

Safe Schools

Report

2002-2003
&
2003-2004



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 New Mexico school districts for the 2002-03 and the 2003-04 school year. It examines key areas of concern across the state, and demonstrates trends in incidents of violence and vandalism. This report reflects New Mexico's emphasis on safety issues, safe school plans and school safety initiatives.

Among the highlights of this report is 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 five years. Incidents of vandalism were down 16% from the previous year, the lowest number of such incidents in over six years. 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 (nearly 20% fewer weapon incidents than the previous school year), as was the number of incidents requiring law enforcement (over than 25% fewer incidents requiring law enforcement than the previous school year). Alcohol and drug violations 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.

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), for the period of August 1 through July 31. This report provides a statewide school safety profile for New Mexico schools for both the 2002-03 and the 2003-04 school years, and is intended to reflect the preeminence of concerted and coordinated efforts of the past few years to ensure safe schools. It contains information about how schools are addressing the issue of school safety through the development and implementation of comprehensive Safe School Plans. It also 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 both the 2002-03 and the 2003-04 school years 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 1997 statewide safe schools forum that resulted in recommendations for school safety. As a result of the recommendations from the forum, 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. 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 SBE¹ 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.

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 (recovery). There are, therefore, three components that comprise the *Safe School Plan*.

¹ 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 New Mexico Safe Schools 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 the school yard 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.

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 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 counselors, school principals, assistant principals, safe schools coordinators and other key school staff members around the state, it became apparent that issues of criminal behavior, violence or weapons possession were the rare exception.

Asked to describe the greatest safety issues faced by schools today, these individuals shared with us the issues that their schools, students, parents and teachers address on a daily basis. While responses ranged from gangs to drugs to bullying, they were in nearly universal agreement that a positive school climate is essential to school safety. Schools need to focus on creating a safe space where students are able to find support, new skills, and develop their own paths.

More than one administrator told us that a negative school climate influences the creation of bullying behaviors. These in turn lead to punitive measures that do not focus on prevention. Developing these positive climates, however, is a difficult and expensive task requiring adequate funding, teacher training, a focus on guidance and advocacy of students and a partnership between the principal and school counselors. “The biggest (safety) issue that I see our schools facing today is bullying. It has become more prevalent among our young students and the type of bullying has gotten worse. This would have been my same response five years ago, but I think the type of bullying has changed and taken on an uglier form. Our peer mediation program, student assistance teams, and PBS are a part of our safe school plans and they address bullying.”

Ready access to weapons and a culture of retaliation are both felt at the school level. One teacher told us that the greatest safety issue in schools is “the person with a weapon, remoteness, and response time. More and more people have access to weapons and more and more people feel that they are entitled to retaliate for any real or perceived wrong. The issues are the same as five years ago but the threat possibility is part of schools’ consciousness.” A second teacher also felt that weapons were the greatest safety issue, “because of the internet, kids have access to it all.” She noted that this is different than 5 years ago, “We are more aware now.”

A school counselor stressed that the biggest safety issues she sees are two things: “(1) trauma that children experience through seeing domestic and gun violence. Trauma is not in the event, it is in the nervous system. Kids see so much domestic violence and gun violence and bring that heightened state of fear to school with them. They can’t learn because of the heightened adrenalin state. (2) Kids bringing weapons to school. Even little kids. We’re just much more aware of that now.”

Our schools are not immune to the actions occurring outside New Mexico. One administrator noted that “there has been so much that has happened in the world and in our schools. You have to be prepared for any kind of emergency, even if you think it may never happen to you. It’s best to be safe than sorry. Our government and television keeps us informed on world issues and what is happening around the U.S. It’s awful to say, but when something happens in another

state or school district, you learn from that and make changes to your own plans, handbooks, etc, to meet your needs so that you will be prepared.”

Most of the school safety personnel we talked with felt that the schools in New Mexico were safer than they were five years ago. One individual told us, “I feel we are in better shape than we were five years ago. There is just so much going on out in the world that we can’t afford not to do anything about it. It is our job to insure that we have safe schools and plans to follow.” Another pointed out that schools are safer “because of increased awareness of safety plans at most schools. From my position, everyone has heightened awareness.” Another explained, “I believe that NM schools are safer today than they were five years ago. Granted, we’re dealing with more issues, but we are prepared and see the need to be prepared for these issues. We are looking at more prevention, intervention, and response strategies to address these issues and prevent incidents from happening.”

Not all agreed that the schools were safer today, however. One individual explained, “I feel that few schools are safer today. I take school safety very seriously and it is a priority. Many principals give it lip service but fail to put together a plan. I see more awareness now but not more action. We are the only high school in (the district) that conducts regular safety drills.”

Regardless of whether they believed the schools to be safer today or not, the school personnel we talked with took safety issues very seriously in order to ensure a safe future for all New Mexico’s children. “We look to the future for a safe place to go to school, with continued training, review and expertise to implement a good plan for our district.”

OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS IN ENSURING SAFETY IN NEW MEXICO SCHOOLS

In the 2003-04 school year across the State of New Mexico, 89 school districts were responsible for educating 322,790 students, in 790 public and 221 nonpublic schools. The quality of the educational experience of these students, and of their more than 21,814 teachers and 11,509 other school personnel, is directly affected by the school environment, not merely whether it is a stimulating learning place, but whether they feel secure. New Mexico's schools have been steadily reducing the number of incidents of violence and vandalism that can disrupt students' learning over the last six years (see Figure 1). The total number of incidents of violence and vandalism in the 2003-04 school year was 28% lower than in the 1998-99 school year. 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.

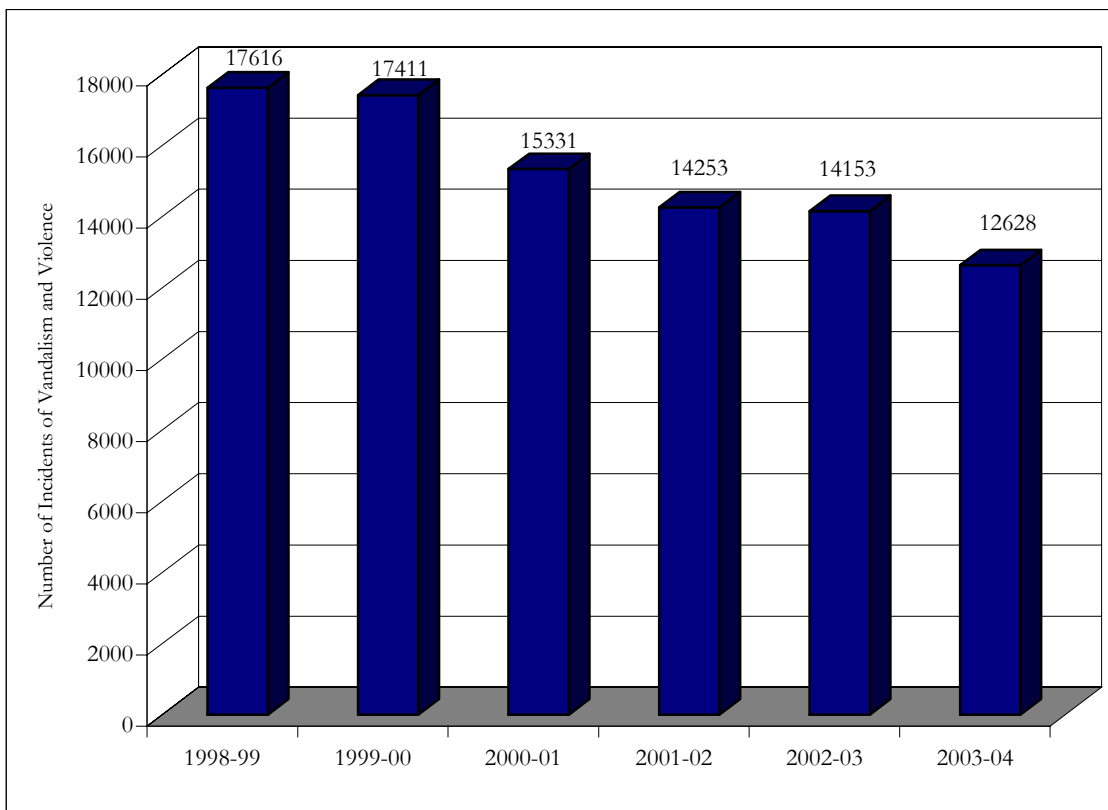


Figure 1. Total reported incidents of vandalism and violence by school year (1998 to 2004)

VIOLENT INCIDENTS IN THE SCHOOLS

For both 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years, firearm incidents were by far the least frequent of the incidents in New Mexico schools, accounting for only 0.2% of all incidents in 2002-03 and 0.15% of all incidents in 2003-04. Violent incidents (fights and assaults of various kinds) accounted for over half of all reported incidents each year, and were 3% higher in the 2003-04 school year than the previous year. Vandalism incidents were down nearly 6%, while other criminal activities dropped by 40% in the 2003-04 school year, compared with the 2002-03 school year.

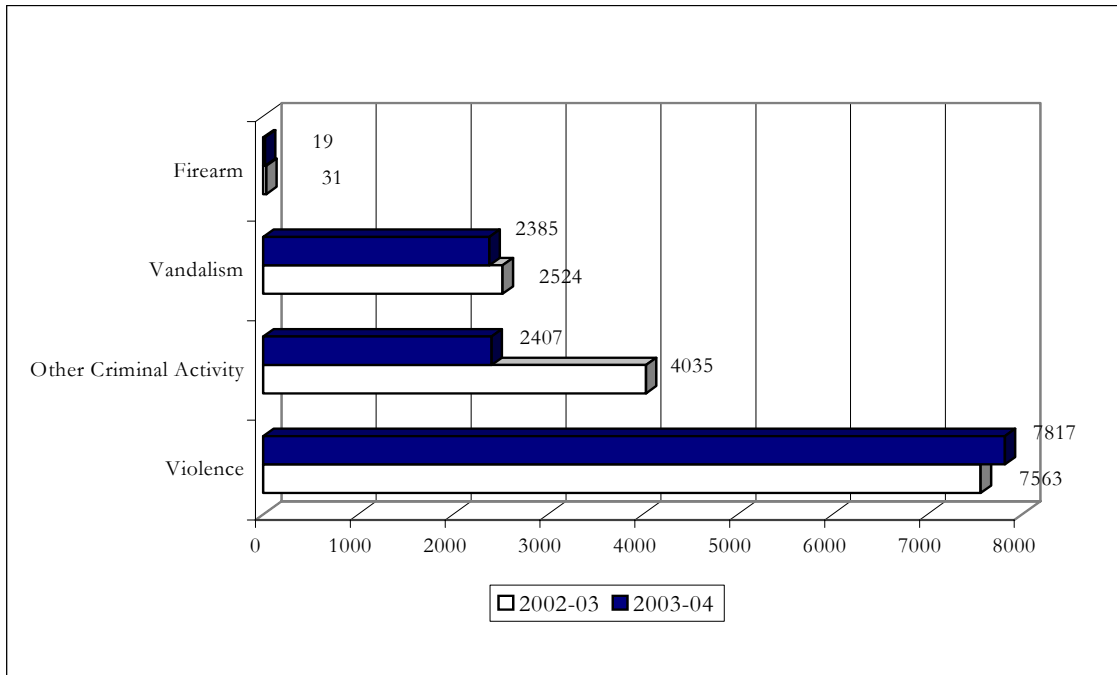


Figure 2. Number of incidents of violence and vandalism by type and by school year (2002-03 and 2003-04).

In the 2002-03 school year schools reported a total of 5,532 incidents of violence, vandalism or firearms to law enforcement agencies (see Figure 3). In the 2003-04 school year schools reported 3,845 incidents of violence, vandalism, firearms or other criminal activities to law enforcement agencies, a 30% reduction from the previous year.

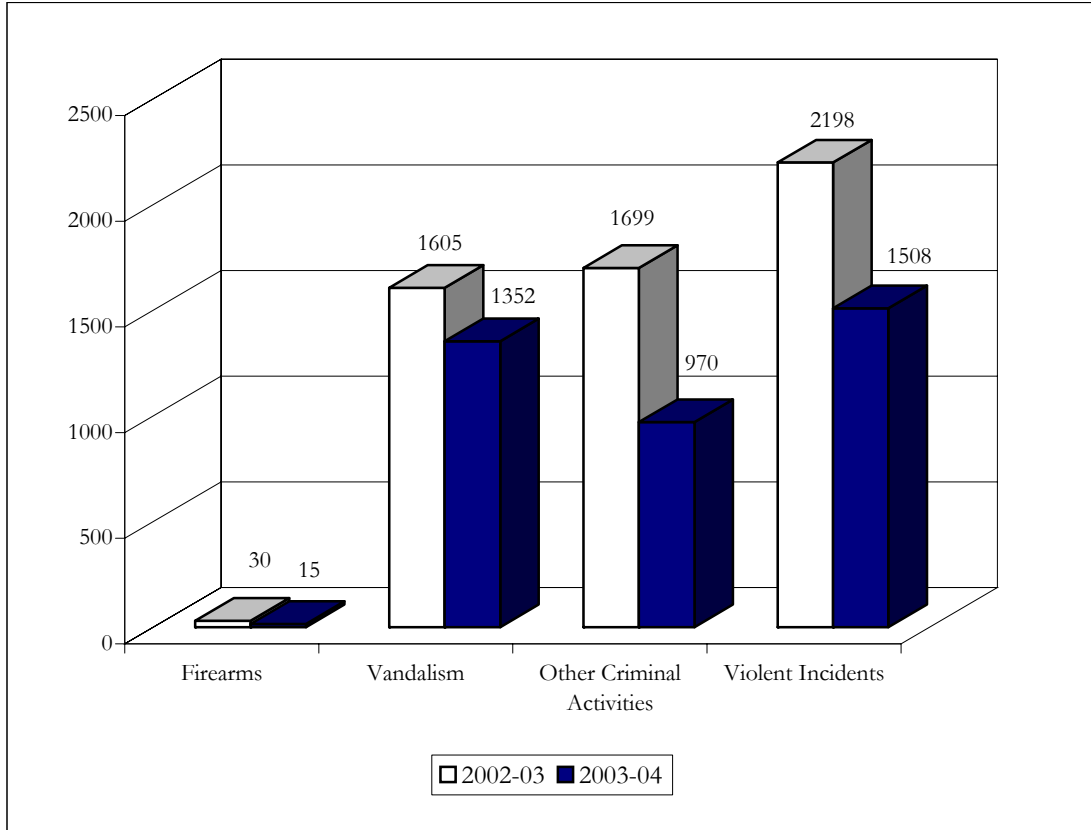


Figure 3. Reports to law enforcement by school year (2002-03 and 2003-04).

WEAPONS POSSESSION AND THE GUN-FREE SCHOOLS ACT

Firearm possession in the schools, although serious, remained rare. Thirty one incidents of firearm possession were reported in 2002-03, or 5.4% of all weapons incidents, and 19 incidents of firearm possession were reported in the 2003-04 school year, or 3% of all weapons incidents (see Figure 4).

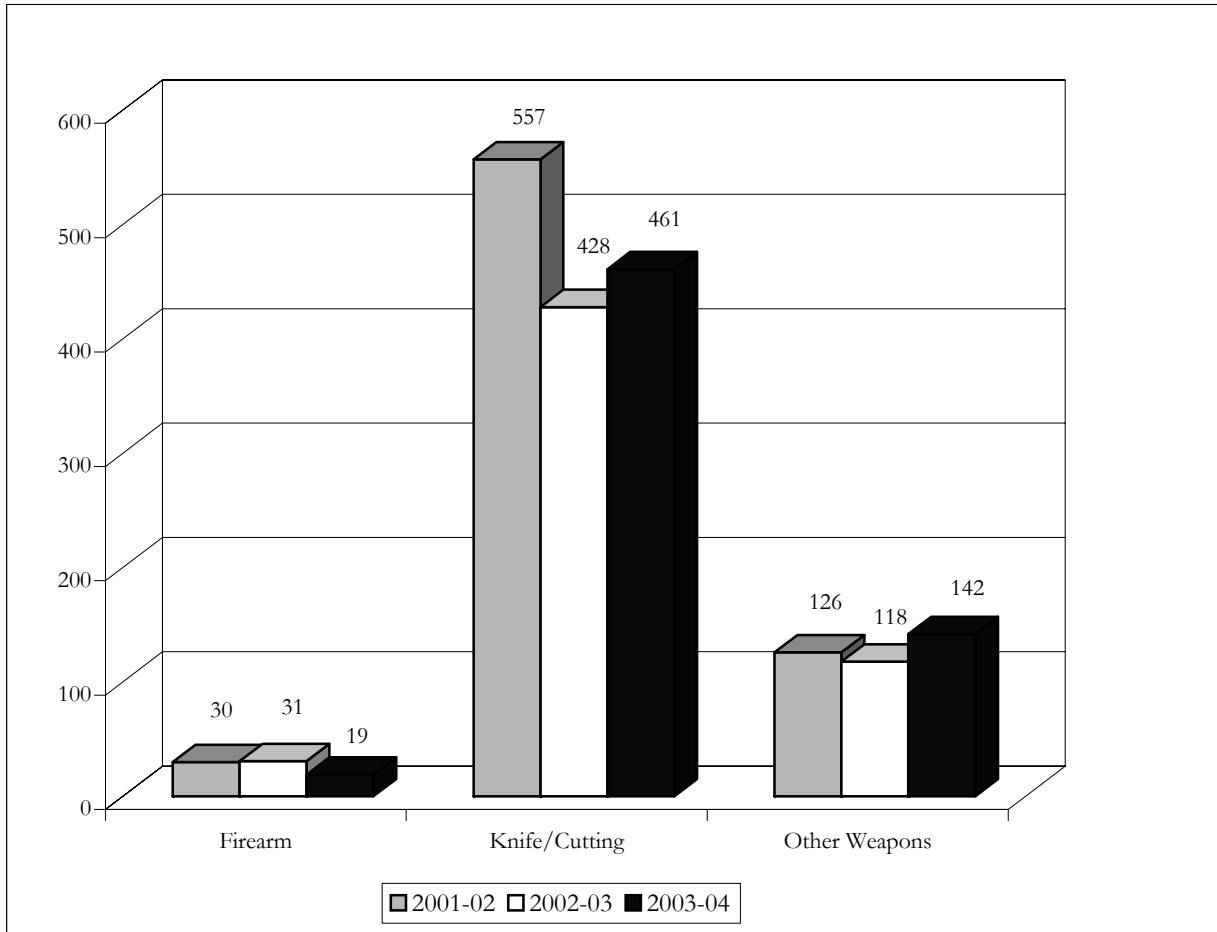


Figure 4. Possession of firearms and other weapons by school year (2001-02 through 2003-04).

Students were the offenders for nearly all firearm and weapons possession violations for both the 2002-03 and the 2003-04 school years (see Figure 5). In the 2002-03 school year, students were reported as being responsible for 28 of the 31 reported firearm incidents; other school employees were responsible for 2 of them. In the 2003-04 school year, students were reported as being responsible for all of the 19 reported firearm incidents, were responsible for 98% of all the knife incidents and 99% of the other weapon incidents.

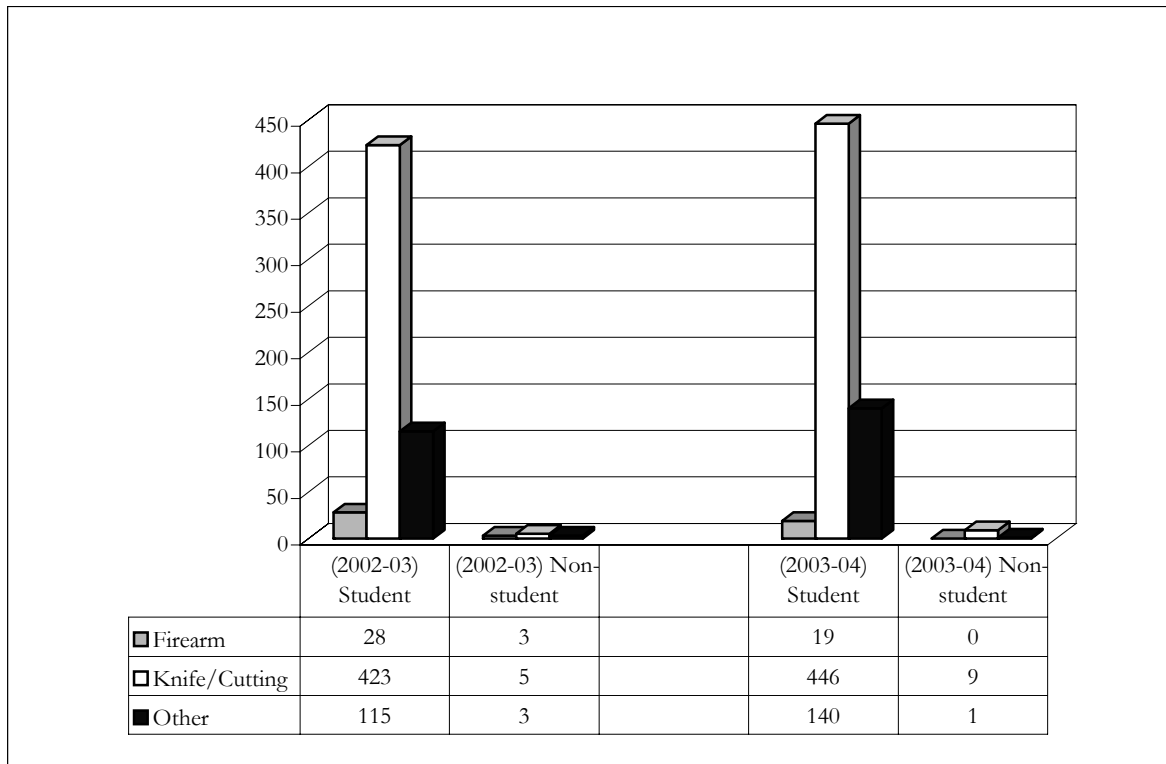


Figure 5: Firearm and weapons possession by offender (2002-03 and 2003-04 school years).

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.

Of the 31 gun incidents in the 2002-03 school year, 9 resulted in suspensions, 7 in alternative educational settings, 4 in modified discipline, 4 were IDEA students, 4 had no discipline reported, and 3 were either non-students or the offender was unknown (see Figure 6). Of the 19 gun incidents in the 2003-4 school year, 8 resulted in suspensions, 8 in modified discipline, and 3 were IDEA students.

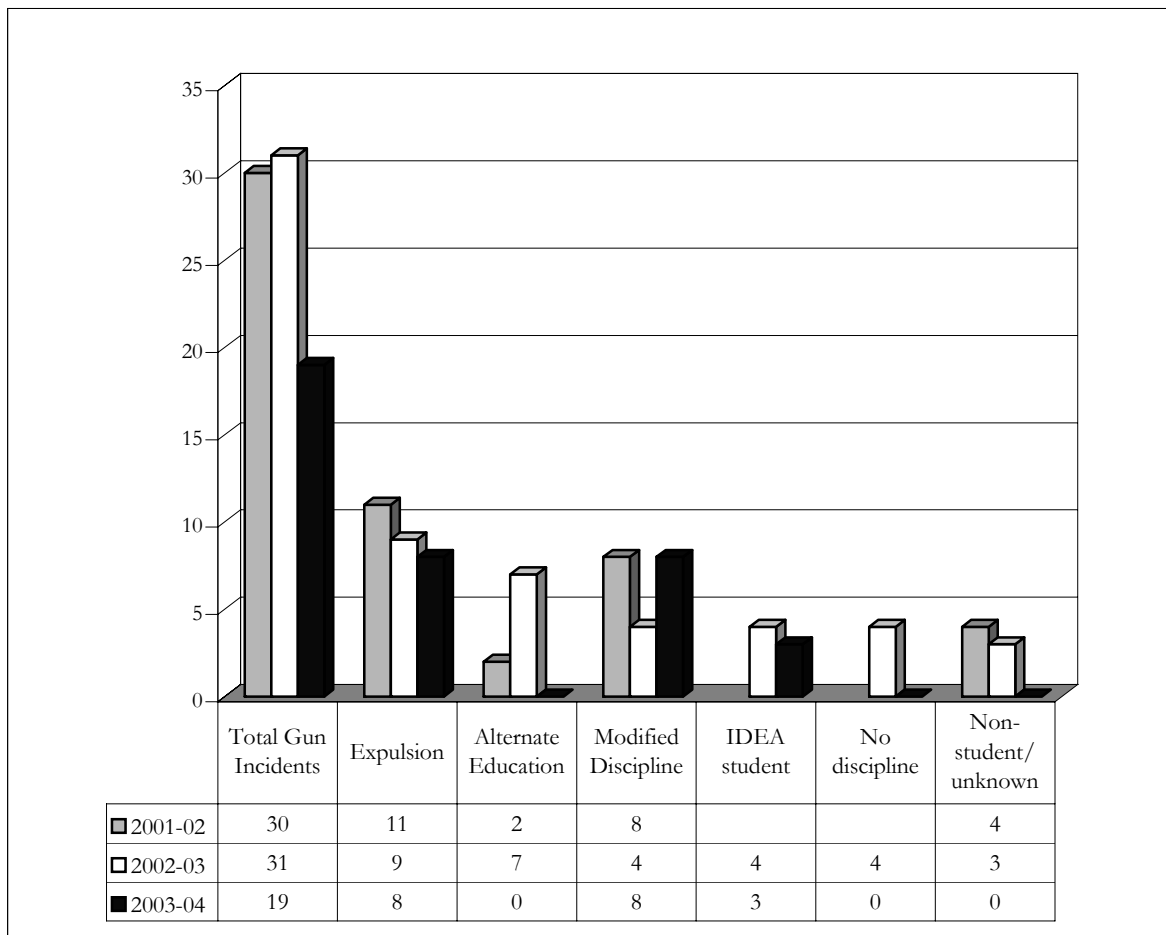


Figure 6: Number of gun incidents at the schools and the disciplinary measure taken in conformance with the Gun-Free Schools Act: 2001-2004.

Reports of Weapons Possession to Law Enforcement

The policy and practice of reporting most weapons incidents to law enforcement agencies may be an effective deterrent to prevent further incidents of weapons possession in the schools. During the 2002-03 school year 2002-03, 97% of the firearm incidents were reported to law enforcement, more than 62% of knife incidents were reported, and 28% of other weapons possessions were reported (see Figure 7). During the 2003-04 school year, 79% of the 19 firearm incidents were reported to law enforcement, 59% of knife incidents were reported, and 36% of other weapons possessions were reported.

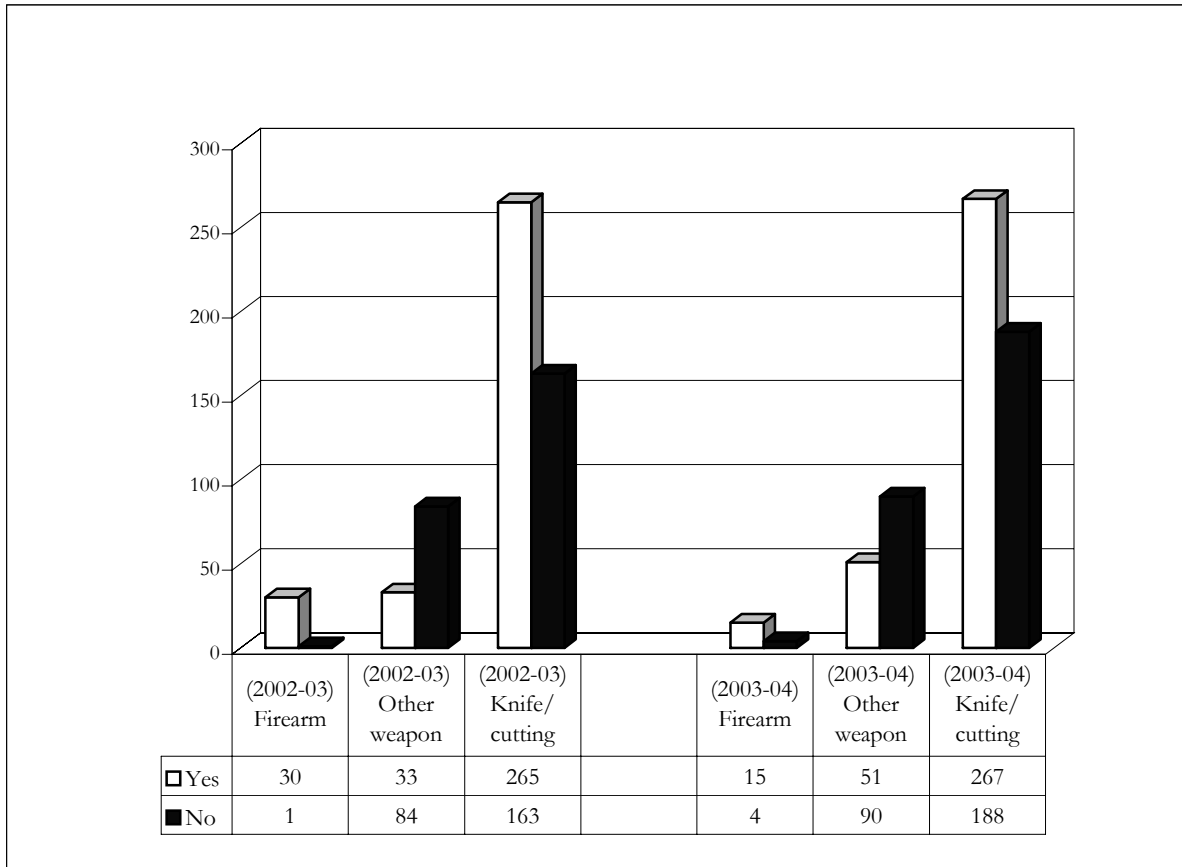


Figure 7: Reports of weapons possessions to law enforcement (2002-03 and 2003-04 school years).

INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE

A total of 7,563 incidents of violent crimes in the schools were reported during 2002-2003, and 7,817 were reported during the 2003-04 school year (see Figure 8). Over half of all reported incidents were simple assault/battery.

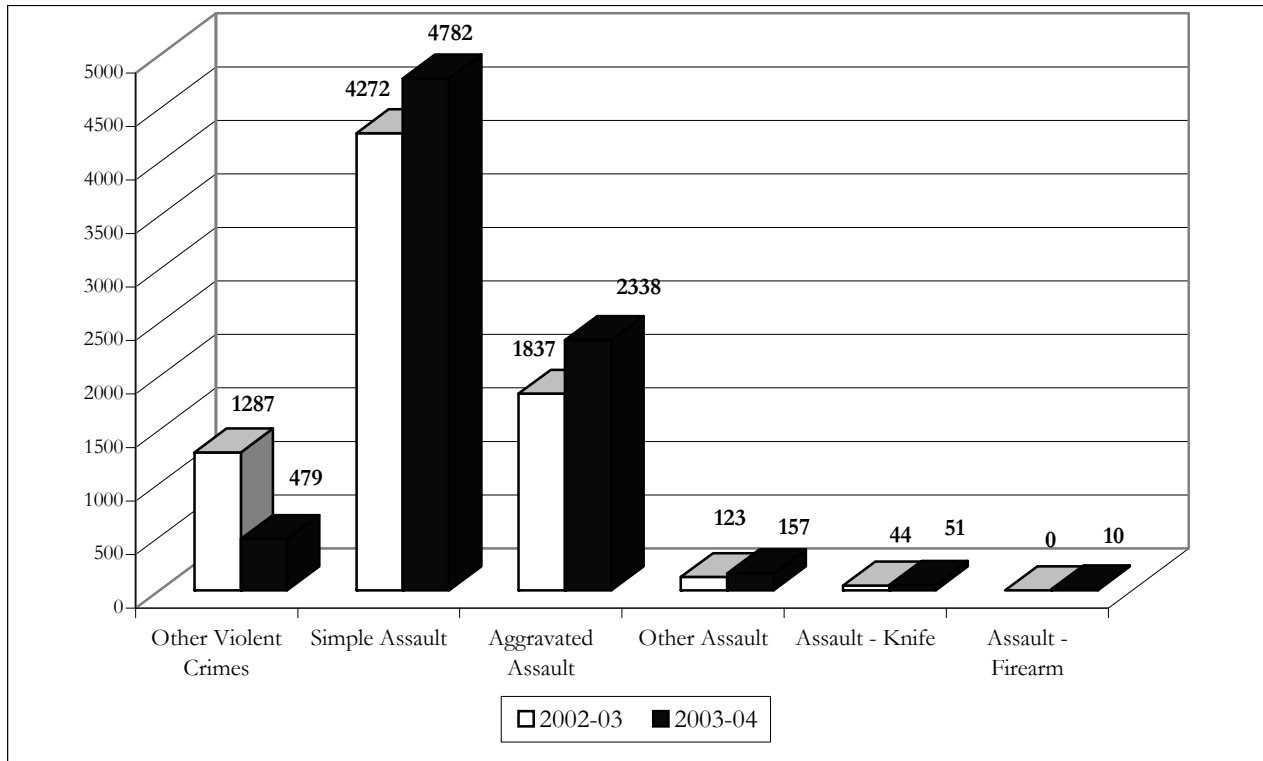


Figure 8: Types and number of violent incidents in the schools (2002-03 and 2003-04 school years).

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. In both the 2002-03 school year and the 2003-04 school year, 98% of the offenders were students (see Figure 9). The largest change during the past three years has been in the number of incidents of violent crime committed by individuals outside the school. During the 2001-02 school year, 10 incidents of violent crime on school property were committed by individuals outside the school. In contrast, during the 2003-04 school year, 85 of the incidents of violent crime on school property were committed by individuals outside the school. 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.

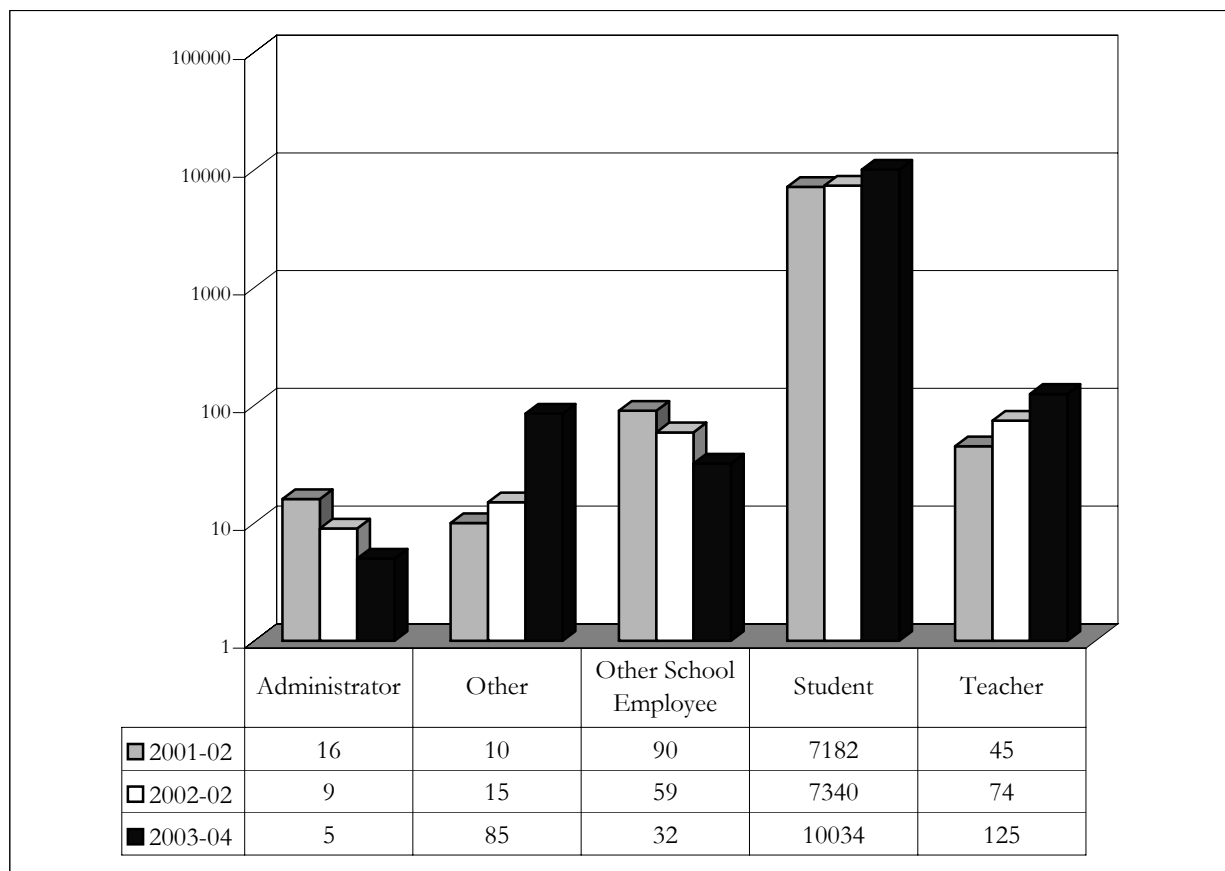


Figure 9: Number of incidents of violent crimes on school property by offender category (2001-02 through 2003-04 school years).

In addition to being the primary offenders, students account for the majority of the victims of these violent crimes. For the past three years, more than eight out of ten of the victims of violent incidents in New Mexico’s schools were students (see Figure 10). The number of victims of these violent incidents who were individuals from outside the school has been increasing steadily over the past three years, as has the number of victims who were administrators.

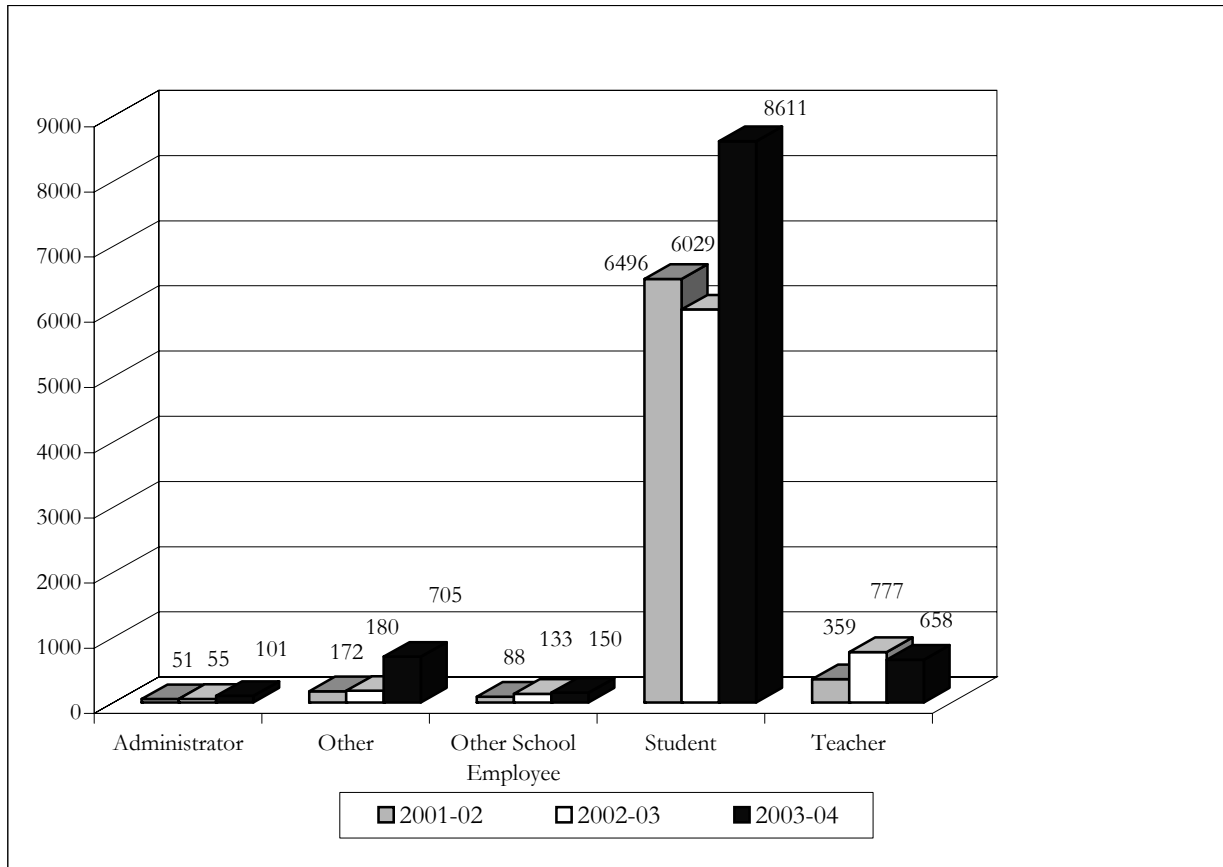


Figure 10. Number of incidents of violent crimes on school property by victim category (2001-02 through 2003-04 school years).

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. Incidents of criminal activity have been decreasing steadily over the past three years (see Figure 11). Drug violations dominate the category of “other criminal activities,” although these incidents have been declining over the past three years, as have alcohol violations. The number of incidents of gang activity remains quite low.

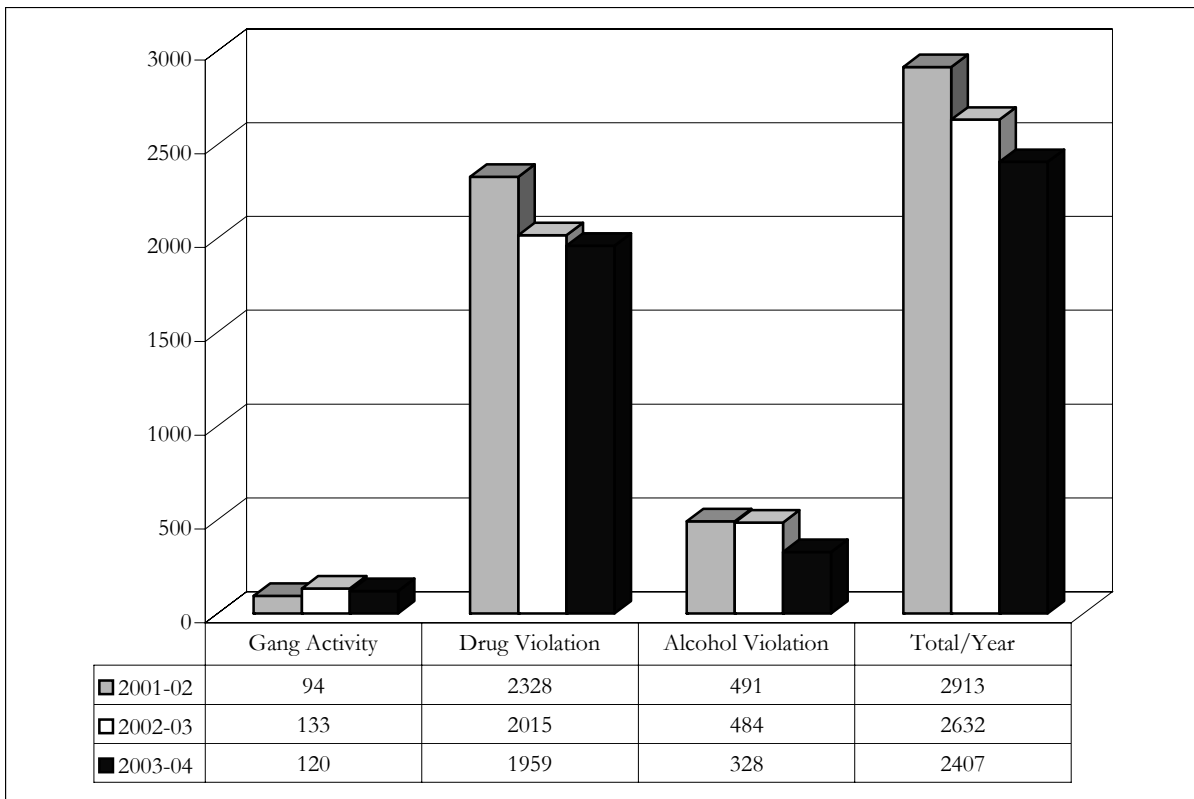


Figure 11. Number of other criminal activities, including gang activity, drug violations and alcohol violations (2001-02 through 2003-04 school years).

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.

Of the total of 7,269 violent incidents in the 2002-03 school year, suspensions constituted nearly half of disciplinary actions (see Figure 12). In-school disciplinary measures comprised one out of five of all disciplinary measures; only 5% resulted in arrest or being referred to the justice system; and less than 1% were expelled. The latter two disciplinary measures, arrest and expulsion, are imposed for the most serious infractions. Ten percent had no reported disciplinary outcome, and 17% were described as having other or unknown disciplinary actions.

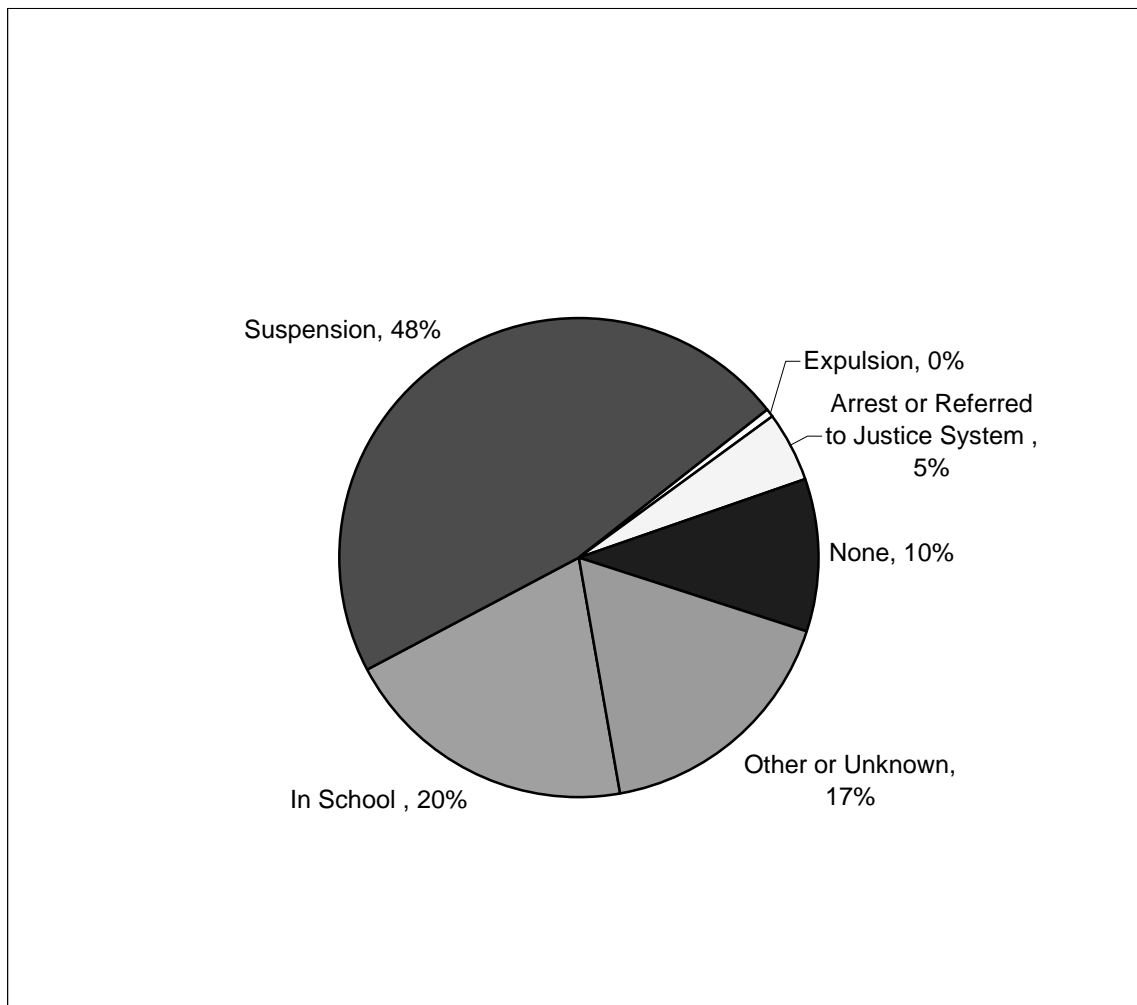


Figure 12: Discipline for violent incidents (2002-03 school year).

Of the total of 10,157 violent incidents in the 2003-04 school year, suspensions constituted half of all disciplinary actions (see Figure 13). In-school disciplinary measures comprised one out of five of all disciplinary measures; only 6% resulted in arrest or being referred to the justice system; and 1% were expelled. The latter two disciplinary measures, arrest and expulsion, are imposed for the most serious infractions. Less than .5% had no reported disciplinary outcome, and 22% were described as having other or unknown disciplinary actions.

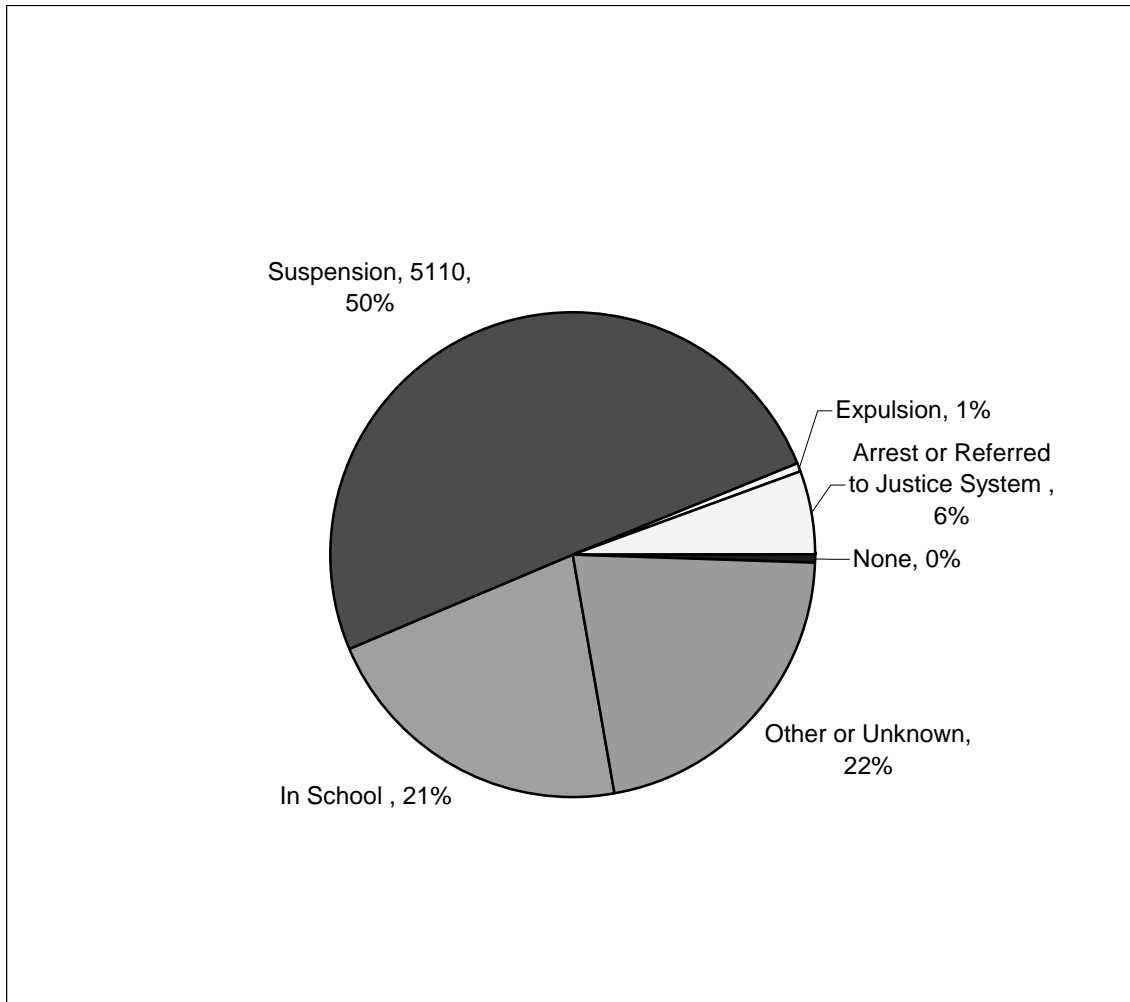


Figure 13: Discipline for violent incidents (2003-04 school year).

School districts provided information about the number of incidents of both violent and other criminal activities that were reported to law enforcement officials. Schools report the majority of all drug violations to law enforcement officials, but smaller proportions of other violent or criminal incidents (see Figure 14).

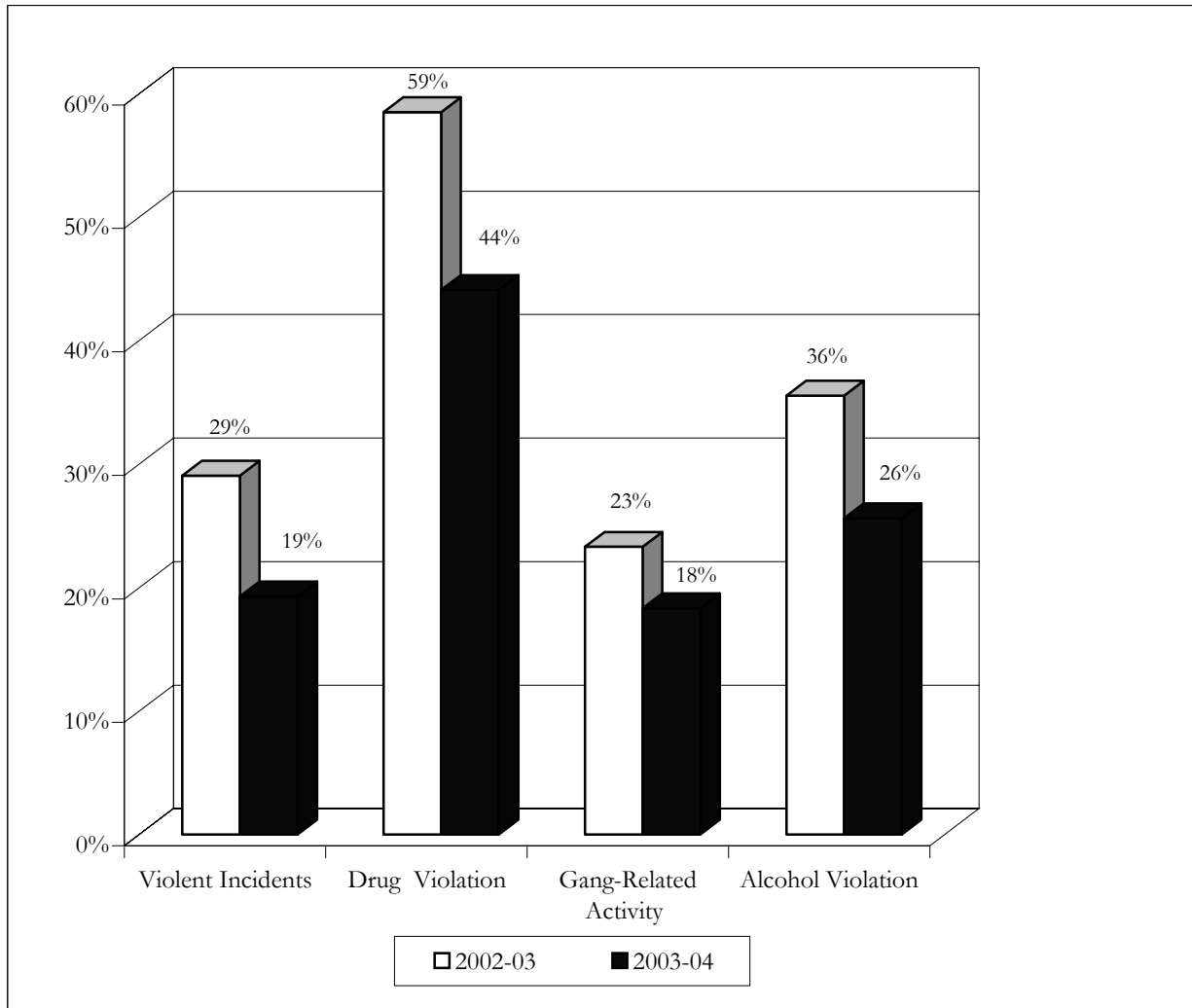


Figure 14: Percentage of all violent incidents, drug, alcohol, and gang-related incidents reported to law enforcement (2002-03 and 2003-04 school years).

Incidents of Vandalism

Vandalism in various forms creates conditions that seriously disrupt the school setting, causing financial loss and emotional distress to students and educators alike, accounting for one out of every five illegal incidents on school campuses. While the total number of vandalism incidents are down 6% overall from the previous year, this was primarily because of reductions in the number of incidents identified only as “other” (see Figure 15). Compared to the previous school year, in 2003-04 graffiti was 40% higher, criminal damage was 46% higher, breaking and entering was 17% higher, larceny/theft was 231% higher, and arson nearly doubled.

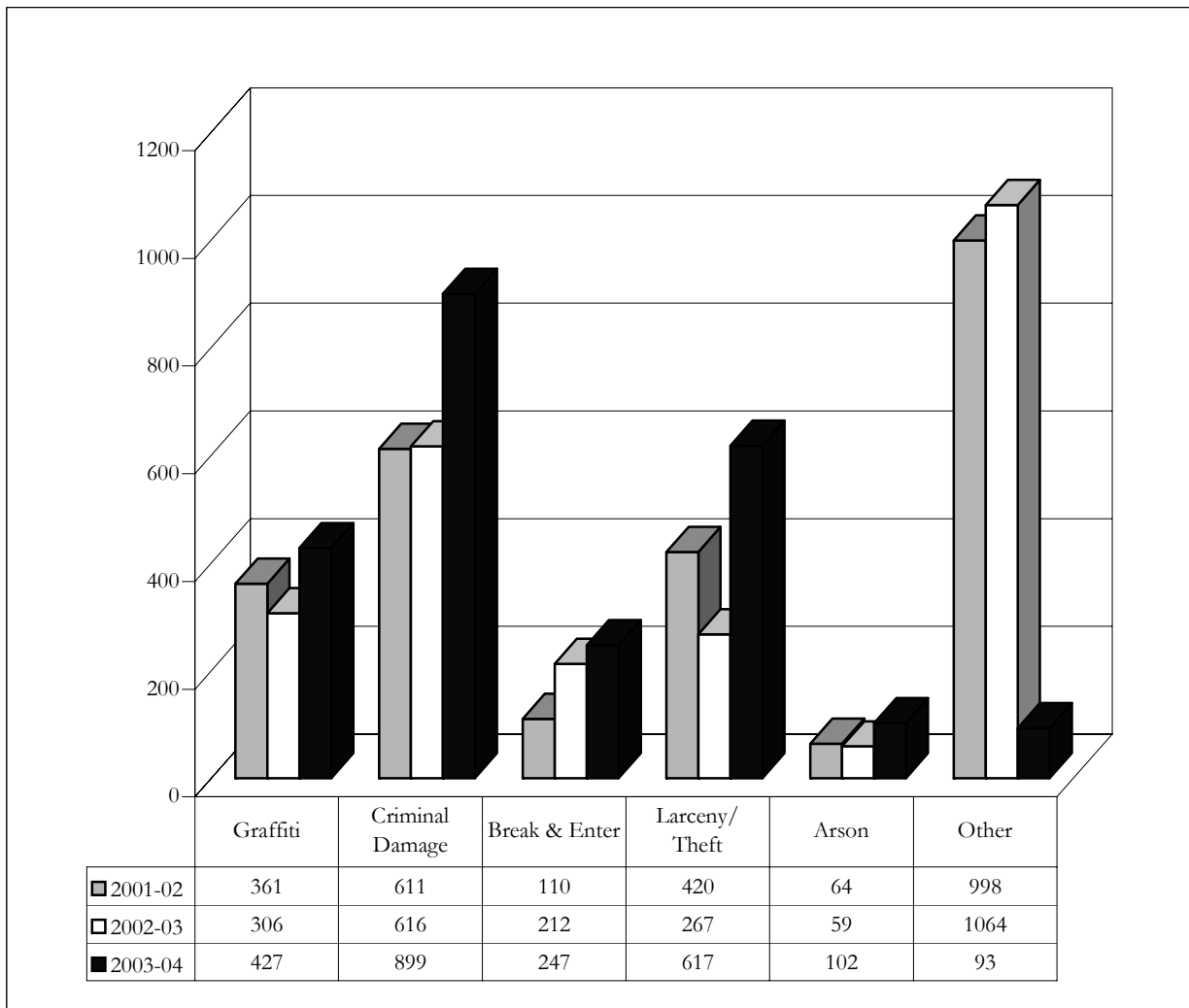


Figure 15: Incidents of vandalism (graffiti, criminal damage, breaking and entering, larceny/theft, arson, and other incidents) for the three school years from 2001-02 through 2003-04.

The financial costs of vandalism can be enormous, especially in cases that involve arson and serious criminal damage to school buildings. Overall, vandalism incidents cost the public schools, staff, students and parents just over half a million dollars for the 2002-03 school year (see Figure 16), half the cost of vandalism incidents in 2001-02. In addition to the reduced number of incidents in 2002-03, the cost in dollars per incident also decreased, from an average of \$391 per vandalism incident in the 2001-02 school year to \$242 per incident in the 2002-03 school year.

In the 2003-04 school year, however, vandalism incidents costs had more than tripled, to \$1.7 million. Despite the lower number of incidents in 2003-04 compared to the previous school year, the cost in dollars per incident nearly tripled, from an average of \$242 per vandalism incident in the 2002-03 school year to \$720 per incident in the 2003-04 school year.

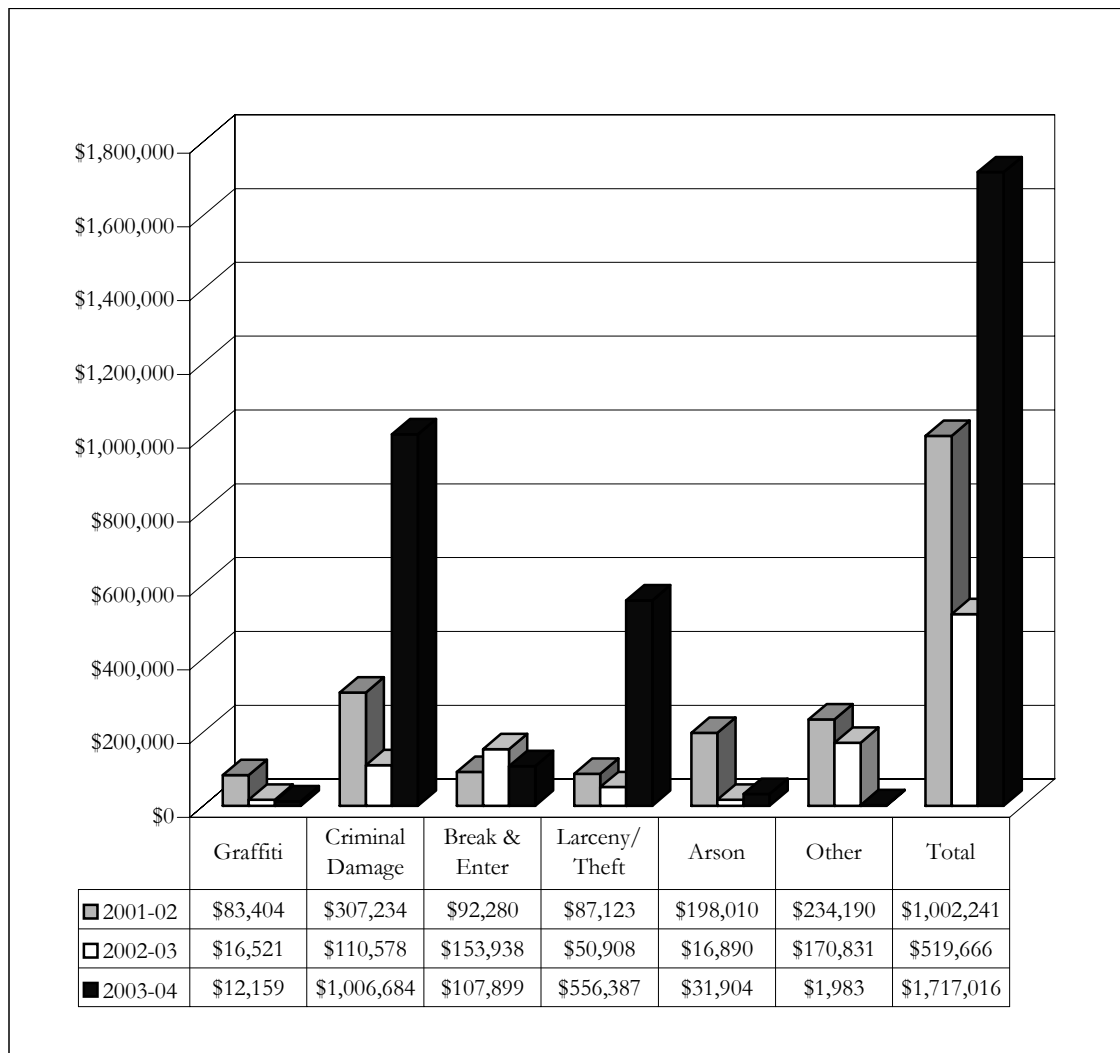


Figure 16: Costs of vandalism incidents in New Mexico schools for the three school years from 2001-02 through 2003-04.

In response to the losses that can be incurred from vandalism, schools report the majority of incidents to law enforcement officials. In the 2002-03 school year, 71% of a total of 2,143 incidents of vandalism were reported to law enforcement (see Figure 17): 68% of the arson incidents, 66% of the breaking and entering cases, 84% of the criminal damage incidents, 50% of graffiti incidents, 31% of the missing property incidents, and 88% of “other” incidents were reported to law enforcement officials.

In the 2003-04 school year, only 57% of a total of 2,385 incidents of vandalism, were reported: 93% of the breaking and entering cases, 64% of the larceny/theft incidents, 56% of the criminal damage incidents, 51% of the arson incidents, 37% of graffiti incidents, and 17% of “other” incidents were reported to law enforcement officials.

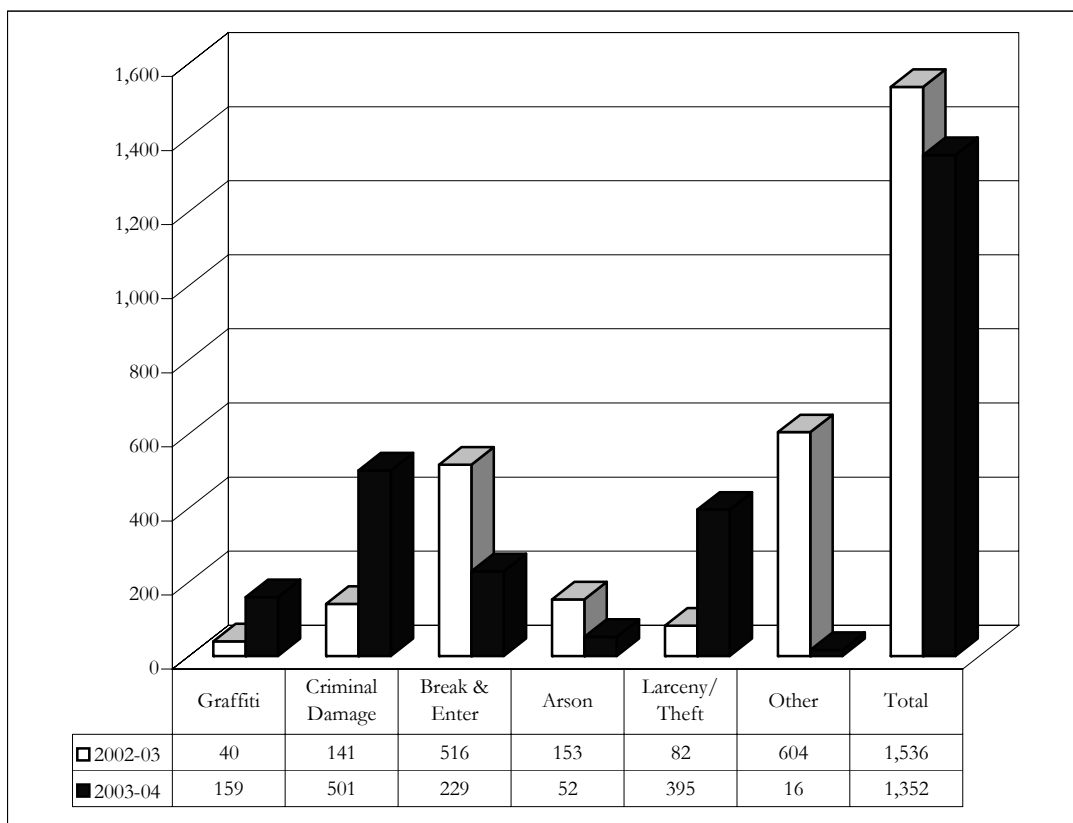


Figure 17: Cases of vandalism reported to law enforcement (2002-03 and 2003-04 school years).

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFE SCHOOLS PLANNING

School safety is of primary importance for everyone involved with the state's school system. School personnel repeatedly told us of the importance of the planning they are doing in the schools, and described the significant difference this planning could make in the safety of everyone on the campus. As one teacher explained, "we take the safety of our students and staff members seriously. We realize that society is always evolving and with that our plans are always changing. What I feel has helped is that students, staff members, community members, and parents understand and are aware of our safe school plans and the reasoning behind what we do."

Many school staff members described their school safety plans:

- "Our safety plans are the driving force behind creating safe learning environments for all our students. The students know why we have practice drills and the importance of being on their best behavior when an incident occurs. We have received feedback from many parents stating how appreciative they are that we take safety seriously."
- "We have eleven schools within our district (seven elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, one alternative high school, and one family school) and each school has a safe school plan in place. Each school within our district has a safe school liaison who oversees the plan and who conducts monthly safe school meetings with his/her safe school team. Each plan addresses prevention, intervention, and responses to crisis situations. Within these monthly safe school meetings at each site, prevention, intervention, and response is addressed. Any and all safety concerns are addressed and people who sit on the teams are assigned to take responsibility to ensure that the safety concerns are addressed. They keep minutes of their monthly meetings and turn them into me so that I can make sure all safety concerns are addressed."
- "The safe school liaison at each site meets with his/her staff yearly to review and explain changes to the safe school plan. Every staff member at each site is aware of their safe school plan and knows what to do when a crisis situation arises."
- "Each site has a code blue team in place to respond to medical emergencies. They also have a code green team in place to respond to bomb threats and other evacuation emergencies and a code red team to respond to lock down situations. Each teams drills once a month and meets on a regular basis to debrief drills and actual occurrences."
- "Parents are aware of each site's safe school plan and when drills occur. The county Emergency Manager sits in on many of our safe school meetings and has helped our district create evacuation plans that meet the size of each school. We also met with emergency responders in the community and aligned our code colors with theirs so that if we need to call for assistance they know what kind of incident we are facing."

- “I feel in (our district) we strive to make sure that we can deal with all emergencies and crisis. We continue to work together, communicate not only with our own staff, students and parents, but with the community and keep them in the loop of what we are doing.”
- “I trained my staff and we began practicing safety drills this year. This plan has made a huge difference. The trainings have forced us to look at the "what if" scenario.”
- “We have a district safety committee that consists of a principal from each grade level (elementary, intermediate, middle and high schools). We also have our school resource officers, technology and transportation. We meet about every other month to discuss any issues at their schools sites and around the district. We review the Crisis Response Handbook and make changes as needed. We also help to set policy with the School Board regarding anything from National Alerts to Suicide and Substance Abuse.”
- “We have Code Blue Teams at each school site with the Nurse in charge of each. The Team continues to train throughout the year on CPR, First Aid, drills, Communication, etc. “Training is provided to district staff on CPR, First Aid, Review of the Crisis Response Plan, different drills: fire, blue, black, yellow and green). As the world is changing and our schools are dealing with crisis, we need to continue to work together to insure that our schools will be safe and that we can meet the challenges of a crisis.”

Safety Plan Success Stories

These safety plans have had the desired effect of helping staff, students, parents and emergency responders to know what to do in the event of an emergency. Teachers and staff described many success stories that were attributable to the planning, training, and effort put into designing a quality school safety plan. The following are a sample of the success stories we heard.

- “We have had deaths of students, weapons on campus, death of a staff member, a suspicious person taking pictures of students and the school. The (safe school) plan has worked well. Our staff continues to review the plan and have drills throughout the year. Not all schools have had to use the plan fully, but those that have did a good job. Training should never stop, (there is) always something new.”
- “During the spring of last year I was meeting with all of the safe school liaisons across the district. About 45 minutes into our meeting we received a message that one of our elementary schools was put on lockdown status due to a shooting and police stand off behind the school. The staff and did wonderful even though safe school liaison was not present at the time. Their training and knowledge of their safe school plan proved to be effective when dealing with a crisis. The students were on lockdown for several hours and classrooms were well equipped with food and water (shelter-in-place preparation). It all worked out and the plan was followed and proved to be successful.”
- “One day (well-loved teacher) left the school to go home. What the school didn’t realize, at the time, was that he had died in his car in the parking lot. He was found at 2:20 pm, the students are released at 2:30 pm. The school knew exactly what to do, and followed the plan completely. Phone calls were made and law enforcement and ambulance service did their jobs. Everyone cried and supported his family. The following day, social workers, psychologists and counselors from around the district met with staff and students to debrief at the end of the day. Some felt like they should have done some things differently, but in the end, they followed the plan.”
- “Our school is right back up against a ditch, with portables there. Last year a 5th grader saw a man by the ditch bank who tried to lure her. She knew enough to go to the nearest portable classroom and got to safety. Students and teachers knew what to do, and the school locked down. Everyone was safe; the plan worked.”
- “(One afternoon), the weather was bad, a rain storm with the possibility of a tornado, so the school decided to send people home early, cancel the after-school program, just to make sure everyone was safe. The majority of the staff stepped up to the plate to call parents, shepherd children to right vehicles, conduct head counts, and kept those who couldn’t get home in the school library to keep them safe. Even though the electricity went out, they were all together and safe. Eventually the weather crisis passed, parents picked up their kids, all was well. What was great about it was that the principal and assistant principal are there on the spot, in the thick of

things – it was very impressive. They were not in their office shooting orders, but in parking lot getting drenched. They are strong leaders, and it shows.”

- “Things come up every day that you never dealt with before. We are lucky in that we have people who care about kids and can make the right choices to keep them safe and protected. No matter what plan is in place, a new situation will come up. You need to be flexible and think on your feet, be able to make the tough calls under pressure – that’s what gives people confidence.”
- “A couple of months ago, there was a situation where a man was loose carrying an AK-47 in the area of our school. Because of planning, we were able to quickly take action. We assessed the situation, called for a lockdown, and were able to be fully secure in less than 10 minutes. We are a large school, so to move this quickly shows that our staff and students have been trained. We accomplished this without outside support. Other schools in the area (middle and elementary) had a more difficult time securing their schools. “

A school counselor wanted to emphasize the importance of people taking preventive measures, rather than waiting for a problem and then reacting to it. “Prevention is the key to making schools safe.” A teacher emphasized the importance of working together and communicating outside the school: “I feel in (this community) we strive to make sure that we can deal with all emergencies/crisis. We continue to work together, communicate not with our own staff, students and parents, but with the community and keep them in the loop of what we are doing.”

These schools and their staff are to be commended for the jobs they are doing in designing and implementing programs to increase the safety and security of all school personnel. The actions they take continue to have a positive impact in all of New Mexico’s schools and communities.

CONCLUSION

For over 15 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 2003-04 school year were at their lowest point in six years. This number was at its highest during the 1998-99 school year, when 17,616 incidents were reported. Since then, the number of incidents has been declining steadily to the 12,628 incidents reported for 2003-04.

The most significant improvements in school safety identified in this report included reductions in number of incidents of vandalism, firearm incidents and other criminal activity, and fewer reports to law enforcement for incidents of violence, vandalism, firearms or other criminal activities. These improvements can be celebrated as tangible evidence of improved safety measures in every district.

Weapons were involved in 572 of the reported incidents of violence in the 2002-03 school year, and 622 incidents in the 2003-04 school year. Students were the offenders in all but 11 cases in 2002-03 and all but 10 cases in 2003-04. Reports were made to law enforcement in 328 of these cases in 2002-03 and 333 of these cases in 2003-04. This was a dramatic improvement over the numbers of weapons-related incidents reported to law enforcement in previous years. Other violent incidents were higher in 2002-03 by nearly 6% over the previous year, and were another 3% higher in 2003-04. Approximately six out of ten of these incidents were simple assault/battery. Students comprised 98% of the offenders and more than 80% of the victims of these violent incidents both school years.

Other criminal offenses (gang activity, drug violations and alcohol violations) showed a significant decline from previous years, down 10% in 2002-03 and 9% in 2003-04 from the previous year. Drug violations, the most prevalent criminal activity, accounted for approximately 8 out of 10 of all reported offenses. Alcohol violations accounted for 18% of these offenses in 2002-03 and 14% in 2003-04. Drug violations were most likely to be reported to law enforcement (59% in 2002-03 and 44% in 2003-04). Fewer alcohol violations, violent incidents or gang activities were reported to law enforcement.

Incidents of vandalism were down 16% in 2002-03 from the previous year, with graffiti, missing property, arson and other vandalism all trending downwards for most measures of violence and vandalism. Total incidents of vandalism were down another 6% in 2003-04, although each category of vandalism except "other" had increased. Financial costs for these incidents of vandalism were just over half a million dollars in 2002-03. In the 2003-04 school year, the cost of vandalism reached \$1.7 million, or over \$700 per incident.

These data show that for most measures of violence and vandalism, schools in New Mexico are becoming safer places for the students, staff and parents. These improvements may be credited to increased awareness of the problems of safety, as well as a positive approach for dealing with safety issues. Each school and school district in the state has worked hard to create safer, more enjoyable places for learning and growing. Their successes are reflected in the data in this report.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Internet Resources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov>

Federal Emergency Management Agency
<http://www.fema.gov>

World Health Organization
<http://www.who.int>

American Red Cross
<http://www.redcross.org>

Journal of the American Medical Association
<http://www.jama.ama-assn.org>

American School Counselors Association
<http://www.schoolcounselor.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>

This website provides position statements on school nurse roles in emergency and bioterrorism emergency preparedness.

New Mexico Homeland Security Office

<http://governor.state.nm.us/homeland.php?mm=4>

This website provides updates on safety and security issues affecting all New Mexican citizens.

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.

Florida Department of Education

http://www.unf.edu/dept/fe/sdfs/notes/crisis_mngmnt.pdf

This website provides information on emergency preparedness including how to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from emergencies.

Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency

<http://www.riema.ri.gov/eguide.htm>

This website provides guidance for schools on emergency procedures.

Virginia Model School Crisis Management Plan

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/crisis-guide.pdf>

This crisis plan outlines the responsibilities of key school personnel such as the principal, teachers, school nurse, counselor and custodial staff.

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/nwcphp/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.

Crisis Response Team

<http://www.healthinschools.org/sh/CrisisResponse.pdf>

<http://www.healthinschools.org/sh/schoolresponse.asp>

This website will provide information on how to put together a crisis response team.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Emergency Preparedness and Response.

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/planning/index.asp>

This website provides information on how to develop policies and procedures to be used in establishing a crisis response team at the school building level.

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.

Connect With Parents (2003). Available from CWK Network, Inc.
www.connectingwithkids.com

Books and Reports

Safe Schools Report 2000-2001 (2003).

New Mexico Public Education Department and the University of New Mexico
Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

Safe Schools Report 2001-2002 (2004).

New Mexico Public Education Department and the University of New Mexico
Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

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 Win-Win! (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.

How to Talk to Your Kids About School Violence (2003).

Dr. Ken Druck, Onomatopoeia, Inc.

Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities
(2003). The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, U.S. Department of Education.
edpubs@inet.ed.gov 1-877-433-7827.

Connect With Parents (2003). Available from CWK Network, Inc.
www.connectingwithkids.com

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
P.O. Box 42481; 3480 Greenbriar Parkway, Suite 310-B; Atlanta, GA 30331.

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