



NJDOE News

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Commissioner Announces Pilot Program for School Violence Reporting

Commissioner of Education David Hespe today announced a pilot program designed to improve New Jersey's system of school violence reporting. Eleven districts from 10 counties have agreed to participate in the pilot test of the "Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System."

Under the new system, data on violence and vandalism would be collected through the Internet. Under the current system, all school districts submit paper copies of their complete reports to the Department of Education on an annual basis. The new reporting system goes into effect in the 1999-2000 school year and will be reflected in the report that will be released in 2001.

"The implementation of this system fulfills a pledge I made several months ago," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "An electronic reporting system will relieve some of the reporting burden on schools, districts and county offices and such a system will enable data to be collected more efficiently and accurately for state and federal reports. Due to new federal reporting requirements, we must have a system in place that will allow districts to report this information as quickly and easily as possible.

"We depend on receiving accurate information on violence and vandalism from school districts so that we can design the appropriate programs to ensure that our children are safe in their schools."

The pilot program is scheduled to begin in mid-to-late October. A user's guide will be distributed to district staff along with information regarding log-on procedures. The department will offer training to district and county staff on how to use the new reporting system. All districts are scheduled to begin using the Internet to report their data next February. Additional materials, including log-on procedures and a user's manual, will be distributed to all districts in January 1999.

The pilot districts are Burlington County Special Services, Millville, East Orange, Newark, Jersey City, Trenton, Middlesex County Vocational, Montville, Jackson, Paterson and Union Township.

In addition, the department has made revisions to the instructions and definitions for the reporting of incidents of violence and vandalism that are distributed to school districts. The forms have been redesigned so that they may be used with the Internet-based reporting system that all districts are scheduled to begin using next February. In making changes to the reporting forms that are distributed to each school district an effort was made to make the instructions and definitions more explicit, while assuring that serious incidents do not go unreported and that minor occurrences are not taken as if they were serious incidents.

In order to address the issue of consistency in the application of standards for reporting incidents, many of the definitions were aligned with the criminal justice code. The following summarize the changes:

- Simple Assault. Aggravated Assault. Phrases were added to bring definitions into alignment with the criminal justice code;
- Fight. The definition for this category had excluded "minor scuffles," now it excludes only "verbal confrontations and minor confrontations such as a shoving match;"
- Robbery and Extortion. Due to the serious nature of these types of incidents "regardless of value" was added to the definition.
- Threats. (new category-had been part of definition of simple assault);
- Damage to Property. "due to repair or replacement" added;
- Substance Abuse-Use. Instruction to record "Use" only when medical exam confirms suspicion of use was added.

"I believe these definition changes will make for a much better reporting system," said Hespe. "It is important the districts know the incidents that they need to report so that we can get a clear picture of the level of violence and

vandalism at the school level."