

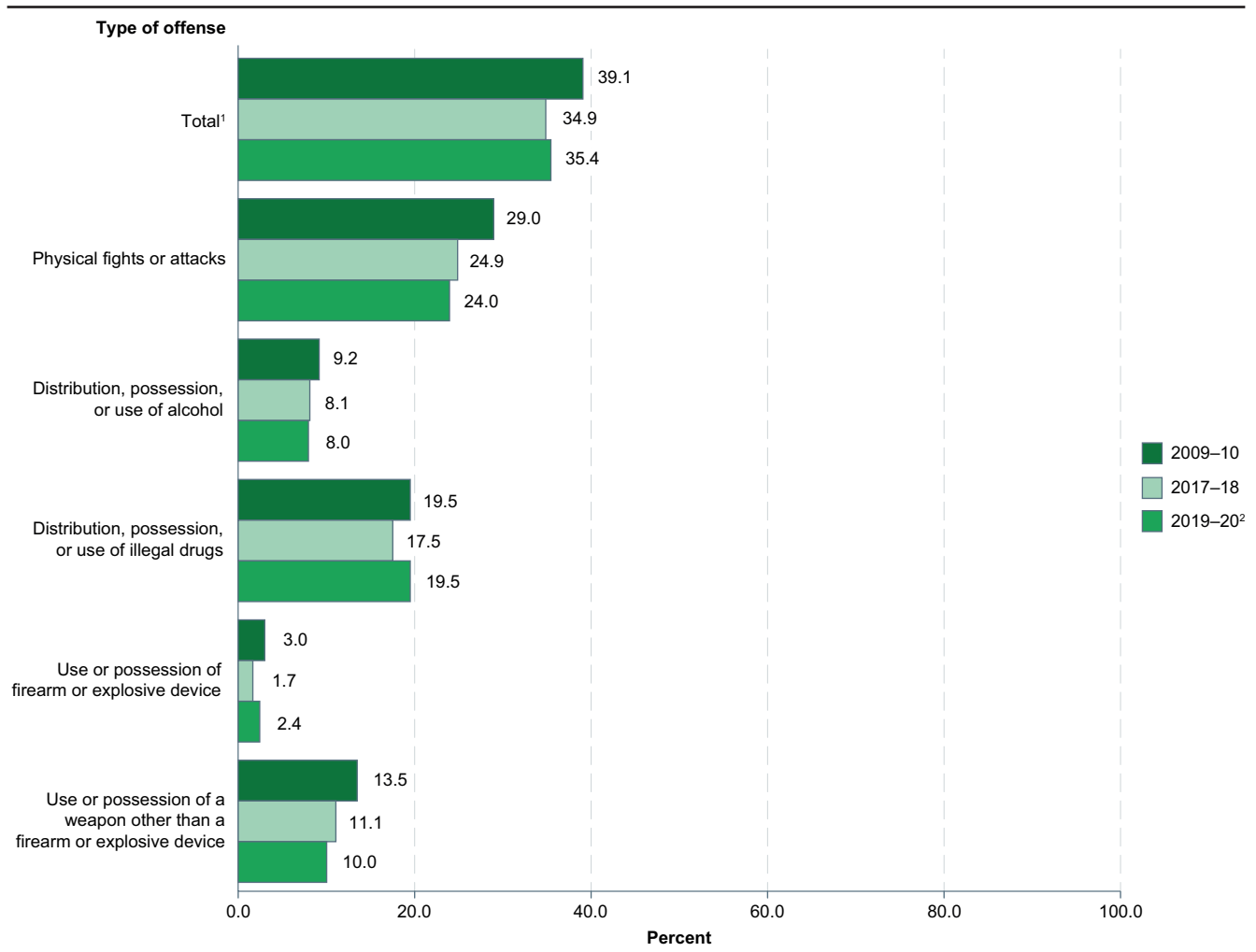
Serious Disciplinary Actions Taken by Public Schools

During the 2019–20 school year, higher percentages of secondary/high schools (74 percent) and middle schools (61 percent) took at least one serious disciplinary action than did combined/other schools (33 percent) and elementary schools (16 percent).

In 2019–20, the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) asked public school principals to report the number of disciplinary actions their schools had taken against students.¹ Serious disciplinary actions include out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days, removals

with no services for the remainder of the school year, and transfers to alternative schools. This indicator examines differences in the percentages of schools that took such actions based on the specific type of offense committed and various school characteristics.

Figure 1. Percentage of public schools that took a serious disciplinary action in response to specific offenses, by type of offense: School years 2009–10, 2017–18, and 2019–20



¹ Schools that took serious disciplinary actions in response to more than one type of offense were counted only once in the total.

² The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019–20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when comparing 2019–20 estimates with those from earlier years. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming).

NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Serious disciplinary actions include out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days, but less than the remainder of the school year; removals with no continuing services for at least the remainder of the school year; and transfers to alternative schools for disciplinary reasons. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

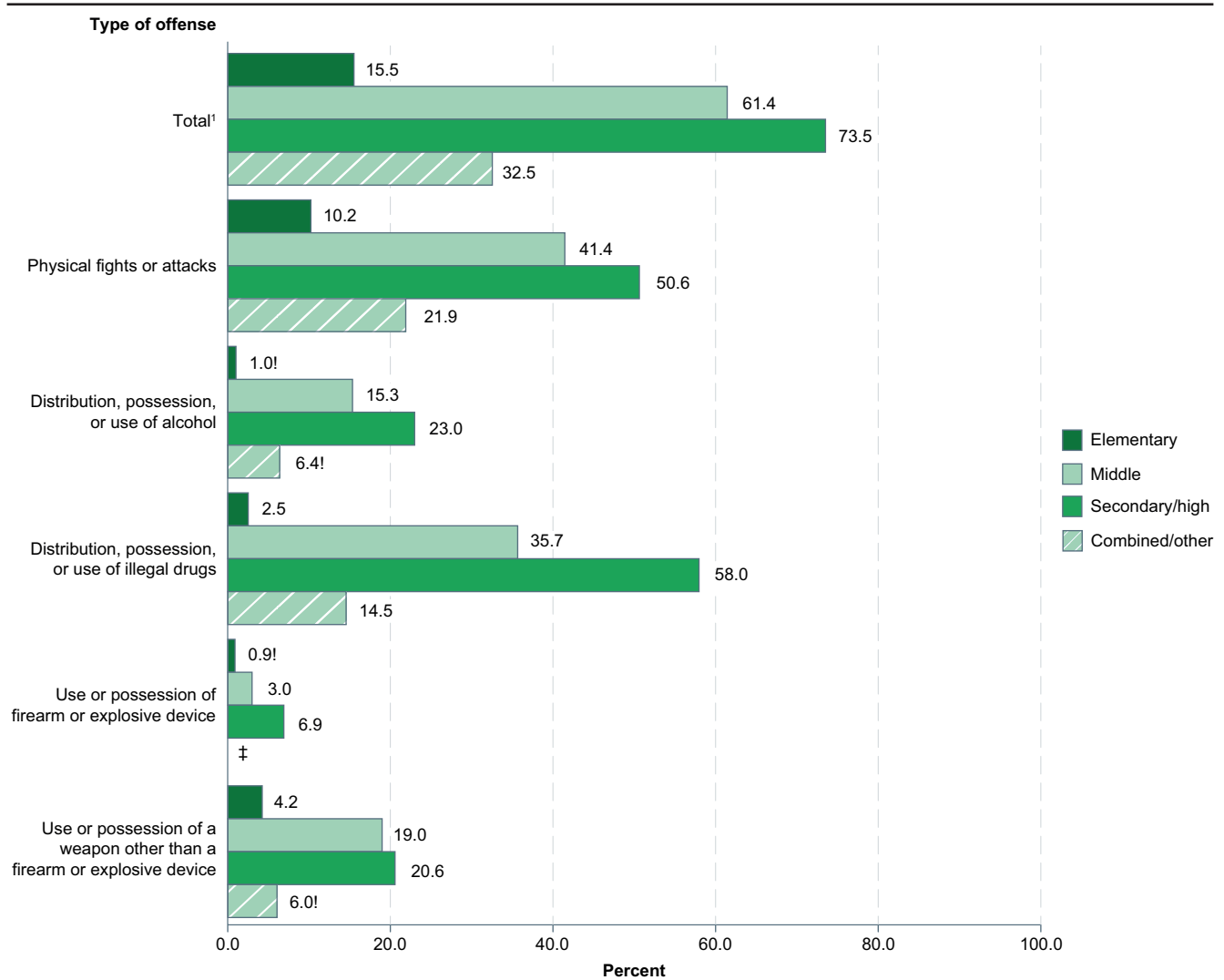
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009–10, 2017–18, and 2019–20. School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2010, 2018, and 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 233.10.

During the 2019-20 school year, 35 percent of public schools (29,500 schools) took at least one serious disciplinary action² for at least one reported offense.

Out of all offenses reported during the 2019-20 school year, physical attacks or fights prompted the largest percentage of schools (24 percent) to respond with at least one serious disciplinary action. In response to other offenses by students, 19 percent of schools took serious disciplinary actions for the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs, and 10 percent did so for the use or possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device. Eight percent of public schools did so for the distribution, possession, or use of alcohol, and 2 percent did so for the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device.

The overall percentage of schools taking at least one serious disciplinary action was lower during the 2019-20 school year than during the 2009-10 school year (35 vs. 39 percent). Specifically, lower percentages of schools in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 reported actions in response to the following types of offenses: physical attacks or fights (24 vs. 29 percent); use or possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device (10 vs. 13 percent); and distribution, possession, or use of alcohol (8 vs. 9 percent).³ Between 2017-18 and 2019-20, there was no measurable difference in the percentages of schools who took at least one serious disciplinary action for any type of offense.

Figure 2. Percentage of public schools that took a serious disciplinary action in response to specific offenses, by type of offense and school level: School year 2019–20

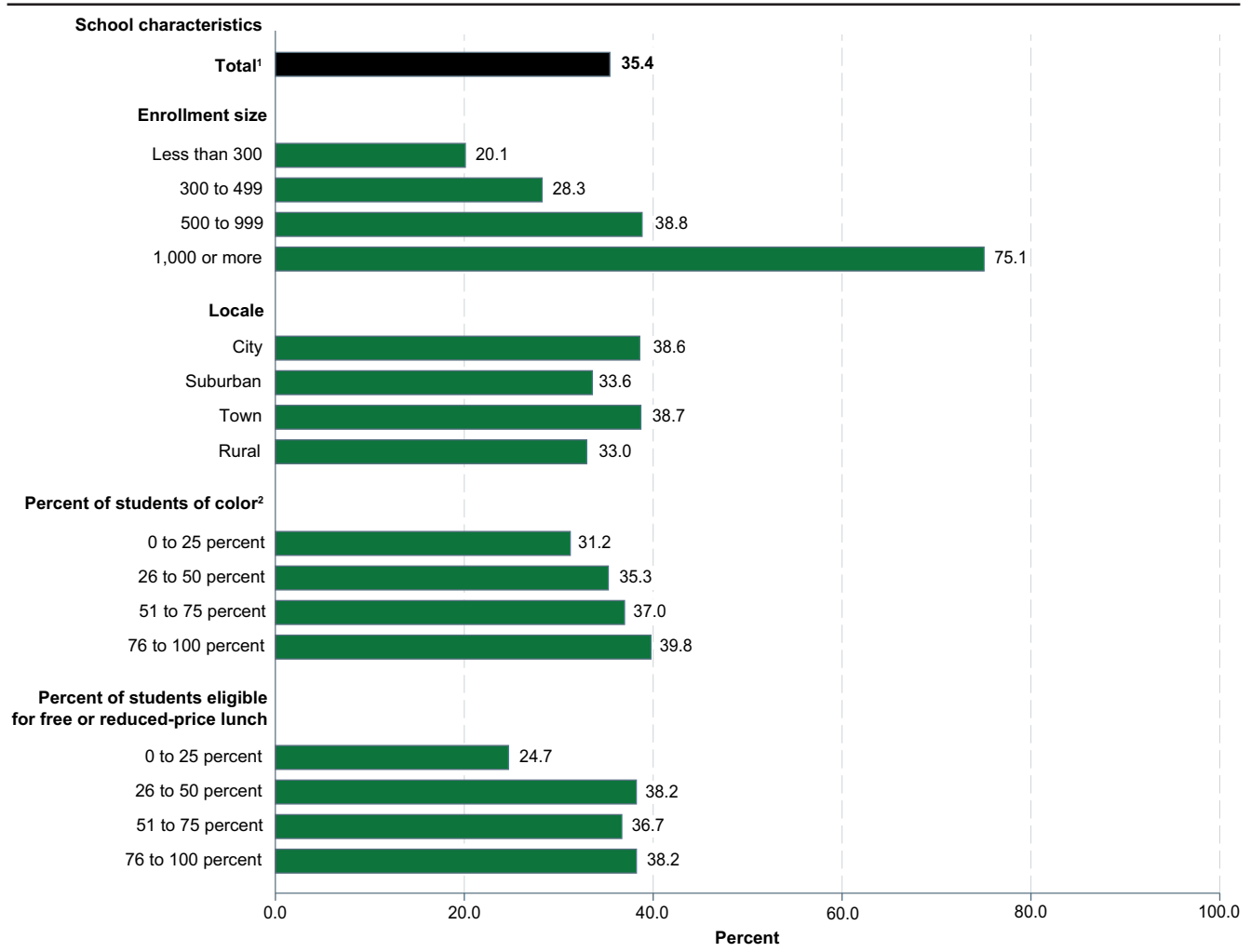


! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
 ‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.
¹ Schools that took serious disciplinary actions in response to more than one type of offense were counted only once in the total.
 NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Serious disciplinary actions include out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days, but less than the remainder of the school year; removals with no continuing services for at least the remainder of the school year; and transfers to alternative schools for disciplinary reasons. Elementary schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades K through 4 than in higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 5 through 8 than in higher or lower grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools include all other combinations of grades, including K–12 schools.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20. School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 233.12.

During the 2019-20 school year, higher percentages of secondary/high schools (74 percent) and middle schools (61 percent) took at least one serious disciplinary action than did combined/other schools (33 percent) and elementary schools (16 percent).⁴ This pattern by school level was generally observed for disciplinary actions taken

in response to specific offenses, as well. For example, 58 percent of secondary/high schools and 36 percent of middle schools took serious disciplinary actions in response to the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs, compared with 15 percent of combined/other schools and 2 percent of elementary schools.

Figure 3. Percentage of public schools that took a serious disciplinary action, by selected school characteristics: School year 2019–20

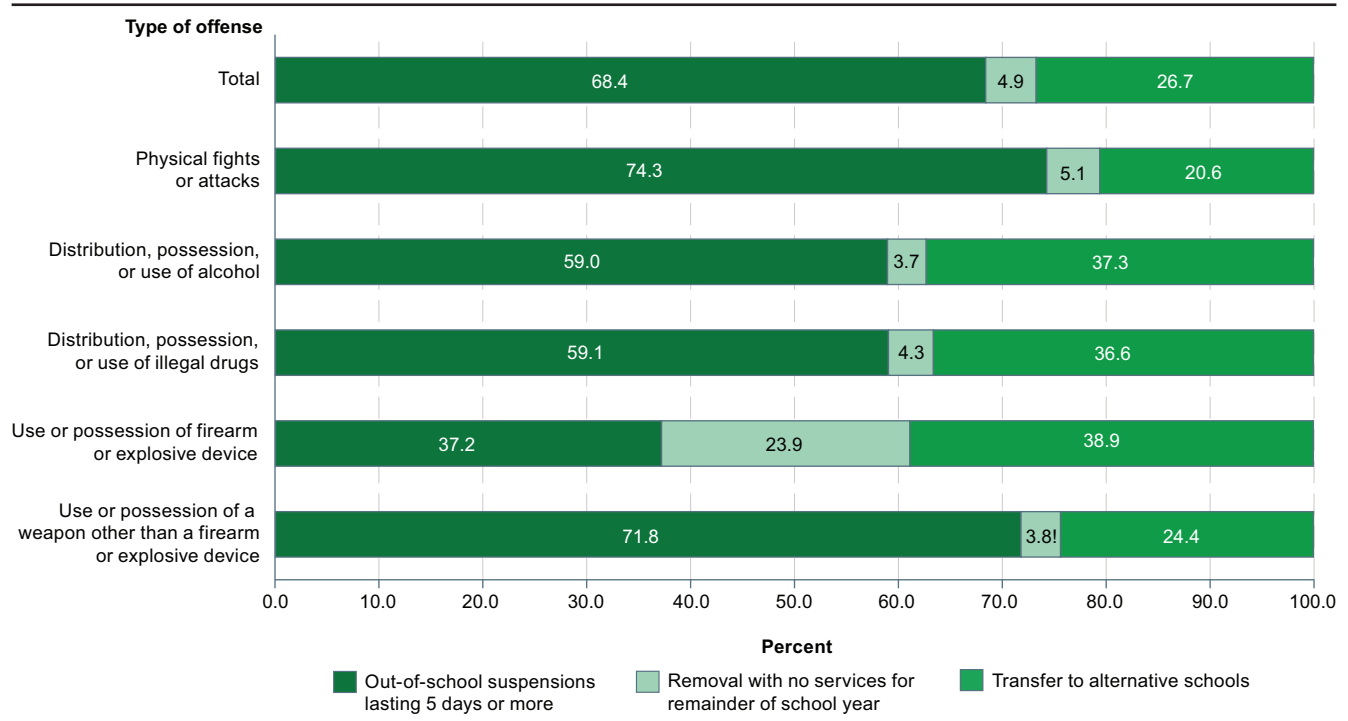


¹ Schools that took serious disciplinary actions in response to more than one type of offense were counted only once in the total.
² The term “students of color” is being used synonymously with “minority students” in *Digest* table 233.12. Students of color include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races.
 NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Serious disciplinary actions include out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days, but less than the remainder of the school year; removals with no continuing services for at least the remainder of the school year; and transfers to alternative schools for disciplinary reasons. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20. School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 233.12.

The percentages of public schools that took at least one serious disciplinary action varied by other school characteristics as well. For instance, the percentages were higher for schools with larger enrollments. Specifically, 75 percent of public schools with an enrollment of 1,000 or more students took at least one serious disciplinary action, compared with 39 percent of schools with 500 to 999 students enrolled, 28 percent of schools with 300 to 499 students enrolled, and 20 percent of schools with less than 300 students enrolled. In addition, the percentage of public schools that took at least one serious disciplinary action was higher for schools in cities (39 percent) than

for schools in suburban areas (34 percent) and rural areas (33 percent). The percentage of public schools that took at least one serious disciplinary action was higher for those where 76 percent or more of the students were students of color⁵ (40 percent) than for those where 25 percent or less of the students were students of color (31 percent). Additionally, this percentage was lowest for schools where 25 percent or less of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) (25 percent). The percentage reported by schools with other percentages of students eligible for FRPL ranged from 37 to 38 percent.⁶

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of serious disciplinary actions taken by public schools, by type of offense and type of disciplinary action: School year 2019–20



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
 NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20. School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 233.10.

Public schools took a total of 330,600 serious disciplinary actions during the 2019-20 school year for specific offenses. The largest number of these reported disciplinary actions were taken in response to physical attacks or fights (184,000 actions; 56 percent). Of the serious disciplinary actions taken during the 2019-20 school year, 68 percent were out-of-school suspensions for 5 or more days, which was lower than in 2009-10 (74 percent). Another 27 percent were transfers to alternative schools in 2019-20, which was higher than in 2009-10 (20 percent). In 2019-20, about 5 percent of the serious disciplinary actions taken were removals with no services for the remainder of the school year; this was not measurably different from 2009-10.

During the 2019-20 school year, the types of disciplinary actions public schools took varied by the type of offenses

to which they responded. For example, out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days constituted a higher percentage of responses to physical attacks or fights (74 percent) than of responses to most other types of offenses (ranging from 37 percent to 59 percent). Conversely, transfers to alternative schools constituted a lower percentage of responses to physical attacks or fights (21 percent) than of responses to most other types of offenses (ranging from 37 to 39 percent). In both cases, the exception was possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device (72 and 24 percent, respectively). Finally, removals with no services for the remainder of the school year constituted a larger percentage of responses to the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device (24 percent) than of responses to all other types of offenses (ranging from 4 percent to 5 percent).

Endnotes:

¹ The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019-20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when comparing 2019-20 estimates with those from earlier years. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019-20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming).

² Schools that took serious disciplinary actions in response to more than one type of offense were counted only once.

³ For the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs or the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device, there were no measurable differences between 2009-10 and 2019-20.

⁴ Elementary schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades K through 4 than in higher grades. Middle

schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 5 through 8 than in higher or lower grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools include all other combinations of grades, including K-12 schools.

⁵ The term “students of color” is being used synonymously with “minority students” in *Digest* table 233.12. Students of color include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races.

⁶ The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) programs is a proxy measure for school poverty. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCES blog post “[Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)”

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 233.10 and 233.12

Related indicators and resources: [Marijuana Use and Illegal Drug Availability](#); [Physical Fights on School Property and Anywhere](#); [Safety and Security Practices at Public Schools](#); [Students Carrying Weapons and Students’ Access to Firearms](#); [Students’ Use of Alcohol](#)

Glossary: Firearm/explosive device; Free or reduced-price lunch; Locale codes; Physical attack or fight; Public school or institution; Weapon (Fast Response Survey System and School Survey on Crime and Safety)