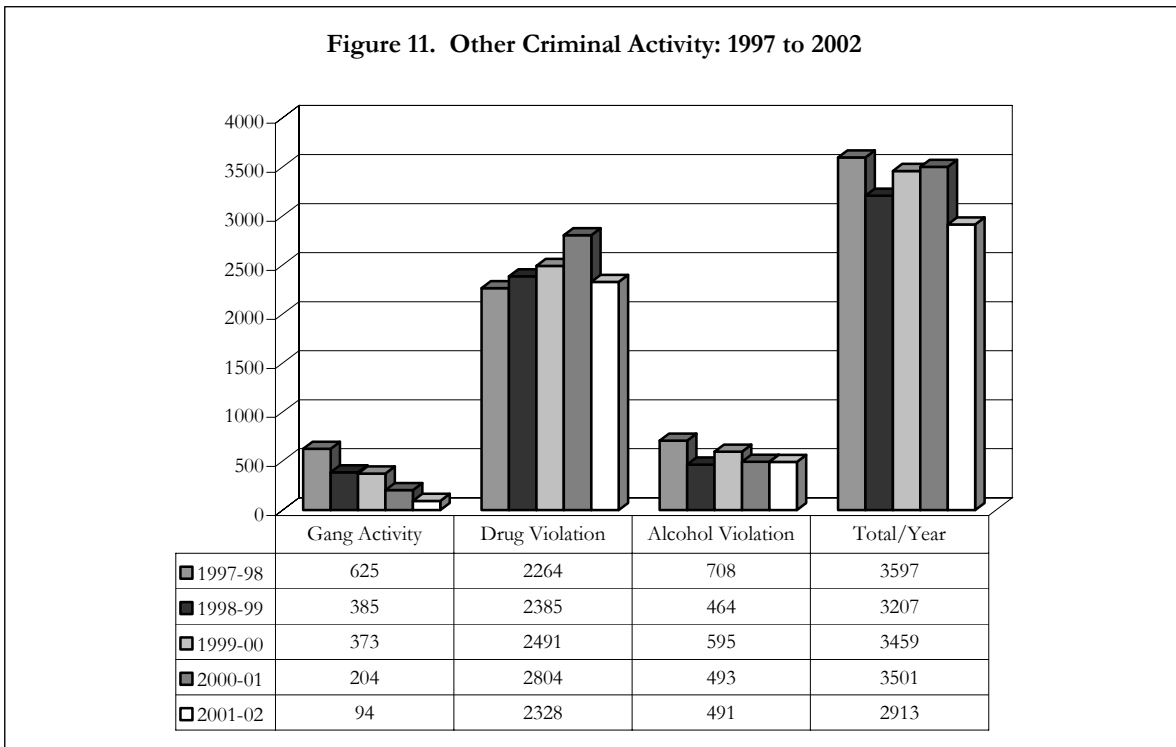
The number of victims of these violent incidents who were individuals from outside the school increased slightly over the previous year, as did the number of victims who were administrators. For all the other categories, the number of victims decreased from the previous year.



OTHER CRIMINAL OFFENSES

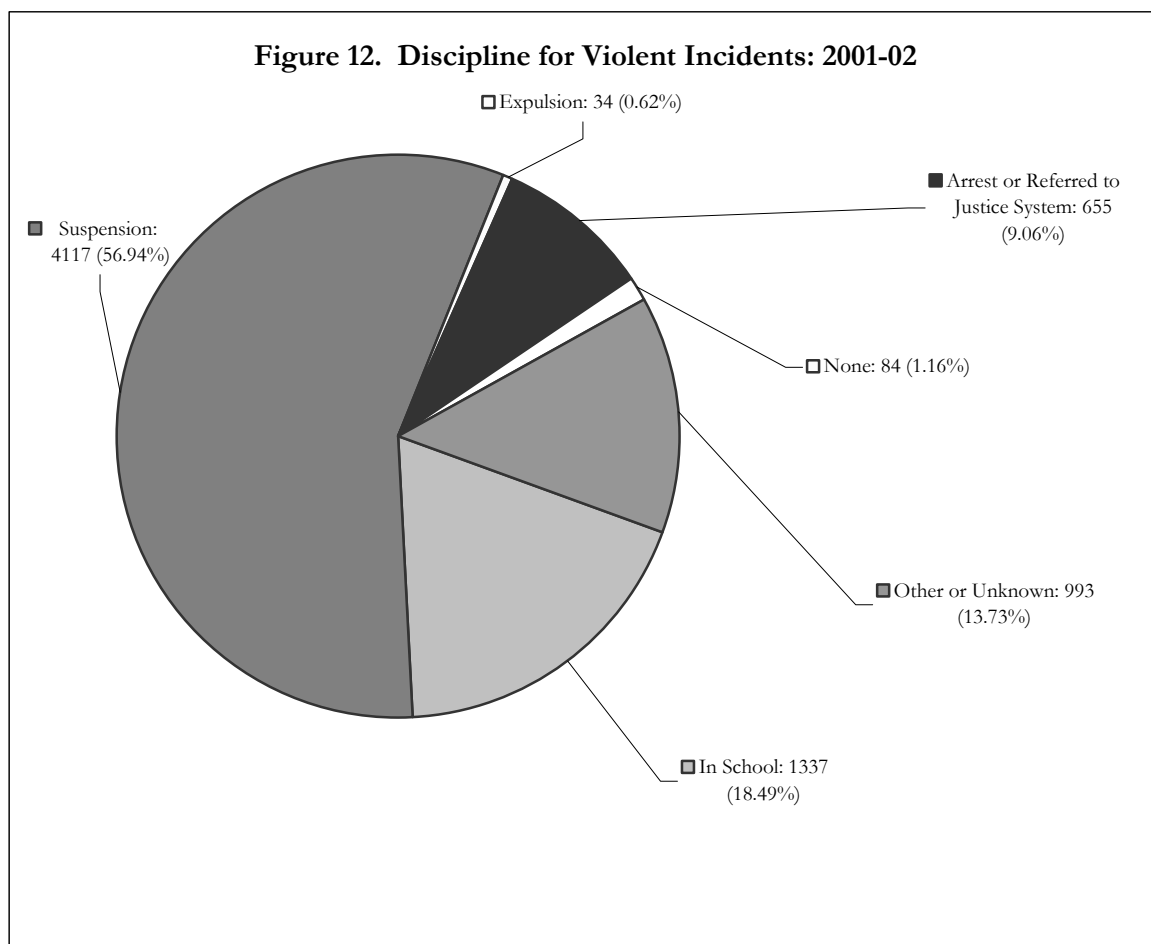
In addition to reports of violent crimes, assaults, weapons possession and vandalism, other criminal activities are also reported annually. These activities include gang-related activities, drug violations, and alcohol violations. As Figure 11 shows, incidents of criminal activity decreased by 17% in 2001-02 from the previous year, and 19% since 1997-98.

The number of incidents of gang activity and alcohol violations declined over this five-year span, including a significant decrease from the previous year. From 1997 to 2002, gang activity decreased by 85% (down 531 incidents, from 625 to 94 incidents), and alcohol violations decreased by 30% (down 217 incidents, from 708 to 491 incidents). Drug violations, which had risen during the previous four years, dropped 17% from the previous year, nearly as low as during the 1997-98 school year.



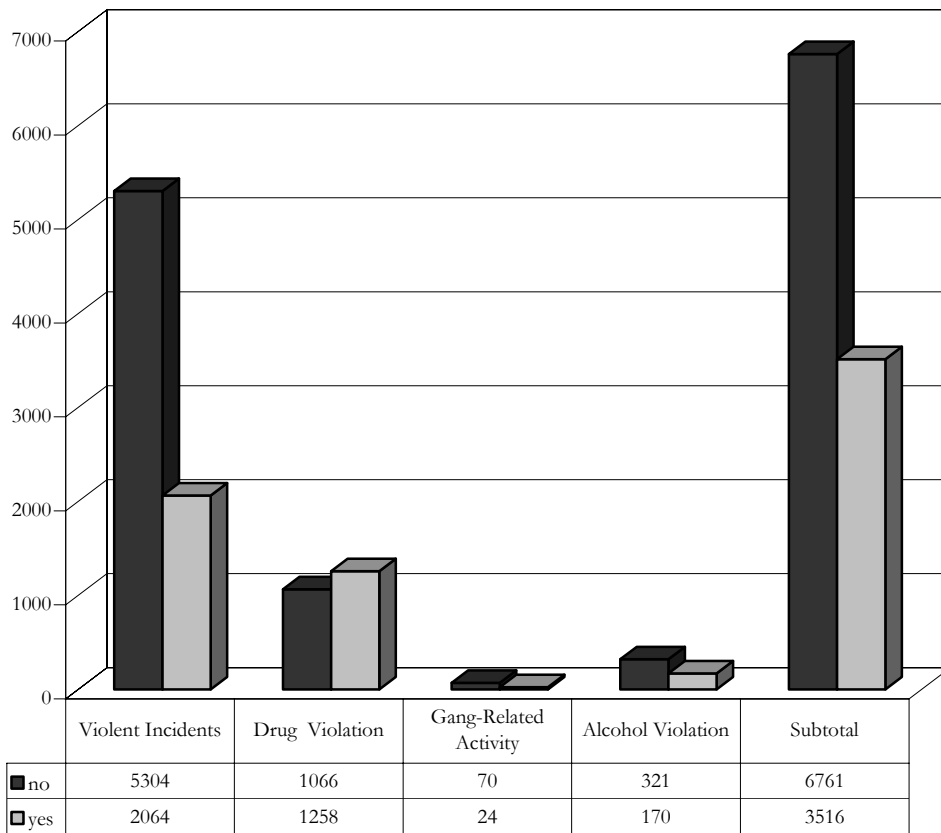
Responses to Incidents of Violence and Other Criminal Offenses

Most of the New Mexico schools' Safe School Plans include a progressive set of disciplinary procedures for incidents that occur in the schools. This begins with calling the student's parents or guardians at the first instance, then requiring the student in consultation with school officials and parents to develop a plan to change the offending behavior, and then, if another incident occurs, the consequence can be suspension. As noted in figure 12, of the total of 7,220 violent incidents, suspensions constituted the largest number of disciplinary actions, nearly 57% (4117 incidents). In-school disciplinary measures comprised more than 18% (1337) of the disciplinary measures; 9% (655) resulted in arrest or being referred to the justice system; and less than 1% (34) were expelled. The latter two disciplinary measures, arrest and expulsion, are imposed for the most serious infractions. 1% (84) had no disciplinary outcome, and more than 13% (993) were described as having other or unknown disciplinary actions.



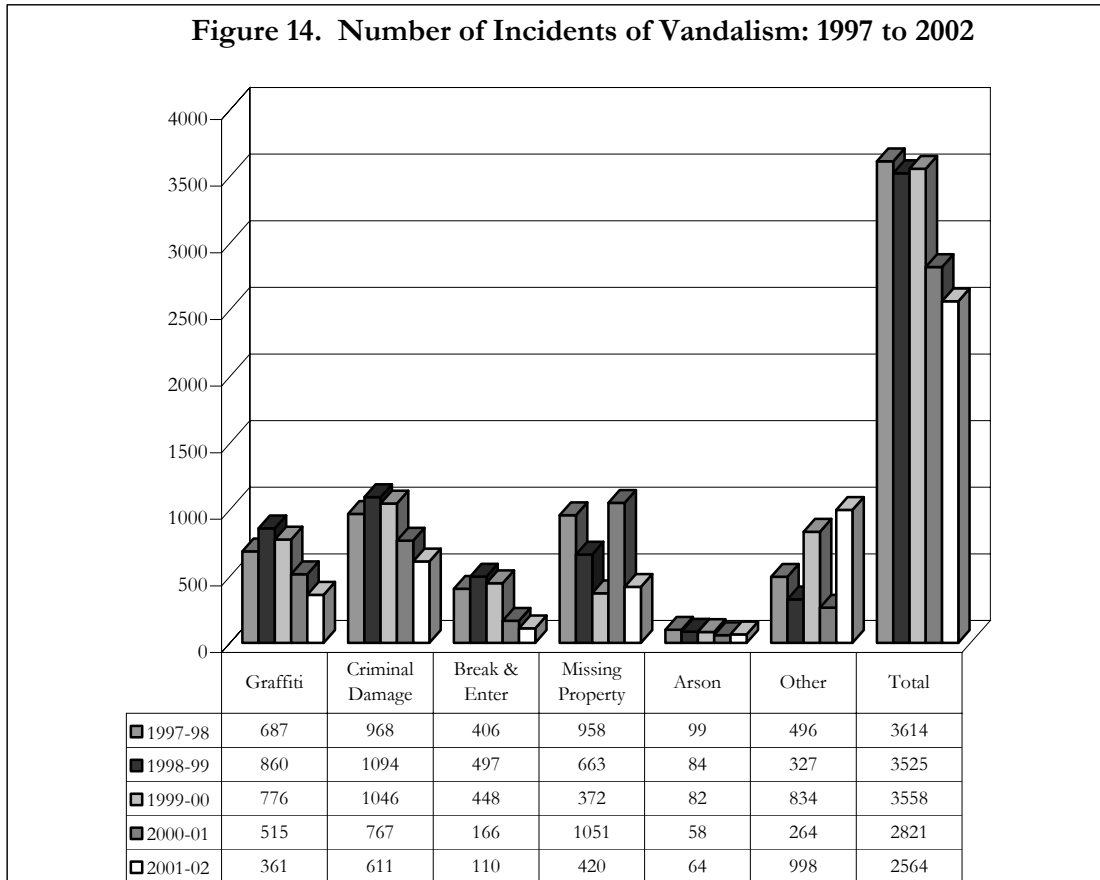
School districts provided information about the number of incidents of both violent and other criminal activities that were reported to law enforcement officials. As shown in Figure 13, of the total number of 7,368 violent incidents, 28% (2064 incidents) were reported to law enforcement officials. Of the total number of 2,324 drug violations, 54% (1258) were reported to law enforcement officials. Of the 94 gang-related events, 25% (24) of the 94 gang-related events were reported. Of the 491 alcohol violations, nearly 35% (170) were reported to law enforcement. Schools are reporting the majority of all drug violations to law enforcement officials, but smaller proportions of other violent or criminal incidents.

Figure 13. Reports to Law Enforcement of Violent Incidents and Other Criminal Activity: 2001-02



Incidents of Vandalism

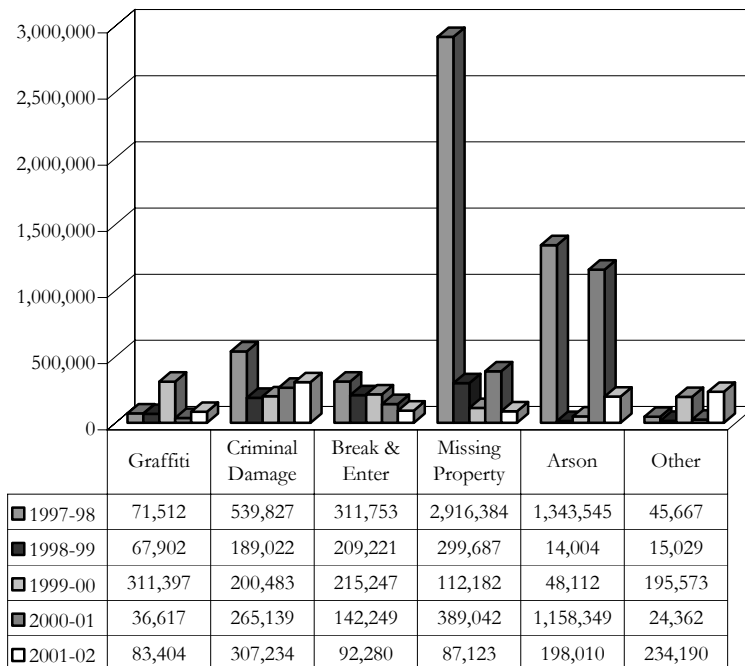
Vandalism in various forms creates conditions that seriously disrupt the educational setting, causing financial loss and emotional distress to students and educators alike. For the 2001-02 school year, vandalism accounted for 18% of all incidents of violence and vandalism, representing 9% fewer incidents than the previous year. It continues a trend with regard to the decreasing numbers of incidents over the previous four years (see Figure 14), from 3,614 in 1997-98 to 2,564 incidents in 2001-02, a decrease of 29% in 5 years.



Incidents of graffiti, criminal damage, breaking and entering, and missing property were all lower than the previous year. Incidents of arson (only 2.5% of all vandalism incidents) were 10% higher, and “other” incidents were dramatically higher than the previous year. The noticeable change in the number of incidents for the different categories most likely reflects increased vigilance in some areas.

The financial costs of vandalism can be enormous, especially in cases that involve arson and serious criminal damage to school buildings. Figure 15 indicates that, overall, vandalism incidents cost the public schools, staff, students and parents over \$1 million for the 2001-02 school year, half the cost of vandalism incidents in 2000-01. While the number of incidents has decreased, however, the cost per incident has increased. For example, although the *number* of incidents of criminal damage was 20% lower in 2001-02 than the previous year, the financial *costs* for this type of incident increased by nearly 16%.

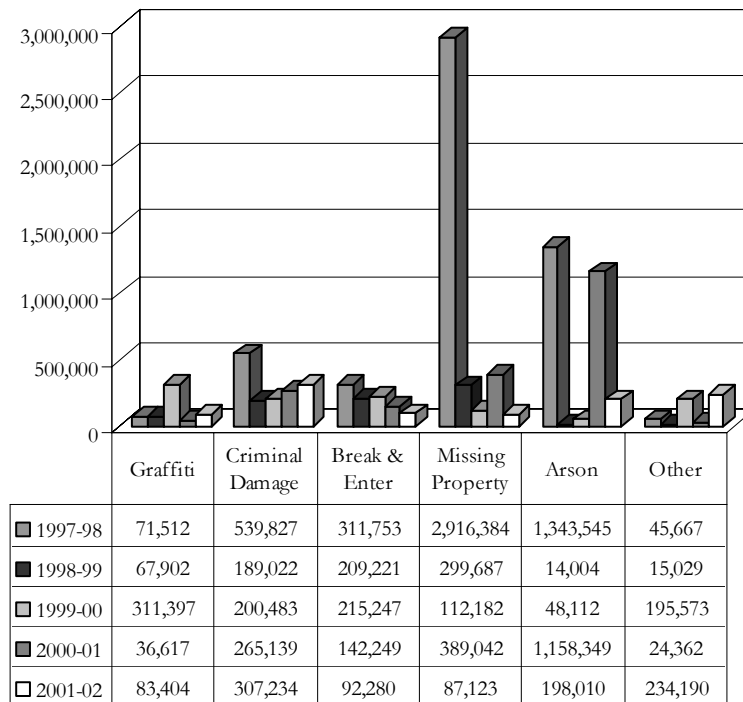
**Figure 15. Vandalism Types and Costs (in dollars):
1997 to 2002**



Similarly, although the number of incidents of graffiti damage decreased 30% from the previous year, the cost of that damage more than tripled from an average of \$71 per incident for 2000-01 to an average of \$231 per incident for 2001-02.

In response to the losses that can be incurred from vandalism, Figure 16 indicates that schools report the majority of incidents to law enforcement officials. Of a total of 2,563 incidents of vandalism, 1,656 or 65% of the incidents were reported.

**Figure 15. Vandalism Types and Costs (in dollars):
1997 to 2002**



Among the 2,563 incidents of vandalism, 76% of the arson incidents, 80% of the breaking and entering cases, 86% of the criminal damage incidents, 46% of graffiti incidents, 58% of the missing property incidents, and 59% of “other” incidents were reported to law enforcement officials.

EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO INCIDENTS

Within the first month of the school year of 2001-2002, safety concerns were heightened as the result of a significant terrorist attack on New York and Washington, D.C. With the heightened national awareness of war and terrorist activities, school administrators expressed concern about the safety of the students and staff in their care. Although the likelihood of terrorist activity is minimal, schools need to be ready for all emergency situations that might arise. All schools in New Mexico have in place comprehensive Safe School Plans which contain a section on emergency response. This section includes various responses schools should be prepared to execute, including both natural emergencies (adverse weather or wildfire conditions) and manmade emergencies (violent incidents).

In response to several schools and districts inquiring about emergency preparedness in terms of war and terrorist activities, the School Health Unit in the Public Education Department worked with the Departments of Health and Public Safety to develop resources and guides for school districts as they reviewed and revised their Safe School Plans. These resources include: (1) a School Emergency Supply List that included recommendations from the American Red Cross on materials needed for a School Emergency Supply Kit; (2) a Health Alert Network which provides a matrix illustrating how state officials will communicate with school officials in order to send warning and alert messages regarding the health and welfare of students and staff; (3) an Incident Command System Overview that provides coordination and clarification of roles and responsibilities of various agencies responding to the same incident and sets communication guidelines; and (4) a resource list of local emergency planning committees, public health offices, school health and school mental health advocates and selected websites and training resources. A list of these resources is provided in the appendix section of this report.

In addition to the physical safety of the students, the School Health Unit also provided information to help schools work with children experiencing fear and anxiety over war and the threat of terrorist incidents. Each school was provided with resources from the National Mental Health Association, including documents entitled "Helping Our Children Deal with War" and "Waiting for War: Dealing with the stress of it all." These documents provided warning signs of stress and steps the schools can take to help children of all ages deal with the stresses and fears caused by national and international tensions. A list of these resources is provided in the appendix section of this report.

Regardless of the nature of the emergency situation faced by the school, timely and effective communication is critical to ensure safety and maintain order. The resources provided to schools were designed to aid this communication and to help schools develop efficient Safe School Plans.

Two documents, *Planning for Safe Schools in New Mexico*, produced by the 1997 Safe Schools Forum, and the subsequently published guidance document for implementing the *Safe Schools Plan*, disclose how important family and community are in preventing violence and vandalism in the schools. The guidance document is a template on the web to assist schools with developing their individual *Safe Schools Plan*. These documents outline a comprehensive approach to ensure that students are in an environment and prepared to benefit from conditions that nurture learning, and to promote retention of good teachers and other school personnel.

Specific information is provided for schools in the template for the *Safe Schools Plan* about how to involve parents in efforts to ensure a healthy, safe, and supportive school environment. This

includes recommendations for parents of how to teach their children about anger management and dealing with conflict in a peaceful, nonviolent manner. The guidance outlines programs for in-school mediation and conflict resolution programs, whereby students are trained as mediators and teachers model conflict resolution skills. Various kinds of monitoring are described as necessary to enforce traffic safety and parking lot rules, and to monitor closely the presence of visitors on school grounds. The plan also indicates that a dress code is necessary to prevent disruptive behavior that can be provoked if students wear accessories or clothing that suggest gang activity or drug use, sexual activity, disrespect and/or bigotry toward any group.

Another section of the *Safe Schools Plan* guidance document outlines procedures for involving law enforcement officials and recommendations for designing emergency plans for major life threatening events and practice drills to prepare for these. Included in this context are templates for schools in general, and for teachers in particular, about how to respond if one of a number of incidents were to occur. Additional outline instructions are proposed in case of an earthquake, gas leak/explosion, windstorms or fallen aircraft. A significant question in some cases that is addressed in the template is whether to evacuate the school or whether students should remain in school, in a “shelter-in-place” condition, using a classroom or other school room as a temporary shelter. To prepare for the latter cases, the guidelines specify that schools should have available necessary provisions in “classroom emergency kits.” To respond efficiently and effectively in an emergency, the guidelines instruct the districts to have an up-to-date list of phone numbers and a chart that designates the duties or responsibilities of district personnel. In addition, districts receive a template to prepare a “critical incident management plan” that outlines what should be done at various stages of response to an incident. The guidelines also provide examples of special arrangements that may need to be made for persons with disabilities in practice drills for evacuations or other emergency preparations.

These documents also provide a plan for how schools, local agencies and state agencies can coordinate their efforts, at yet another level of this comprehensive approach to seek to provide a healthful as well as a safe and nurturing learning environment for New Mexico students. Each document also offers a set of resources for school personnel and their community and family network as they prepare and update their Safe School Plans.

Partnerships with Parents and Community

Safe schools have all worked to develop partnerships with parents and community organizations. These partnerships have been essential for supporting safe school efforts. Our discussions with school principals, assistant principals and staff highlighted the importance of these relationships for the schools. For example, in one community the churches nearest the school have made themselves available as evacuation sites in the event of a fire or other emergency, and the parents in the community know they should go there to locate their children.

Frequent and open communication with local police departments, the State Department of Children, Youth and Families, and even juvenile probation are essential for creating opportunities to exchange knowledge and collaborate. One principal told us, “I think our partnership with the Department of Public Safety is absolutely the most fabulous thing I have ever seen.”

For one school, the collaboration with the village police department led to a grant, written by the police department on the school’s behalf, to cover costs of having a police officer attend all safety meetings at the school. In another school, the state Department of Health awarded a grant to purchase exercise equipment for the middle school to help create a “student and staff fitness center.” In most schools, the police, EMT and fire departments regularly conduct checks and provide ideas for improving safety and security. Police provide traffic speed monitoring, and have shared their knowledge and expertise to improve the safety plan.

Parental involvement in ensuring safety has been extremely important for our sample of safe schools. Wherever parents were actively involved, the schools have been the most satisfied with the results. When parents are involved, they understand the school’s safety plans, they feel comfortable coming to talk with teachers and administrators about safety concerns, they call or e-mail if something has happened, and they provide valuable input in future planning.

Schools tell us that it is vital to have parents involved. One principal told us, “Parents are the key factor in the whole process. If they’re not involved, we can’t do much. The more closely they are involved, the greater our success.” Another said, “We couldn’t survive without parents!”

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“We couldn’t survive without parents!”

CONCLUSION

For 14 years, New Mexico's 89 local school districts have maintained and reported data on incidents of vandalism and violence to the Public Education Department. These data have been invaluable for monitoring district-level and statewide trends in school safety issues, as well as highlighting needs for improved efforts for ensuring safe schools.

The total number of incidents of vandalism and violence for the 2001-02 school year were at their lowest point in four years. This number had been climbing for several years, and peaked in the 1998-99 school year at 17,616 incidents. Since then, the number of incidents has been declining steadily to the 14,253 incidents reported for 2001-02.

The most significant improvements in school safety were identified in detail in this report of the 2001-02 data. This includes a 10% reduction in violence statewide and a 9% reduction in vandalism. In addition, schools reported about 14% fewer incidents of violence, vandalism, firearms or other criminal activities to law enforcement than had been reported in the previous year. These improvements can be celebrated as tangible evidence of improved safety measures in every district.

Weapons were involved in 713 of the reported incidents of violence, and students were the offenders in each case. Reports were made to law enforcement in 450 of these cases. This was a dramatic improvement over the 908 weapons-related incidents in the previous year, 612 of which had been reported to law enforcement.

Other violent incidents were down nearly 12% from the previous year, with a total of 7,146 incidents reported statewide. Nearly half of these were aggravated assault/battery, a 41% reduction from the previous year. Students comprised 98% of the offenders and 91% of the victims of these violent incidents.

Other criminal activities showed a marked decline from previous years, down 17% (2,913 incidents) from the previous year. Drug violations, the most prevalent criminal activity, accounted for 80% of all reported offenses, followed by alcohol violations (17%) and gang-related activities (3%). The numbers for each of these activities were down from the previous year: drug violations were 17% fewer than 2000-01, alcohol violations decreased by 0.4%, and gang-related activities decreased by 54%. Suspensions were the primary disciplinary response to these activities, accounting for 57% of all disciplinary actions taken in the year.

A total of 3,516 violent or criminal incidents were reported to law enforcement in 2001-02, 24% fewer than the previous year. Most of these (59%) were violent incidents, 36% were for drug violations, 5% were for alcohol violations, and less than 1% were for gang-related activities.

Incidents of vandalism were down 9% since the previous year, with graffiti, criminal damage, breaking and entering, and missing property all trending downwards. Financial costs for the incidents were just over \$1 million, half of the costs related to vandalism from the previous year. The cost per incident had increased, however, indicating fewer but more costly vandalism activities.

School officials were pleased to report their successes in developing and implementing safe school plans, and were proud of the improved safety records that have resulted. In our conversations with representatives of successful and safe schools, we heard what a positive impact that a well designed, up-to-date school safety plan had on the entire school community. One principal described

an emergency evacuation that was the result of a chemical incident. Despite the severity of the emergency, she was delighted to report that “everything went according to plan” and that there were no injuries at all. Another principal described using their plan to provide guidance during two extremely windy days that required a complete lock-down. She remembered that, “several years ago it happened, and it was a chaotic mess. Now with the plan, things go a lot more smoothly.” As a result of having their plan, she said, “everyone got home safely.”

The statistics show that in the last few years schools have become safer places for the students, staff and parents. Principals and staff agree, and they can provide many success stories to support the data. They credit an increased awareness, not only by school personnel but also by parents and students, of the problems of safety, and a direct approach for dealing with those. As a result, schools are better prepared to deal with nearly any situation that arises. Each school and school district has worked hard to create safer, more enjoyable places for learning and growing. Their successes are reflected in the stories they tell, the pride they show in their improvements, and the numbers reflected in this report. As one principal told us, “I feel safe coming to school every day, and so do our kids. Kids can’t learn unless they feel safe.”

“Kids can’t learn unless they feel safe.”

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Internet Resources

Department of Education: Safe and Drug-Free Schools Office
Address: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/index.html>
Telephone: (800) 624-0100

Join Together
Address: <http://www.jointogether.org>
Telephone: (617) 437-1500

National Alliance for Safe Schools
Address: <http://www.safeschools.org>
Telephone: (301) 306-0200

Northwest Regional Educational Library
Address: <http://www.nwrac.org>
Telephone: (503) 275-9500

Ribbon of Promise: National Campaign to End School Violence Resources
Address: <http://www.ribbonofpromise.org> (check “Resources”)
Telephone: (541) 726-0512

School Violence Resource Center
National Center for Rural Law Enforcement
Address: <http://www.svrc.net> (check “Other Links” and “Resource Library”)
Telephone: (800) 635-6310

The Lesson One Foundation, Inc.
Address: <http://www.lessonone.org>

Selected Websites for Disaster Planning and Response in Schools

U.S. Department of Education

<http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan>

This website was designed to be a one-stop shop to help school officials plan for any emergency, including natural disasters, violent incidents and terrorist acts. Among the resources on this website is a two-page document, *Emergency Planning for Schools*, that provides a fundamental overview of the issues to be considered in an emergency plan.

National Mental Health Association

<http://www.nmha.org>

The NMHA provides several resources to help children and adults cope with stress and other topics. They also offer a toll-free phone line at (800) 969-NMHA (6642).

Federal Emergency Management Agency

<http://www.fema.gov/kids/teacher.htm>

Information about disaster planning and response for children, parents and educators; also includes a list of FEMA training courses for educators.

Los Angeles County Department of Education

<http://www.lacoe.edu/lacoeweb/orgs/158/index.cfm>

Useful resources for educators, including Managing a School Crisis using the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)

National Association of School Psychologists

<http://www.nasponline.org/index2.html>

This website provides information that ranges from crisis intervention to violence prevention for children and creation of safe schools.

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

Resource List for Disaster Planning & Response

<http://www.edfacilities.org/rl/disaster.cfm>

This website provides a 27 page bibliography of resources for disaster planning and response for schools, including the *Proactive Guide for the Threat of Terrorism in Schools* from the Texas School Safety Center.

National Association of School Nurses

<http://nasn.org/positions/positions.htm>

Position statements on school nurse roles in emergency and bioterrorism emergency preparedness.

National Education Association

<http://www.nes.org/>

Search for publications on crisis communication guidelines and toolkit

National School Safety and Security Services

<http://www.schoolsecurity.org>

This website is for a national consulting firm that provides an array of services relating to ensuring safe school environments, including those relating to school security assessment and response to terrorism.

Project SAVE: Safe Schools Against Violence in Education

Guidance document for school safety plans – April 2001

<http://www.mhric.org/scss/save.html>

Developed by the State Education Department of New York, this document provides comprehensive information for developing school safety plans that will apply to a variety of emergency incidents.

US Department of Homeland Security

<http://www.ready.gov/>

This is a new federal website for the general public relating to emergency preparedness. Useful information is provided in non-technical terms.

Safety Zone

<http://www.safetyzone.org>

This website provides information on school design, violence prevention, emergency planning for various disaster scenarios, including bioterrorism.

Selected Websites for School Safety Training Resources

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/crslst.asp>

Independent study course list on all aspects of disaster planning and response

New Mexico Department of Public Safety

Office of Emergency Services and Security

http://www.dps.nm.org/emergency/training_conference.htm

A list of locally available courses in a variety of emergency management areas

Northwest Center for Public Health Practice

University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine

<http://healthlinks.washington.edu/nwcp/ht/bttrain/phw/>

Preparing for and Responding to Bioterrorism is an independent study curriculum that is designed for the public health workforce. It contains information about bioterrorist agents and how to manage bioterrorist events. The curriculum is divided into six major sections: Introduction to Bioterrorism, Emergency Response Planning, Diseases of Bioterrorist Potential, Health Surveillance and Epidemiologic Investigation, Consequence Management and Communications and Informatics.

University of Findlay, Center for Terrorism Preparedness, Findlay, Ohio

<http://www.nceem.org/terrorism/default.asp>

The University of Findlay's Center has developed a CD-ROM to prepare school employees for terrorist attacks and other acts of violence. The purpose of this CD is to ensure proper planning, prevention and response in the event of a bomb threat or a chemical or biological incident. The goal is not to frighten but to educate school personnel on standard techniques that will help to ensure the safety of staff and students. Ordering information is provided.

Videos

Bullets Have No Names on Them (1993). Available from Coronet/MTI Film and Video, 108 Wilmont Road, Deerfield, IL 60015.

Drug-Free Schools: A Generation of Hope (1994). Available from Southeastern Regional Vision for Education, 41 Marietta Street, NW, Suite 100, Atlanta, GA 30303. (800) 659-3204, (404) 577-7737.

Freedom from Violence Series – *The Gang Alternative; Taking the Lid Off Anger; Resolving Conflict Peacefully; Safe Environment* (1993). Available from Altschul Group Corp., 1560 Sherman Ave., Evanston, IL 60201.

Kids in the Crossfire: Violence in America (1993). Available from MPI HomeVideo. (800) 323-0443.

Lesson One: Teaching the ABC's of Life (2003). Available from The Lesson One Foundation, Inc., 245 Newbury Street, Suite 2F, Boston, MA 02116.

Sometin' To Do: Kids and Crime (1993). Available from Turner Entertainment Network, Public Affairs, 1050 Techwood Drive, NW, Atlanta, GA 30318.

School Crisis: Under Control; High Risk Youth: At the Crossroads; Set Straight on Bullies; and What's Wrong With This Picture. Available from The National School Safety Center, 4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290, Westlake Village, CA 91362. (805) 373-9977.

Tragic Consequences: Teenagers and Guns (1995) and **Violence Prevention: Inside Out** (1993). Available from United Learning, Inc., 6633 W. Howard ST., Niles, IL 60714. (800) 424-0362.

Wasted! Guns & Teens, Lives & Dreams (1996). Available from National Center for Drug Abuse, Violence, and Recovery. 102 Hwy 81 North, Calhoun, KY 42327-0009. (800) 962-6662.

Books and Reports

Planning for Safe Schools in New Mexico: Report of the Safe Schools Forum (1997).
New Mexico State Department of Education, School Health Unit; Santa Fe, NM.
(505) 827-1804.

Antisocial Behavior in School: Strategies and Best Practices (1995).
Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.; Pacific Grove, CA.

Conflict in the Classroom: Drawing the Line on Bad Behavior (1994).
New York State United Teachers; Albany, NY. (518) 459-5400.

Mediation: Getting to Winwin! (1994).
Peace Education Foundation, Inc.; Miami, FL.

The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action (1993).
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mail Stop 36, 4770 Buford Hwy NE;
Atlanta, GA 30341. (404) 488-4646.

Reaching the Goals: Safe, Disciplined and Drug Free Schools (1993).
U.S. Department of Education, The Goals 6 Work Group; Washington, DC.

Schools Free of Drugs and Violence. Questions and Answers on Reaching National Education Goal 6. U.S. Department of Education; Washington, DC.

A Study of Safety and Security in The Public Schools of New York (1994).
New York State Education Department; Albany, NY 12234. (518) 473-7155.

Violence and the Schools (1994).
Georgia Department of Education; Atlanta, GA. (404) 656-2600.

Violence in Schools: How to Build a Prevention Program from the Ground Up
(1995). Oregon School Study Council; Eugene, Oregon.

Violence in the Schools: A National, State, and Local Crisis (1994).
New York State Education Department; Albany, NY 12234. (518) 474-1311.

Curriculum/Training--Educational Programs

Abrams Peace Education Foundation
3550 Biscayne Boulevard, Suite 400; Miami, FL 33137. (305) 576-5075.

Alternative to Violence Project
15 Rutherford Place; New York, NY 10003. (212) 951-7199.

Boston Conflict Resolution Program
Boston Area Educators for Social Responsibility
19 Garden Street; Cambridge, MA 02138. (617) 492-8820.

Bureau for At-Risk Youth
135 Dupont Street; Plainview, NY 11803-0760. (800) 999-6884.

Comprehensive Assistance Center – Region Seven
555 East Constitution; Norman, OK 73072. (405) 325-1711.

Children’s Creative Response to Conflict
P.O. Box 271; 521 N. Broadway; Nyack, NY 10960. (914) 353-1796.

Committee for Children
2203 Airport Way South, Suite 500; Seattle, WA 98134-2027. (800) 634-4449.

Concerned Educators Allied for a Safe Environment
17 Gerry Street; Cambridge, MA 02138. (617) 864-0999.

Educators for Social Responsibility
23 Garden Street; Cambridge, MA 02138. (617) 492-1764.

Harvard Negotiation Project
500 Pound Hall; Cambridge, MA 02138. (617) 495-1684.

Hawaii Mediation Program, University of Hawaii at Manoa
West Hall Annex 2, Room 222; 1776 University Avenue; Honolulu, HI 96822.

Iowa Peace Institute
P.O. Box 480; Grinnell, IA 50112. (515) 236-4880.

Kids on the Block
9385-C Gerwig Lane; Columbia, MD 21046. (800) 245-KIDS.

National Consortium on Alternatives of Youth at Risk
5250 17th Street, Suite 107; Sarasota, FL 34235. (800) 245-7133.

National Crime Prevention Council
1000 Connecticut Avenue, 13th Floor; Washington, DC 20036. (202) 466-6272.

National Resources Center for Youth Services
202 West 8th Street; Tulsa, OK 74119-1419.

National Safe Kids Campaign
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW; Washington, DC 20004-1707.

National School Safety Center
141 Duesenberg Drive, Suite 11; Westlake Village, CA 91362. (805) 373-9977.

New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution
800 Park Avenue, SW; Albuquerque, NM 87102. (505) 247-0571.

New Mexico Public Education Department, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program
120 South Federal, Room 207; Santa Fe, NM 87501. (505) 827-1827.

Resolving Conflict Creatively
163 Third Avenue, #239; New York, NY 10003. (212) 260-6290.

Society for Prevention of Violence
3109 Mayfield Road, Room 205; Cleveland, OH 44118. (216) 371-5545.

Teaching Students to be Peacemakers
7708 Cornelia Drive; Edina, MN 55435.

Wholistic Stress Control Institute
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