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Statistics**

October 2001





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Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2001

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U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, NCES 2002-113
U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, NCJ-190075

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October 2001

Suggested Citation

Kaufman, P., Chen, X., Choy, S.P., Peter, K., Ruddy, S.A., Miller, A.K., Fleury, J.K., Chandler, K.A., Planty, M.G., and Rand, M.R. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2001*. U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. NCES 2002–113/NCJ-190075. Washington, DC: 2001.

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FOREWORD

The safety of our students, teachers, and staff at school continues to be the focus of considerable national attention. National indicators affirm that the levels of crime in school have continued to decline, that acts that promote fear and detract from learning are decreasing, and that students feel more safe in school than they did a few years ago. Despite declining rates, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of about 2.5 million crimes of violence or theft at school in 1999. Violence, theft, bullying, drugs, and firearms still remain problems in many schools throughout the country and periodically the news headlines relate the details of a tragic event in a school somewhere in America.

Effective programs and policies can only be built on foundations supported by accurate information about the nature, extent, and scope of the problems being addressed. This report is intended to build a foundation of information that will assist in developing policies and/or programs to prevent and cope with violence and crime in schools.

This is the fourth edition of *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, a joint effort by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics. The report provides detailed statistical information to inform the nation on the current nature of crime in schools. 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. These data include results from a study of violent deaths in school, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the 1999 National Crime Victimization Survey, which is conducted by the Census Bureau on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Statistics; and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics continue to work toward providing more timely and complete data on the issue of school-related violence and safety. Not only is this report available on the Internet in its entirety, but individual indicators are updated there throughout the year as new data become available.

Gary W. Phillips
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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. Student safety is of concern outside of school as well. In fact, as the data in this report show, more serious victimizations happen away from school than at school.¹ In 1999, students were more than two times as likely to be victims of serious violent crime away from school as at school (Indicator 2).²

In 1999, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of about 2.5 million total crimes at school. In that same year, these students were victims of about 186,000 serious violent crimes at school (that is, rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) (Indicator 2). There were also 47 school-associated violent deaths in the United States between July 1, 1998, and June 30, 1999, including 38 homicides, 33 of which involved school-aged children (Indicator 1).

The total nonfatal victimization rate for young people generally declined between 1992 and 1999. The percentage of students being victimized at school also declined over the last few years. Between 1995 and 1999, the percentage of students who reported being victims of crime at school decreased from 10 percent to 8 percent (Indicator 3). This decline was due in large part to the decrease in percentages of students in grades 7 through 9 who were victimized. Between 1995 and 1999, the prevalence of reported victimization dropped from 11 percent to 8 percent for 7th graders, from 11 percent to 8 percent for 8th graders, and from 12 percent to 9 percent for 9th graders.

However, the prevalence rates of some types of crimes at school have not changed. For example, between 1993 and 1999, 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 to 8 percent (Indicator 4).

As the rate of victimization in schools has declined or remained constant, students also seem to feel more secure at school now than just a few years ago. The percentage of students ages 12 through 18 who reported avoiding one or more places at school for their own safety decreased between 1995 and 1999—from 9 to 5 percent (Indicator 13). Furthermore, the percentage of students who reported that street gangs were present at their schools decreased

¹These data do not take into account the number of hours that students spend on school property and the number of hours they spend elsewhere.

²“Students” refers to persons 12 through 18 years of age who have attended any grade equal to or less than high school. An uncertain percentage of these persons may not have attended school during the survey reference period.

from 1995 to 1999. In 1999, 17 percent of students ages 12 through 18 reported that they had street gangs at their schools compared with 29 percent in 1995 (Indicator 15).

There was an increase in the use of marijuana among students in grades 9 through 12 between 1993 and 1995, but percentages of students reporting marijuana use were similar in 1995, 1997, and 1999. In 1999, about 27 percent of these students had used marijuana in the last 30 days (Indicator 18). Furthermore, in 1995, 1997, and 1999, about one-third of these students (between 30 and 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 19). 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 are still present, indicating that more work needs to be done.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CURRENT REPORT

This report, the fourth in a series of annual reports on school crime and safety from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), presents the latest available data on school crime and student safety. The report repeats many indicators from the 2000 report but also provides updated data on fatal and nonfatal student victimization, nonfatal teacher victimization, students being threatened or injured with a weapon at school, fights at school, students carrying weapons to school, students' use of alcohol and marijuana, and student reports of drug availability on school property.

The report is organized as a series of indicators, with each indicator presenting data on a different aspect of school crime and safety. It starts with the most serious violence. There are five sections to the report: Violent Deaths at School; 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 BJS, NCES, 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 complete 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 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

All of the comparisons described in this report were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Some of the key findings from the various sections of this report are as follows:⁴

VIOLENT DEATHS AT SCHOOL

From July 1, 1998, through June 30, 1999, there were 47 school-associated violent deaths in the United States. Thirty-eight of these violent deaths were homicides, six were suicides, two were killed by a law enforcement officer in the line of duty, and one was unintentional (Indicator 1). Thirty-three of the 38 school-associated homicides were of school-aged children. By comparison, a total of 2,407 children ages 5 through 19 were victims of homicide in the United States from July 1, 1998, through June 30, 1999. Four of the six school-associated suicides occurring from July 1, 1998, through June 30, 1999, were of school-aged children. A total of 1,854 children ages 5 through 19 committed suicide that year.

NONFATAL STUDENT VICTIMIZATION—STUDENT REPORTS

Students ages 12 through 18 were more likely to be victims of nonfatal serious violent crime—including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault—away from school than when they were at school (Indicator 2). In 1999, students in this age range were victims of about 476,000 serious violent crimes away from school, compared with about 186,000 at school.

- The percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property⁵ has not changed significantly in recent years. In 1993, 1995, 1997, and 1999, about 7 to 8 per-

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

⁴See appendix B for details on the statistical methodology.

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

cent 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 4).

- In 1999, 12- through 18-year-old students living in urban and suburban locales were equally vulnerable to serious violent crime at school. Away from school, however, urban students were more vulnerable to serious violent crime than were suburban students, and suburban students were more likely to experience serious violent victimization than were rural students. Yet, student vulnerability to theft at school and away from school in 1999 was similar in urban, suburban, and rural areas (Indicator 2).
- Younger students (ages 12 through 14) were more likely than older students (ages 15 through 18) to be victims of crime at school. However, older students were more likely than younger students to be victimized away from school (Indicator 2).

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 at least one less serious violent or nonviolent crime (but not a serious violent one). Crimes in this category include physical attack 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. Elementary schools 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 1995 through 1999, teachers were victims of approximately 1,708,000 nonfatal crimes at school, including 1,073,000 thefts and 635,000 violent crimes (rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault) (Indicator 9). On average, this translates into 79 crimes per 1,000 teachers per year.

- During the 1995 through 1999 period, senior high school and middle/junior high school teachers were more likely to be victims of violent crimes (most of which were simple assaults) than elementary school teachers (38 and 54, respectively, versus 16 crimes per 1,000 teachers) (Indicator 9).
- Teachers were differentially victimized by violent crimes at school according to where they taught. Over the 5-year period from 1995 through 1999, urban teachers were more likely to be victims of violent crimes than suburban and rural teachers (39 versus 22 and 20, respectively, per 1,000 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 1995 and 1999, the percentages of students who felt unsafe while they were at school and while they were going to and from school decreased. In 1995, 9 percent of students ages 12 through 18 sometimes or most of the time feared they were going to be attacked or harmed at school. In 1999, this percentage had fallen to 5 percent. During the same period, the percentage of students fearing they would be attacked while traveling to and from school fell from 7 percent to 4 percent (Indicator 12).

- Between 1993 and 1999, the percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property within the previous 30 days fell from 12 percent to 7 percent (about a 42 percent reduction) (Indicator 11).
- Between 1995 and 1999, the percentage of students ages 12 through 18 who avoided one or more places at school for fear of their own safety decreased, from 9 to 5 percent. (Indicator 13).
- In 1999, about 13 percent of students ages 12 through 18 reported that someone at school had used hate-related words against them. That is, in the prior 6 months someone at school called them a derogatory word having to do with race/ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation. In addition, about 36 percent of students saw hate-related graffiti at school (Indicator 14).
- Between 1995 and 1999, the percentage of students who reported that street gangs were present at their schools decreased. In 1995, 29 percent of students reported gangs being present in their schools. By 1999, this percentage had fallen to 17 percent (Indicator 15).

- In 1999, about 5 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 had at least one drink of alcohol on school property in the previous 30 days. Half of students (about 50 percent) had at least one drink anywhere during the same period (Indicator 17).
- There was an increase in the use of marijuana among students in grades 9 through 12 anywhere and on school property between 1993 and 1995, but no change between 1995, 1997, and 1999. About one-quarter (27 percent) of students reported using marijuana anywhere in the last 30 days in 1999 and 7 percent reported using marijuana on school property (Indicator 18).
- In 1995, 1997, and 1999, about one-third of all students in grades 9 through 12 (between 30 and 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 that illegal drugs were available to them on school property (Indicator 19).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank the heads of their respective agencies, Gary W. Phillips of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and Lawrence Greenfield of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), for supporting this report. We also appreciate the support provided by Bill Modzeleski of the Safe and Drug-free Schools program. Their support of our larger data collection and reporting agendas on school crime and safety make this report possible.

From BJS, we wish to thank Callie Rennison of the Victimization Statistics Branch for her work in preparing and verifying data from the NCVS.

From NCES, we wish to thank Bruce Taylor, Ilona Berkovits, and Patt Dabbs, who served as reviewers. They each provided input that substantially improved the publication.

Outside of NCES and BJS, school crime experts who reviewed the report were John Bishop of Cornell University, Joseph Moone of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Joanne Wiggins of the Planning and Evaluation Service of the U. S. Department of Education. Their advice was gratefully accepted. We particularly appreciated their willingness to review the report under very strict time constraints.

Without the assistance of the following staff at MPR Associates this report could not have been produced: Barbara Kridl (overall production and proofreading), Francesca Tussing (production, proofreading, layout, and editing), Andrea Livingston (editing), and Leslie Retallick (figure design and text layout). They provided invaluable editorial, graphic, and production assistance.

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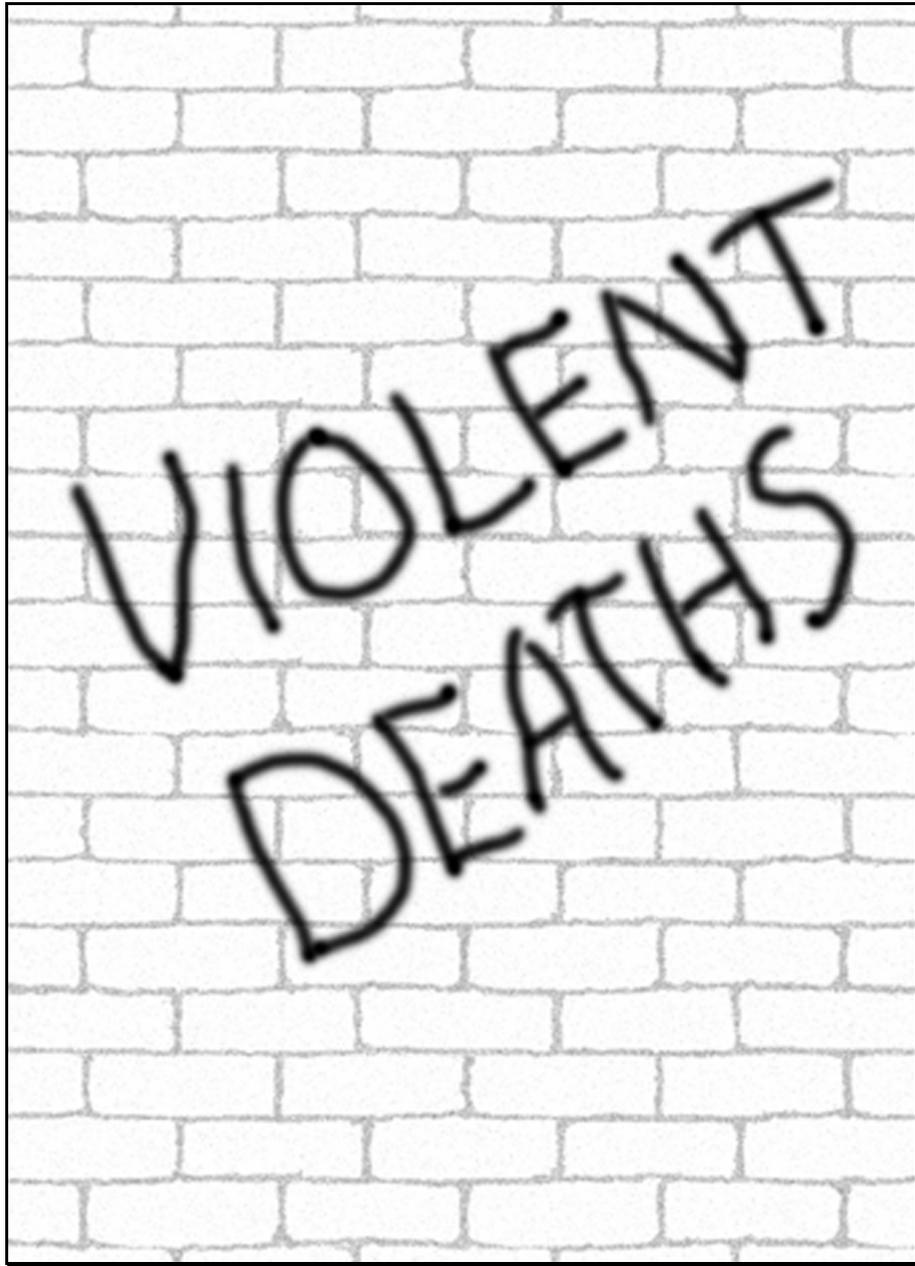
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Violent Deaths at School

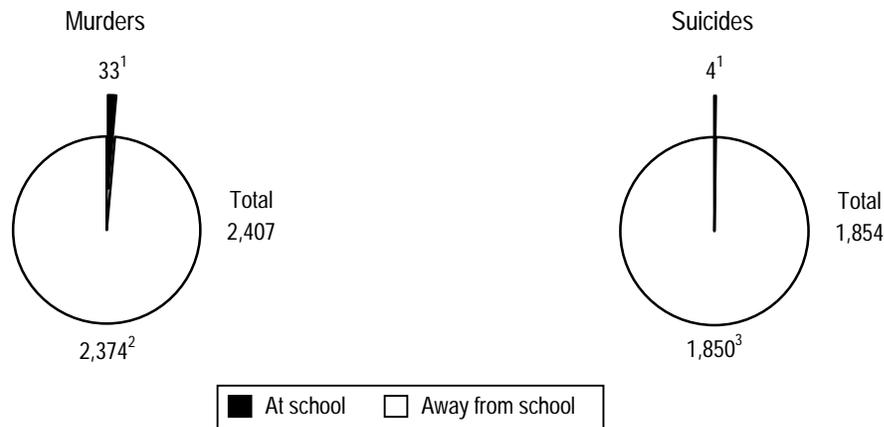
1. Violent deaths at school and away from school*

Violent deaths are tragic events that affect not only the individuals and their families directly involved but also everyone in the schools where they occur. Violent deaths at school receive national attention; accurate data on the magnitude of this problem are important.

- From July 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999, there were 47 school-associated violent deaths in the United States.¹ Thirty-eight of these violent deaths were homicides, six were suicides, two were killed by a law enforcement officer in the line of duty, and one was unintentional.
- Thirty-three of the 38 school-associated homicides were of school-aged children. There were a total of 2,407 homicides of children ages 5 through 19 occurring from July 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999.
- Four of the six school-associated suicides occurring between July 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999 were of school-aged children. There were a total of 1,854 suicides of children ages 5 through 19 occurring in the 1999 calendar year.

*This indicator has been updated to include 1999 data.

Figure 1.1.—Number of murders and suicides of students at school and of youth ages 5 through 19 away from school: 1998–99



¹Student murders and suicides at school, July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999.

²Murders of youth ages 5 through 19 away from school, July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999.

³Suicides of youth ages 5 through 19 away from school, during calendar year, 1999.

NOTE: "At school" includes on school property, on the way to or from school, and while attending or traveling to or from a school-sponsored event.

SOURCE: Special tabulation using preliminary data from the School Associated Violent Deaths Study, 1998–1999; Special tabulation using the FBI Supplementary Homicide Reports, 1998 and 1999; Special tabulation using preliminary data from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics of the United States, 1998 and 1999.

¹See glossary for definition of school-associated violent deaths.