



## NJDOE News

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### **Violence, Vandalism Down Slightly at New Jersey Schools**

More than two thirds of the schools in New Jersey (69 percent) reported five or fewer incidents of violence, vandalism or substance abuse during the 2003-2004 school year, with one school in three (34 percent) reporting no incidents at all, according to an annual report released today by the state Department of Education.

The report, which is required by statute, is compiled from data that DOE collects from schools through the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS) and is submitted to the Education Committees of the Legislature.

It provides detailed information on a wide range of incidents, from fighting, trespassing, theft and fireworks possession to major behavioral problems such as assault, extortion, and possession of firearms and drugs at New Jersey's approximately 2,400 public and charter schools.

"This report shows that the overwhelming majority of our schools are safe places where teachers can teach and children can learn," said Acting Governor Richard J. Codey.

The total number of incidents reported by school districts was 20,207, down 1,979 (nine percent) from the 22,186 incidents reported in 2002-2003. Only 10 percent of the schools reported 25 or more incidents, down from 12 percent the year before.

Instances of violence declined by five percent while the number of incidents involving weapons increased by nine percent, from 1,396 to 1,525, accounted for principally by increases in the number of incidents involving the possession of knives, air guns and imitation guns. The number of incidents of vandalism and substance abuse remained relatively unchanged.

However, Assistant Commissioner for Student Services Isaac Bryant, whose division prepared the report, advised that direct year-to-year statistical comparisons between the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 must be interpreted with caution because of changes in the types of incidents reported and the manner in which they are reported.

"Some of the incident definitions changed in 2003-2004, and three new types of violent incidents were added to the EVVRS," he said.

"Also during this period, DOE conducted many training sessions for the people in the districts who do the actual reporting of incidents to the state. A number of district officials realized that they were interpreting the definitions either too loosely or too tightly and adjusted their reporting standards accordingly after receiving the training. In fact, 63 percent of the decrease in the total number of incidents reported statewide occurred in two districts," Assistant Commissioner Bryant said.

The report also describes the many programs and initiatives that DOE, the Attorney General's Office, other state agencies, education organizations and the districts and schools themselves have undertaken or plan to undertake to foster safety within the schools, including the promotion of student health and character education.

"New Jersey has aggressively pursued a variety of policy and program strategies to address the problems of disruption and violence in the schools since the beginning of the Safe Schools Initiative in 1994," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "We work with the school districts to foster safety at all points of the continuum, from prevention, through crises response to recovery."

Recent initiatives have included:

- A new law prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying in schools
- A new law requiring annual public hearings on school violence
- A new law requiring the annual observance of School Violence Awareness Week
- A new law imposing penalties for the falsification of reports of violence

- A new website, "Keeping Our Kids Safe," which provides one-stop, convenient access to resources that help districts find diverse ways to create a safe environment for students at all times
- Amendments to administrative code adopted by the State Board of Education that address school safety issues.
- New Core Curriculum Content Standards focusing on bullying and violence prevention strategies, with a clear emphasis on character education
- The establishment of the New Jersey Character Education Commission and the opening of the New Jersey Center for Character Education at Rutgers University
- The continuation of the Intervention and Referral Services initiative, which provides technical support for the creation of multi-disciplinary problem-solving teams in individual schools.

New Jersey students have also benefited from numerous grant programs, conferences, seminars, publications and partnerships with institutions of higher education, including the Positive Student Discipline Reform Demonstration Project with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

[Click here to view the 2004 report on Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey public Schools.](#)

[Click here to view a copy of the reporting form.](#)

[Click here to view an Excel spreadsheet containing district-by-district incident totals.](#)