

DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES

Criminal Justice Statistical Analysis Center
Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety
State of West Virginia

School Violence

Justice Bulletin

December 1999

Recent incidents of school shootings such as those that occurred in Kentucky, Oregon, Arkansas, and Colorado have focused local, state, and national attention on school violence. These tragic events have received massive amounts of national media attention and raised a number of questions about the safety of students and faculty in the public school system.

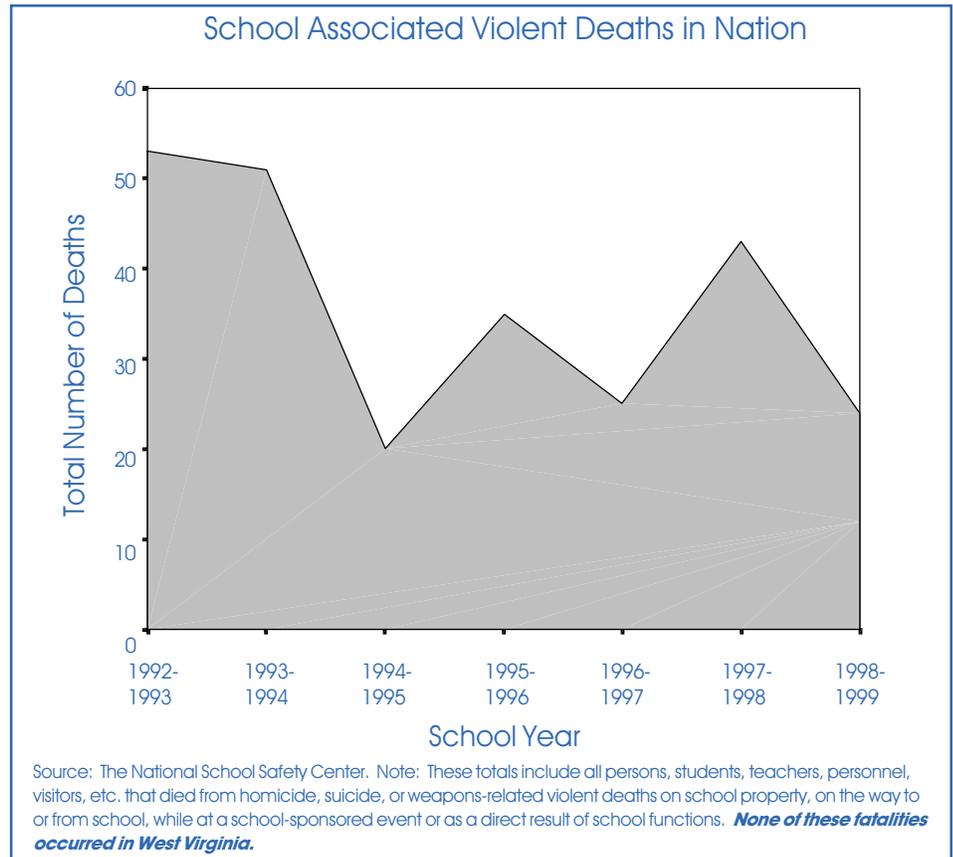
While these events raise concern about student safety, they do not present an accurate picture of the level of violence that occurs in our schools. This publication will examine several indicators of school violence and place the school violence problem in perspective on the state and national levels.

Fear for Safety

In 1997, 4% of the nation's high school students stated that they did not go to school at least one of the past 30 days because they felt unsafe. This percentage is down slightly from 4.4% in 1993. Statistics on West Virginia's high school students are slightly higher than the national average. In 1997, 5.7% of the state's high school students reported missing school because they felt unsafe. This represents a slight increase from the 1993 school year when only 4.2% reported missing school for similar circumstances (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 1997).

Weapons at School

In 1997, 8.5% of the nation's high school students reported carrying a weapon on school property on one or more of the past thirty days. This



percentage is down from 11.8% reported in 1993. In 1997, 10.8% of West Virginia's high school students reported carrying a weapon on school property on one or more of the past thirty days. This is a decrease from the 14.1% reported in 1993 (DHHS, 1997).

Violence at School

In 1997, 7.4% of the nation's high school students reported they had been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property at least once during the past 12 months. This percentage is similar to the 7.3% reported in 1993. In 1997, 7.8% of West Virginia's high school students reported they had been threatened or injured with a weapon on

school property at least once during the past 12 months. This is a slight increase from 1993 (7.6%) (DHHS, 1997).

Deaths at School

In the 1998-99 school year, 25 students, teachers, school personnel, etc., were murdered or committed suicide at school. This included deaths on school property, on the way to or from school, and while at school-sponsored events. This is a reduction of 53% from the 1992-93 school year's 54 deaths. In West Virginia, no violent fatalities have occurred on school property between the 1992 and 1998 school years (National School Safety Center, 1999).

Summary

While there are areas of concern, schools are relatively safe for students and teachers. In the 1992-93 and 1993-94 school years, less than 1% of the murdered youth in the United States ages 5 to 19 were killed at school or on school related property. The number of students threatened or injured has remained steady over the past five years. The number of students who carried a weapon to school declined and the number of students who felt unsafe also declined slightly.

While no violent fatalities have occurred in West Virginia's schools, other indicators of school violence are slightly above the national average including; the percentage of high school students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon, the percentage of students who reported carrying a gun, knife, or club to school, and the number of students who missed school because they felt unsafe.

Quick Facts

- *No school-associated fatalities have been reported in West Virginia between the 1992 and 1998 school years (National School Safety Center, 1999).
- *The percent of students carrying a gun, knife, or club to school has decreased between 1993 and 1997 in West Virginia and across the nation (DHHS, 1997).
- *12-17 year olds are 3 times more likely than adults to be victims of serious violent crimes (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).
- *The number of juveniles murdered peaked in 1993 at 2,900 victims and by 1997, that figure dropped to 2,100 (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).
- *Juveniles are more likely to be the victim of a violent crime in the hour after the end of the school day than at any other hour of the day (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

Acknowledgments

Laura Hutzel, Research Analyst
J. Norbert Federspiel, DCJS Director
Michael Cutlip, Deputy Director, Programs
Harry N. Boone, Jr., Ph.D., CJSAC Director

References

Donohue, E., Schiraldi, V., & Ziedenberg, J. (1998). *School house hype: School shootings and the real risks kids face in America*. San Francisco, CA: Justice Policy Institute, National School Safety Center.

Kaufman, P., Chandler, K., & Rand, M. (1998). *Indicators of school crime and safety*. Washington, DC: National Association for Education Statistics and the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

National School Safety Center. (1999). *School associated violent deaths*. West Lake Village, CA: Author.

Snyder, H. N., & Sickmund, M., (1999). *Juvenile offenders and victim: 1997 national report*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1997). *Youth risk behavior survey, 1997*. Washington, DC: Author.



7755-24

Division of Criminal Justice Services
1204 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25301
(304) 558 - 8814

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage Paid
Charleston, WV
Permit No. 271

