



Office of Justice Programs

Bureau of Justice Statistics

Washington, D.C. 20531

September 20, 1999

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

THROUGH: THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

THE ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Laurie Robinson
Assistant Attorney General
Office of Justice Programs

FROM:

Jan M. Chaiken
Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics

SUBJECT:

Advance Notification of BJS Publication

PURPOSE: To provide the Attorney General with advance copies and notification of the pending publication of **Indicators of School Crime and Safety 1999** (NCJ 178906), by Patsy A. Klaus and Michael R. Rand of BJS; Phillip Kaufman, Xiangli Chen, and Susan Choy of MPR Associates, Inc.; and Kathryn A. Chandler and Christopher D. Chapman of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

DISCUSSION: **Indicators of School Crime and Safety 1999** presents data on crime at school from the perspectives of students, teachers, principals, and the general population from an array of sources — the National Crime Victimization Survey (1992-97), the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (1993, 1995, and 1997), the National Household Education Survey (1993), and the School and Staffing Survey (1993-94). A joint effort by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Center for Education Statistics, the report examines crime occurring in school as well as on the way to and from school. Data for crime away from school are also presented to place school crime in the context of crime in the larger society. The report provides detailed statistical information to inform the Nation on the current nature of crime in schools, and is a companion document to the **Annual Report on School Safety: 1999**, which provides an overview of the nature and scope of school crime and describes actions schools and communities can take to address this critical issue. The two reports respond to a 1998 request by President Clinton for an annual report card on school violence.

Page 2

Some technical corrections which have been agreed upon by BJS and NCES have not been included in this advance notification copy, but will be included in the final document. Highlights include the following:

- In 1997, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of about 202,000 nonfatal serious violent crimes at school, and about 636,000 away from school. These numbers indicate that when students were away from school, they were more likely to be victims of nonfatal serious violent crime—including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault — than when they were at school.
- The percentages of students in grades 9 through 12 who have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property have not changed significantly in recent years. In 1993, 1995, and 1997, about 7 to 8 percent of students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property in the past 12 months.
- In 1996-97, 10 percent of all public schools reported at least one serious violent crime to the police or a law enforcement representative.
- Over the 5-year period from 1993 to 1997, teachers were victims of 1,771,000 nonfatal crimes at school, including 1,114,000 thefts and 657,000 violent crimes (rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault). This translates into about 84 crimes per 1,000 teachers per year.
- Between 1989 and 1995, the percentages of students who felt unsafe while they were at school and while they were going to and from school increased. In 1989, 6 percent of students ages 12 through 19 sometimes or most of the time feared they were going to be attacked or harmed at school. By 1995, this percentage had risen to 9 percent. During the same period, the percentage of students fearing they would be attacked while traveling to and from school rose from 4 percent to 7 percent.
- Between 1993 and 1997, the percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property at least 1 day within 30 days before the survey fell from 12 percent to 9 percent.
- In 1995 and 1997, almost one-third of all students in grades 9 through 12 (32 percent) reported that someone had offered, sold, or given them an illegal drug on school property. This was an increase from 1993 when 24 percent of such students reported illegal drugs available to them on school property.

TIMETABLE: There will be no press release. This report will initially be released electronically on the Internet on September 24, 1999. When printed, the report will be distributed to criminal justice practitioners, policymakers, and others who have indicated an interest in this subject.



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
National Center for Education Statistics

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Bureau of Justice Statistics



September 1999

Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1999

Phillip Kaufman
Xianglei Chen
Susan P. Choy
MPR Associates, Inc.

Kathryn A. Chandler
Christopher D. Chapman
National Center for Education Statistics

Michael R. Rand
Patsy Klaus
Bureau of Justice Statistics

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, NCES #
U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, NCJ #

U.S. Department of Education
Richard W. Riley, *Secretary*

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
C. Kent McGuire, *Assistant Secretary*

National Center for Education Statistics
Gary Phillips, *Acting Commissioner*

U.S. Department of Justice
Janet Reno, *Attorney General*

Office of Justice Programs
Laurie O. Robinson, *Assistant Attorney General*

Bureau of Justice Statistics
Jan M. Chaiken, *Director*

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations. It fulfills a congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States; conduct and publish reports and specialized analyses of the meaning and significance of such statistics; assist state and local education agencies in improving their statistical systems; and report on education activities in foreign countries.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing, publishing, and disseminating statistical information about crime, its perpetrators and victims, and the operation of the justice system at all levels of government. These data are critical to federal, state, and local policy-makers in combating crime and ensuring that justice is both efficient and evenhanded.

September 1999

Suggested Citation

Kaufman, P., Chen, X., Choy, S. P., Chandler, K. A., Chapman, C. D., Rand, M. R., and Klaus, P. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1999*. U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. NCES #/NCJ-#. Washington, D.C.: 1999.

This publication can be downloaded from the World Wide Web at <http://nces.ed.gov> or <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>. Single hard copies can be ordered through ED Pubs at 1-877-4ED-PUBS (NCES #) (TTY/TDD 1-877-576-7734), and the Bureau of Justice Statistics Clearinghouse at 1-800-732-3277 (NCJ-#).

Contact at NCES:

Kathryn Chandler
(202) 219-1767
(e-mail) kathryn_chandler@ed.gov

Contact at BJS:

Michael Rand
(202) 616-3494
(e-mail) randm@ojp.usdoj.gov

Foreword

The renewed national focus on school crime and safety continues into the current school year, fueled not only by the tragic events in Colorado, Oregon, and elsewhere, but also by the more common but less serious violence that touches the lives of students, parents, teachers, and school officials.

Solutions to any problem can only be developed if the programs and policies developed to address it are built on accurate information about the nature, extent, and scope of the problem. This report is intended to provide information that will assist in developing programs to prevent and cope with violence and crime in schools.

This is the second edition of Indicators of School Crime and Safety, a joint effort by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Center for Education Statistics. The report provides detailed statistical information to inform the nation on the current nature of crime in schools, and is a companion document to the Annual Report on School Safety: 1999. The Annual Report is a joint publication of the Departments of Education and Justice that provides an overview of the nature and scope of school crime and describes actions schools and communities can take to address this critical issue. The two reports respond to a 1998 request by President Clinton for an annual report card on school violence.

This edition of Indicators contains the most recent available data on school crime and safety drawn from a number of statistical series supported by the federal government. The data in the report can provide perspective of the extent of crime and violence in our schools, as well as some measure of our National response to this problem.

We were not able to include in this edition the latest information about school-associated violent deaths, a key indicator of great interest to students, parents, teachers and others involved in addressing school violence. We anticipate that preliminary estimates from Center for Disease Control and Prevention's study on this topic will be included in the 1999 Annual Report, and the complete study will be submitted later this year for publication in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Electronic editions of this Indicators report will contain links to the data concerning school-associated violent deaths data as soon as they are available.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Center for Education Statistics continue to work towards providing more timely and accurate data on the issue of school related violence and safety. The results of the 1999 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey will be included in next year's edition of Indicators, while the following year's report will contain data from a new survey of school administrators on crime and victimization in the schools.

We hope that this ongoing series of reports will continue to help inform the President, Congress, and the American people on our nation's progress in providing our children with safe places to live and learn.

Gary Phillips
Acting Commissioner of Education Statistics

Jan M. Chaiken, Ph.D.
Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools should be safe and secure places for all students, teachers, and staff members. Without a safe learning environment, teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn. In fact, as the data in this report show, more victimizations happen away from school than at school.¹ For example, despite the tragic and deadly incidents on school campuses in the last few years, in 1997, students were about three times more likely to be victims of nonfatal serious violent crime away from school than at school (Indicator 1).

However, while young people may be relatively safer at school than they are away from school, this does not mean that schools are "safe" or are perceived by students as "safe."² Although between 1993 and 1997 the total nonfatal victimization rate for young people declined, in 1997, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of about 202,000 serious violent crimes at school (that is, rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault). They were victims of more than 2.7 million total crimes at school (Indicator 1). Furthermore, for some types of crimes at school, rates have not changed over the last few years. For example, between 1993 and 1997, the percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property in the past 12 months remained constant—at about 7 or 8 percent (Indicator 3). The percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who reported being in a physical fight on school property in the past 12 months also remained unchanged between 1993 and 1997—at about 15 percent (Indicator 4).

As noted in last year's report, while data show that the actual rate of victimization has declined or remained constant over recent years, students seem to feel less safe at school now than just a few years ago. Students ages 12 through 19 who reported avoiding one or more places at school for their own safety increased between 1989 and 1995—from 5 to 9 percent (Indicator 13). Furthermore, the presence of street gangs on school property continues to be a concern and may lead to students feeling less safe. The percentage of students who reported that street gangs were present at their schools increased from 1989 to 1995. In 1995, 28 percent of students ages 12 through 19 reported that they had street gangs at their schools compared to 15 percent in 1989 (Indicator 14).

In addition, whereas alcohol and marijuana use on school property remained constant between 1993 and 1995, marijuana use anywhere among students in grades 9 through 12 increased. In 1997, about 26 percent of these students had used marijuana in the last 30 days (Indicator 17). Furthermore, almost one-third of all students in

¹The reader should be cautious in making comparisons between victimization rates on school property and elsewhere. These data do not allow the estimation of hours on school property and hours elsewhere.

grades 9 through 12 (32 percent) reported that someone had offered, sold, or given them an illegal drug on school property—an increase from 24 percent in 1993 (Indicator 18).

Therefore, the data shown in this report present a mixed picture of school safety. While overall school crime rates have declined, violence, gangs, and drugs in school remain problems that demand attention. It is hoped that all children will be able to go to and from school and spend time at school without fearing for their safety or the safety of their friends and teachers. The data presented in this report indicate that more work needs to be done.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CURRENT REPORT

This report, the second in a series of annual reports on school crime and safety from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics, presents the latest available data on school crime and student safety. The report repeats many indicators from last year's report but also provides updated data on nonfatal student victimization and nonfatal teacher victimization, and new data on student fights and the availability of drugs on school property.

The report provides a profile of school crime and safety in the United States and describes the characteristics of the victims of these crimes. It is organized as a series of indicators, with each indicator presenting data on a different aspect of school crime and safety. There are four sections to the report: Nonfatal Student Victimization—Student Reports; Violence and Crime at School—Public School Principal/Disciplinarian Reports; Nonfatal Teacher Victimization at School—Teacher Reports; and School Environment. Each section contains a set of indicators that, taken together, describe a distinct aspect of school crime and safety.

Rather than relying on data from a large omnibus survey of school crime and safety, this report uses a variety of independent data sources from federal departments and agencies including the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Each data source has an independent sample design, data collection method, and questionnaire design, all of which may be influenced by the unique perspective of the primary funding agency. By combining multiple and independent sources of data, it is hoped that this report will present a more valid portrait of school crime and safety than would be possible with any single source of information.

However, because the report relies on so many different data sets, the age groups, the time periods, and the types of respondents analyzed can vary from indicator to indicator. Readers should keep this in mind as they compare data

²Moreover, safety is a subjective term. One person's view of a safe environment may not match another's.

from different indicators. Furthermore, while every effort has been made to keep key definitions consistent across indicators, different surveys sometimes use different definitions, such as those for specific crimes and "at school."³ Therefore, caution should be used in making comparisons between results from different data sets. Descriptions of these data sets are located in appendix B of this report.

KEY FINDINGS

Some of the key findings from the various sections of this report are as follows:⁴

NONFATAL STUDENT VICTIMIZATION—STUDENT REPORTS

In 1997, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of about 202,000 nonfatal serious violent crimes at school, and about 636,000 away from school. These numbers indicate that when students were away from school, they were more likely to be victims of nonfatal serious violent crime—including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault—than when they were at school (Indicator 1).

- The percentages of students in grades 9 through 12 who have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property⁵ have not changed significantly in recent years. In 1993, 1995, and 1997, about 7 to 8 percent of students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property in the past 12 months (Indicator 3).
- Students were differentially victimized by crime according to where they lived. In 1997, 12- through 18-year-old students living in urban or suburban areas were more vulnerable to serious violent crime at school than were students in rural areas. Away from school, urban students were more vulnerable to serious violent crime than were suburban or rural students. However, student vulnerability to theft at school in 1997 was similar in urban, suburban, and rural areas and similar in urban and suburban areas away from school (Indicator 1).

VIOLENCE AND CRIME AT SCHOOL—PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL/DISCIPLINARIAN REPORTS

In 1996–97, 10 percent of all public schools reported at least one serious violent crime to the police or a law enforcement representative. Principals' reports of serious violent crimes included murder, rape or other type of sexual battery, suicide, physical attack or fight with a weapon, or robbery. Another 47 percent of public schools reported a less serious violent or nonviolent crime (but not a serious violent one). Crimes in this category include physical attack

³Readers should consult the glossary of terms in appendix C for the specific definitions used in each survey.

⁴All comparisons reported here were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. See appendix B for details on the methods used here.

⁵Definitions for "on school property" and "at school" may differ. See appendix C for specific definitions.

or fight without a weapon, theft/larceny, and vandalism. The remaining 43 percent of public schools did not report any of these crimes to the police (Indicator 7).

- Elementary schools were much less likely than either middle or high schools to report any type of crime in 1996–97. They were much more likely to report vandalism (31 percent) than any other crime (19 percent or less) (Indicator 8).
- At the middle and high school levels, physical attack or fight without a weapon was generally the most commonly reported crime in 1996–97 (9 and 8 per 1,000 students, respectively). Theft or larceny was more common at the high school than at the middle school level (6 versus 4 per 1,000 students) (Indicator 8).

NONFATAL TEACHER VICTIMIZATION AT SCHOOL—TEACHER REPORTS

Over the 5-year period from 1993 to 1997, teachers were victims of 1,771,000 nonfatal crimes at school, including 1,114,000 thefts and 657,000 violent crimes (rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault) (Indicator 9). This translates into about 84 crimes per 1,000 teachers per year.

- From 1993 to 1997, middle/junior high school teachers were more likely to be victims of violent crimes (most of which were simple assaults) than senior high school teachers, who, in turn, were more likely to be victims of violent crime than elementary school teachers (Indicator 9).
- In the 1993–94 school year, 12 percent of all elementary and secondary school teachers were threatened with injury by a student, and 4 percent were physically attacked by a student. This represented about 341,000 teachers who were victims of threats of injury by students that year, and 119,000 teachers who were victims of attacks by students (Indicator 10).

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Between 1989 and 1995, the percentages of students who felt unsafe while they were at school and while they were going to and from school increased. In 1989, 6 percent of students ages 12 through 19 sometimes or most of the time feared they were going to be attacked or harmed at school. By 1995, this percentage had risen to 9 percent. During the same period, the percentage of students fearing they would be attacked while traveling to and from school rose from 4 percent to 7 percent (Indicator 12).

- Between 1989 and 1995, the percentage of students ages 12 through 19 who avoided one or more places at school for fear of their own safety increased, from 5 percent to 9 percent. In 1995, this percentage represented 2.1 million students (Indicator 13).
- Between 1989 and 1995, the percentage of students who reported that street gangs were present at their schools increased. In 1989, 15 percent of students reported gangs being present in their schools. By 1995, this percentage had risen to 28 percent (Indicator 14).
- Between 1993 and 1997, the percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property at least 1 day within 30 days before the survey fell from 12 percent to 9 percent (a 25 percent reduction) (Indicator 11).
- In 1997, about 51 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 had at least one drink of alcohol in the 30 days before being surveyed. A much smaller percentage (about 6 percent) had at least one drink on school property during the same period (Indicator 16).
- There was an increase in the use of marijuana among students between 1993 and 1995. In 1995, about 25 percent of all students in grades 9 through 12 had used marijuana in the last 30 days, compared with 18 percent in 1993. Marijuana use in 1997, at 26 percent, was similar to that in 1995. However, marijuana use on school property did not increase significantly between 1993 and 1995, or between 1995 and 1997 (Indicator 17).
- In 1995 and 1997, almost one-third of all students in grades 9 through 12 (32 percent) reported that someone had offered, sold, or given them an illegal drug on school property. This was an increase from 1993 when 24 percent of such students reported illegal drugs available to them on school property (Indicator 18).