

DATA POINT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NCES 2020-007 MARCH 2020

U.S. Public School Students Enrolled in Schools With Violent Incidents and Hate Crimes

The data in this report are from the 2007–08 and 2017–18 administrations of the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS). SSOCS is a nationally representative sample survey of public elementary and secondary schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey asks principals about the prevalence of crime and violence in their schools as well as the practices and programs their schools have in place to promote school safety.

This report estimates the number and percentage of public school students who were enrolled in a school where any violent incidents¹ and hate crimes² occurred at school in 2007–08 and 2017–18,³ as reported by school principals. It also investigates whether these incidents occurred in schools in which a sworn law enforcement officer⁴ was present at least once a week. It is important to note that complex interactions and causal relationships have not been explored in this report; the data do not allow an interpretation of what causes the relationship between the presence of sworn law enforcement officers and the prevalence of violence in schools.

Even if only a few students were directly involved in an incident, other students at the school may have been exposed to violence by witnessing

the incident or learning about its occurrence afterward.

In school year 2017–18, approximately 38.5 million U.S. public school students (78 percent) were enrolled in a school where a violent incident occurred (figure 1).

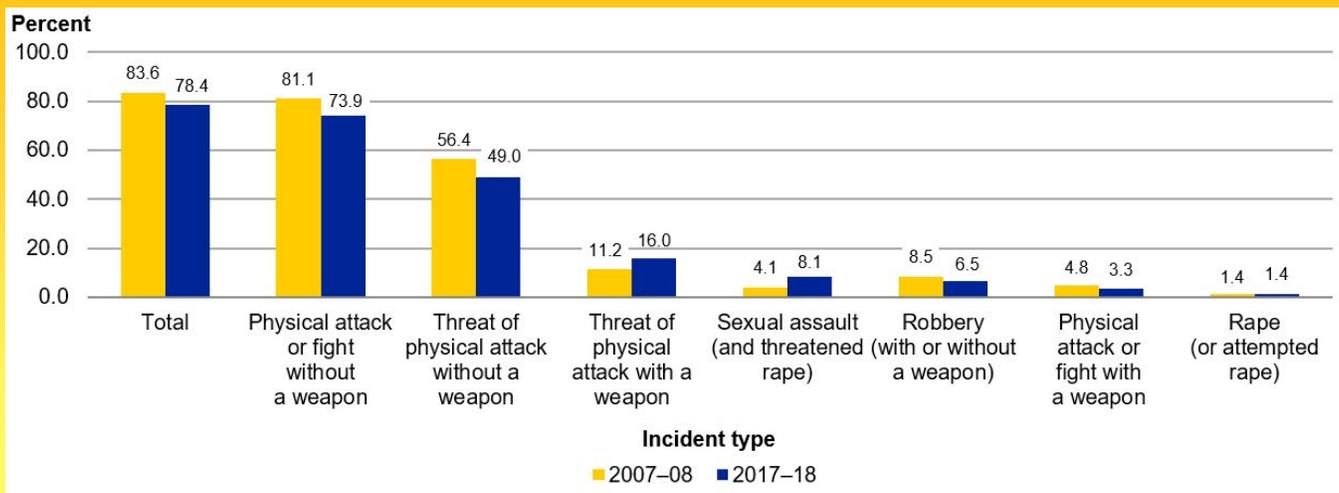
In school years 2007–08 and 2017–18, the number of students enrolled in a school in which a physical attack or fight without a weapon occurred was higher than for any other type of incident. The number of students enrolled in a school where this type of incident occurred was lower in 2017–18 (74 percent, or about 36.3 million students), compared to 2007–08 (81 percent, or about 38.8 million

students). This pattern was observed for most types of violent incidents.

In contrast, the number of students enrolled in a school where a threat of physical attack with a weapon occurred in 2017–18 (16 percent, or about 7.8 million students) was higher than in 2007–08 (11 percent, or about 5.4 million students). A similar pattern was observed for the number of students enrolled in a school where a sexual assault occurred (8 percent, or about 4.0 million students in 2017–18 vs. 4 percent, or about 1.9 million students in 2007–08).

In 2017–18, about 1.4 million public school students (3 percent) were enrolled in a school in which a hate crime occurred.⁵

FIGURE 1. Percentage of U.S. public school students enrolled in a school in which a violent incident occurred during the current school year, by type of incident: School years 2007–08 and 2017–18



NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about school crime and policies to provide a safe environment.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2007–08 and 2017–18.

To learn more about the data collection used in this report, visit <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs/>. For questions about content or to view this report online, go to <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020007>.

In school year 2017–18, more students who were enrolled in a school with a sworn law enforcement officer were in a school where a violent incident had occurred (84 percent), compared with students enrolled in a school without an officer present (70 percent, figure 2).

For nearly every violent incident type examined, higher percentages of students in schools that had a sworn law enforcement officer present at

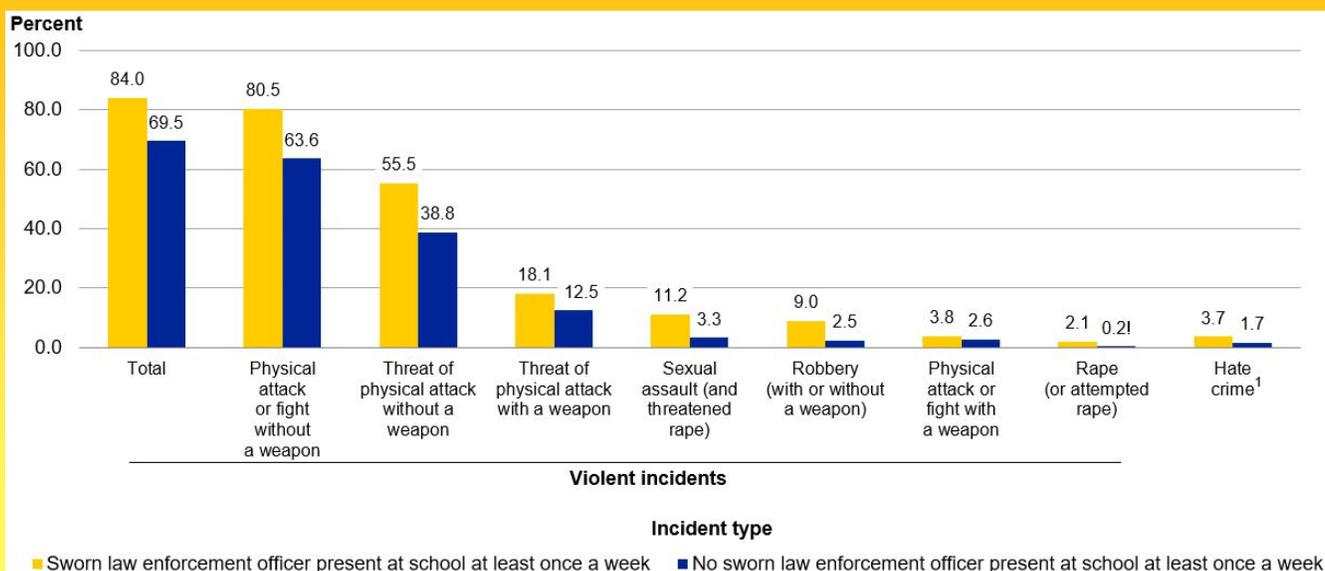
school at least once a week were in schools where a violent incident had occurred, compared with students in schools without an officer present. For example, of students enrolled in schools that had a sworn law enforcement officer present at school at least once a week, 11 percent were in a school where a sexual assault had occurred in school year 2017–18, compared with 3 percent of students enrolled in schools without an officer present.

The one incident that was an exception to this pattern was physical

attack or fight with a weapon; for this incident type, there was no measurable difference in the percentage of students enrolled in a school where this type of violence had occurred by whether an officer was present.

In school year 2017–18, about 4 percent of students enrolled in a school that had a sworn law enforcement officer present at school at least once a week were in a school where a hate crime occurred, compared with 2 percent of students in schools without an officer present.

FIGURE 2. Percentage of U.S. public school students enrolled in a school in which a violent incident or hate crime occurred, by type of incident and whether the school had a sworn law enforcement officer present at school at least once a week: School year 2017–18



¹ "Hate crime" refers to a committed criminal offense that is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias(es) against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity; also known as bias crime.

! 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 school crime and policies to provide a safe environment.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2017–18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018.

Endnotes

¹ "Violent incidents" include rape, sexual assault, robbery (with and without a weapon), physical attack or fight (with or without a weapon), and threat of physical attack (with or without a weapon). To view the definitions for these terms, please visit https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs/pdf/SSOCS_2018_Questionnaire.pdf.

² "Hate crime" refers to a committed criminal offense that is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias(es) against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity; also known as bias crime.

³ The number of students enrolled in a school where an incident occurred is calculated by summing the total number of students enrolled in each school in which at least one incident of the given type occurred. Data on the number of schools in which certain incidents occurred can be found in [Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2017–18](#) (NCES 2019-061). In this report, the number of students is reported rather than the number of schools to account for differences in school size.

⁴ "Sworn law enforcement officers" include School Resource Officers and other sworn law enforcement officers who are not School Resource Officers. Estimates related to sworn law enforcement officers should be considered in the context of school characteristics that may be related to the prevalence of these officers, such as school enrollment size or locale.

⁵ The survey item on hate crimes was modified after the 2008 survey administration. Thus, hate crime data from SSOCS:2008 and SSOCS:2018 are not comparable.