

# RESEARCH IN BRIEF

## Patterns in School Violence in Nevada

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The safety of children at school is a major concern of parents and school officials. Nationally, an estimated 628,200 students aged 12-18 were victimized by a sexual assault, robbery, or physical assault at school in 2005 (Dinkes, Cataldi & Lin-Kelly, 2007). Student's risks of violent victimization on school property have decreased over time (Figure 1), and these reductions in school violence have been attributed to greater security measures on campus, anti-crime policies within schools, and various types of student counseling and mediation programs (see Rand, 2001). However, even with these violence-reduction efforts, an estimated 130,000 students were victims of serious violent offenses in 2005. During the 2005-06 school year, there were 14 homicides and 3 suicides of students ages 5-18 on school property across the United States (Dinkes, et al., 2007).

This state data brief describes recent patterns of violence-related behavior in Nevada's school and compares them with national trends. The limitations of this data are also discussed.

### School Violence in Nevada

Estimates of the nature and amount of violence in Nevada's primary and secondary schools vary widely by data source, type of incidents, and over time. These patterns are summarized below.

### Violent Victimization

The most comprehensive national and state-level data source on student's risks of violent victimization is the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) that is directed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Similar data on violent victimization risks for school teachers are provided by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, Schools,

## HIGHLIGHTS

- An estimated 14% of Nevada students in grades 9-12 reported that they had been in a physical fight at school in the previous 12 months.
- Seven percent of Nevada's public schoolteachers were threatened by a student from their school during the previous 12 months.
- Nearly 20% of Nevada students in grades 9-12 reported that they had carried a weapon within the last 30 days, and about 7% of the students said they had carried a weapon on school property.
- About 90% of incidents of violence that result in suspensions and expulsions from Nevada schools involve attacks by other students, 2% involved violence against school staff, and 8% were for possession of weapons.

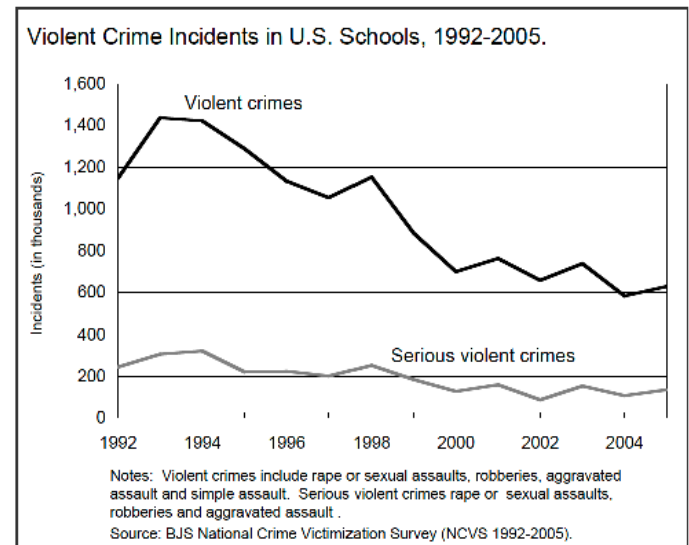


Figure 1

and Staffing Surveys (SASS). Table 1 summarizes these risks of violent victimization for students and teachers in both Nevada and nationwide.

**Table 1. Risks of victimization for students grades 9-12 and public school teachers.**

	Nevada	Nationally
Students reported being in physical fight at school?	14.2%	13.6%
Students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon at school?	8.1%	7.9%
Students reported carrying a weapon anywhere?	18.4%	18.5%
Students reported carrying a weapon at school?	6.8%	6.5%
Teachers reported being physically attacked by a student from school?	3.7%	3.7%
Teachers reported being physically threatened with injury?	7.3%	7.5%

Source: YRBSS (2005) and SASS (2003-2004).

According to the 2005 YRBSS survey, an estimated 14% of Nevada students in grades 9-12 reported that they had been in a physical fight at school in the previous 12 months. About 8% of these student respondents said that they had been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property in this time period. These estimates of student victimization in Nevada are virtually identical to the national averages. Comparable figures are found in the 2003 YRBSS survey, suggesting that student's risks of these types of violent victimization in both Nevada and nationwide have neither increased nor decreased appreciably over this time period. More recent data on violent victimization of students at school is not available.

Aside from students, teachers and staff are also the victims of school violence. For the 2003-04 school year, an estimated 7% of Nevada's public school teachers were threatened by a student from their school during the previous 12 months (SASS 2003-04). This proportion represents an estimated 1,500 public school teachers in Nevada. During this same time period, an estimated 4% of Nevada's teachers

said they were physically attacked by a student from school.

These risks of victimization for Nevada's teachers are similar to the national average for all public school teachers. For comparative purposes, the District of Columbia had the highest risks of threats against teachers in 2003-04 (18%), whereas the lowest risks of these threats were found in Kansas, Wyoming and Colorado (4%). More recent data on teacher's victimization risks is not available.

**Weapons at School**

Under Nevada law (NRS 202.265), it is illegal to carry or possess a dangerous weapon on school property. Estimates of the prevalence of dangerous weapons in Nevada schools are available from youth surveys and school records of weapon incidents.

Based on 2005 YRBSS survey data, an estimated 18.5% of Nevada students in grades 9-12 reported that they had carried a weapon within the last 30 days and 7% of these survey respondents said they had carried a weapon on school property. These risks of weapon possession by Nevada's students on and off school property are nearly identical to the overall national rates (Table 1). A comparison of YRBSS survey results for 2003 and 2005 indicates a slight increase over time in the estimated prevalence of Nevada students who have carried a weapon at school (from 6.3% to 6.8%). Unfortunately, more recent survey data on student's risks of weapon possession in Nevada schools is not available.

Data on disciplinary reports from Nevada's Department of Education (DOE) indicates that there were 791 incidents of weapon possession in the 2007-08 school year, which resulted in suspensions or expulsions. While this number of weapon incidents is troubling, it nonetheless represents a substantial reduction from the 1342 cases that were reported in the 2004-05 school year. Nearly 90% of weapons incidents in 2007-08 occurred in either Clark County (501 cases) or Washoe County (210 cases).

**Suspensions and Expulsions for Violent Incidents**

Based on Nevada's DOE data, the number of violence-related incidents against other students or school staff that lead to suspensions or expulsions peaked at over 14,000 cases in the 2004-05 school

year and decreased to less than 10,000 incidents in 2007-08. As shown in Figure 2, this statewide pattern is largely a reflection of the nature of school sanctions for violent incidents in Clark County. In contrast, the number of suspensions/expulsions for violence-related behavior in Washoe County has remained more stable over time, but these incidents of suspension/expulsions for violence in Nevada's other counties have steadily increased over this time period (e.g., from 956 incidents in 2003-04 to 1297 incidents in 2007-08).

For all Nevada counties, most violence-related suspensions or expulsions were for acts of aggression against other students. About 90% of school suspensions in 2007-08 for violence involved offenses against other students. The remainder of the suspension incidents were offenses against school staff (2%) or possession of weapons (8%). In absolute numbers, Nevada's DOE (2008) indicates that nearly 8,800 incidents of violence against other students, another 184 violent incident against school staff, and 791 incidents of weapon possession lead to disciplinary suspensions or expulsions during the 2007-08 school year.

Several comments about these particular school data are important before making substantive inferences from them about the nature of violence in Nevada's schools. First, these data represent only incidents of violence that resulted in suspensions or expulsions. Violence-related activities that lead to other disciplinary acts short of suspension are not included nor are violence-related incidents (e.g., threats,

assaults, weapon possession) that are not observed or reported to school officials. Second, many schools in Nevada and across the U.S. have increasingly moved to a "zero tolerance" policy toward violence. Under these policies, relatively minor acts of violence among students that may have been previously ignored or at least did not warrant serious disciplinary actions or a criminal complaint are now considered sufficient for suspension/expulsion. Because these policies have changed over time and what counts as a "serious" incident may vary both within and across school districts, these particular data provide little reliable or useful information about the nature and prevalence of violence in Nevada schools. They are useful, however, for documenting that many suspensions or expulsions from Nevada schools involve incidents of some type of violence-related behavior.

**Data Sources and Limitations**

The data for this brief were collected and summarized by various organizations. The primary sources of information include the National Center for Education Statistics(NCES)/Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report of Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007 (Dinkes, et al., 2007) and the Nevada Department of Education's Annual Reports of Accountability (DOE 2003-2008). The NCES/ BJS report contains a description of the particular datasets used in this research brief, including the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) and the National Center for Education Statistics, Schools, and Staffing Surveys (SASS). Most of these data are based on surveys of students and school officials.

When using sample data from surveys to represent population, there are always questions about sampling error and sampling biases. While the data presented in this report represent the most comprehensive and current data that is publicly accessible on the topic of school crime, they are not immune to problems that arise from non-response in surveys and biases from question wording and other types of measurement error. Because of these limitations of survey data, some caution should be exercised when interpreting the specific figures in this state data brief.

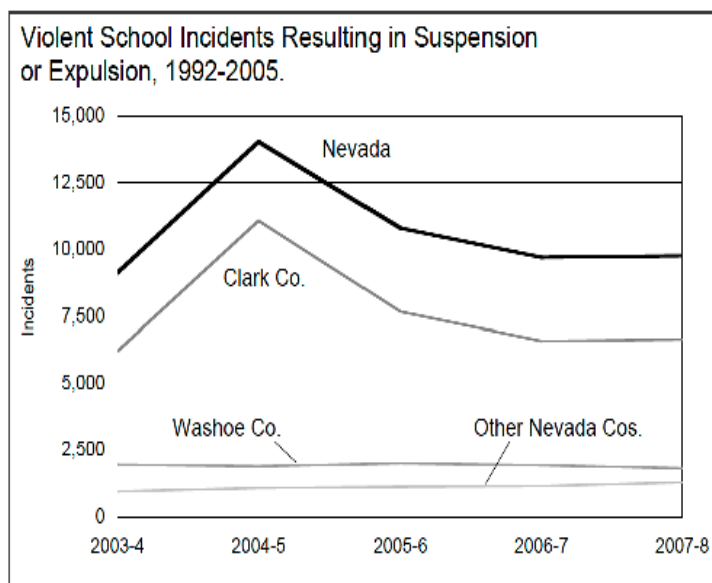


Figure 2

## References

Dinkes, R., Cataldi, E.F., and Lin-Kelly, W. (2007). Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007 (NCES 2008-021/NCJ 219553). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC.

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Truants. Retrieved on December 29, 2008 from <http://www.nevadareportcard.com/>

Rand corporation: School Violence: Prevalence, Fears and Prevention [http://www.rand.org/pubs/issue\\_papers/IP219/index2.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/issue_papers/IP219/index2.html)

National Youth Violence Prevention Center

<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/school.asp>

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