



# Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation in Maryland Public Schools

## A Report to the Maryland General Assembly on Incidents Reported under the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005

Division of Student Support, Academic  
Enrichment, and Educational Policy

March 2022 Legislative Report



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# 1: Introduction

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The Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005 became effective on July 1, 2005. Pursuant to Section 7-424 of the Education Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) requires all county boards of education and the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners to report incidents of harassment or intimidation against students in public schools within their jurisdiction to the Maryland General Assembly. Additionally, the MSDE is required to submit an annual report to the Maryland General Assembly summarizing the information included on the victim of harassment and intimidation forms filed with local boards during the previous school year.

To ensure effective implementation of the law according to the reporting requirements, the MSDE has engaged with each local school system (LSS) to inform the appropriate collection and reporting of information. This report describes the process used by the MSDE to carry out the mandates of the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005. The reporting period for the March 2022 report encompasses information from the 2020-2021 school year, which included the abbreviation of in-person learning due to the pandemic. Local school systems varied in their level of engagement of in-person vs. virtual learning for the school year. Parents, caregivers, students, staff, and close relatives were still able to make reports during virtual learning after schools closed to in-person learning in March 2020. As a reminder, data from the 2019-2020 school year reflected a statewide transition from in-person instruction to virtual learning for approximately one third of the school year.

The MSDE requires each LSS to provide data using the Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Incident Reporting Instrument, which is in the form of a fillable spreadsheet. Data in this instrument includes the following information:

- number of reported incidents by LSS;
- incident rates per one thousand students;
- location of incidents;
- descriptions of incidents;
- ages of victims;
- ages of alleged offenders;
- motives of alleged offenders;
- investigative methods used;
- corrective actions taken by schools;
- number of days missed by victims;
- number of days missed by alleged offenders; and
- the number of false allegations reported.

## 2: Findings

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The 24 LSSs and the SEED School of Maryland reported data for the 2020-2021 school year. This report provides a comparison of the reported information for the past three consecutive school years. Data presented in figures one through ten represent information for the 2018-2019 school year in gray, the 2019-2020 school year in light blue, and the 2020-2021 school year in purple.

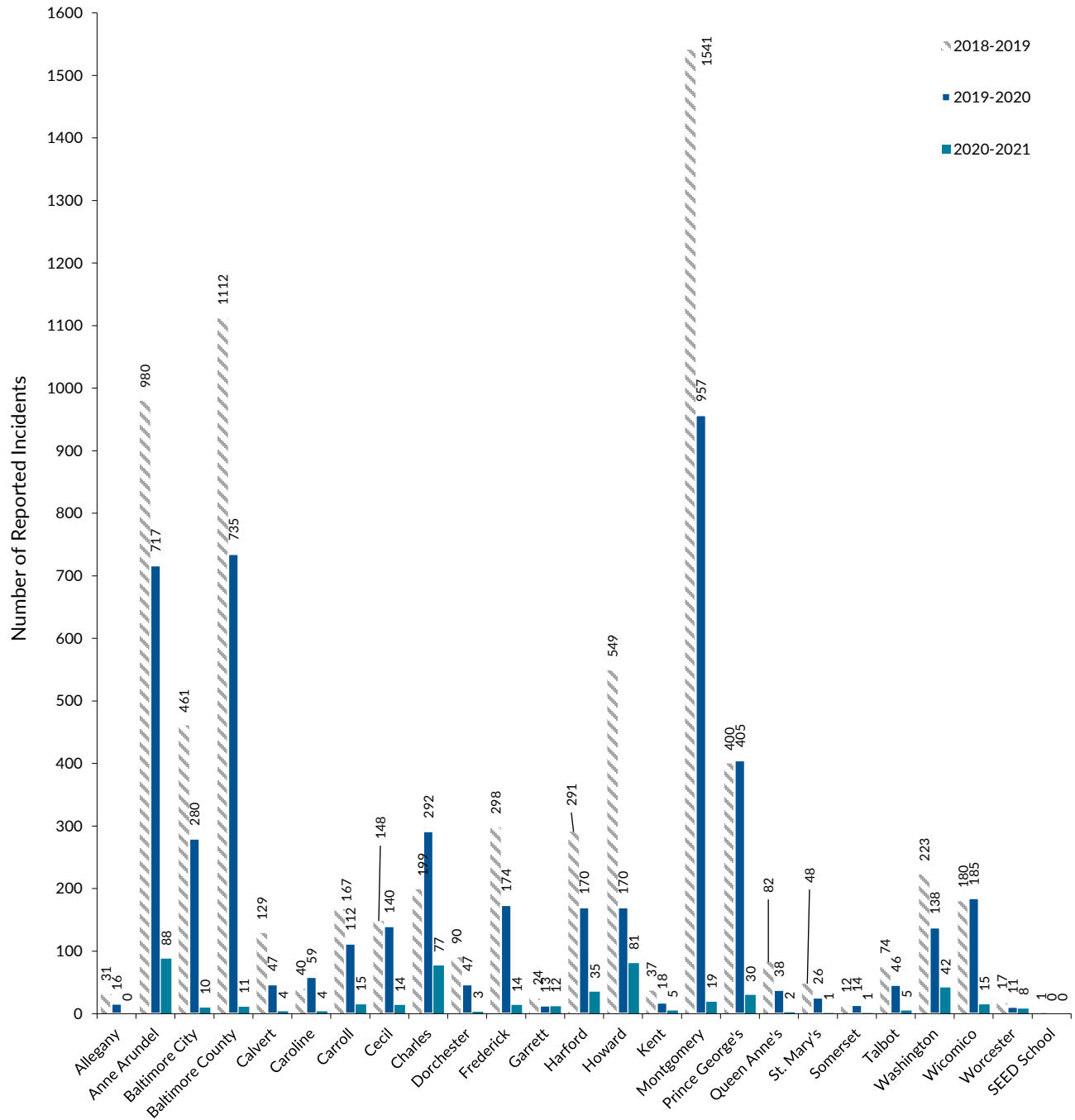
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### NUMBER OF INCIDENTS

There were 496 bullying incidents reported during the 2020-2021 school year in Maryland public schools. This represents a statewide decrease of 4,314 reported incidents from the 2019-2020 school year (a 89.68 percent decrease). The number of reported incidents in each LSS is shown in Figure 1. The rate of reported bullying incidents in LSSs per 1,000 students enrolled during the 2020-2021 school year is shown in Table 1. All LSSs and the SEED School indicated a decrease in the number of reported incidents. In reviewing the total number of incidents, it is important to consider totals relative to student enrollment and recognize that the 2020-2021 school year data is not comparable to the data from previous years due to the pandemic and a shift away from in-person learning.

In exploring options for an income verification process, MSDE conducted a review of departmental income verification procedures currently in place for specific early childhood programs in the state. A sample of income verification methods from other states were examined as well.

Figure 1: Number of Incidents



**Table 1: Number of Reported Incidents Per 1,000 Enrolled Students**

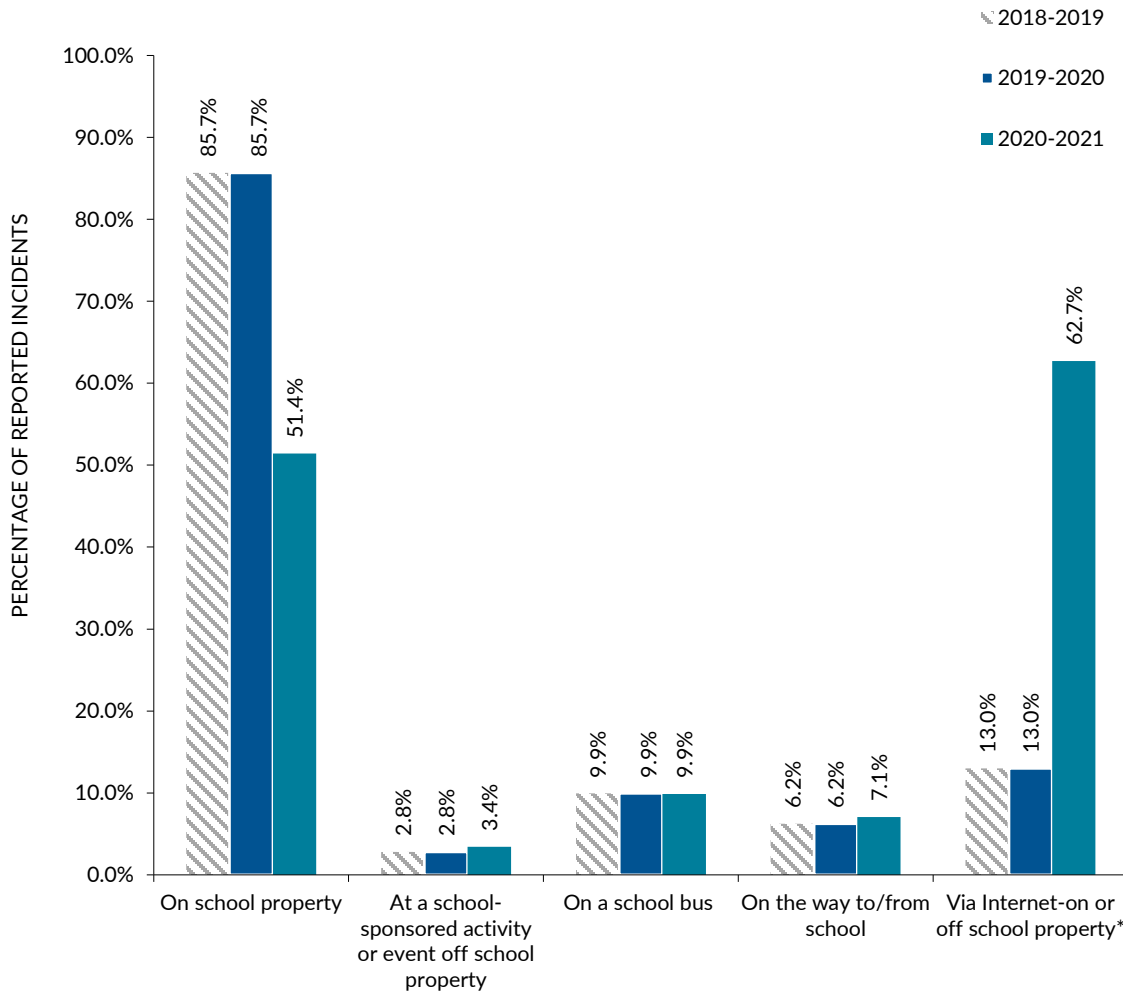
Number of Reported Incidents Per 1,000 Enrolled Students

Local School System	SY 2018-2019	SY 2019-2020	SY 2020-2021
Allegany	3.6	1.9	0.0
Anne Arundel	11.8	8.4	1.1
Baltimore City	5.8	3.5	0.1
Baltimore County	9.8	6.4	0.1
Calvert	8.1	2.9	0.3
Caroline	6.9	10.0	0.7
Carroll	6.6	4.4	0.6
Cecil	9.7	9.2	1.0
Charles	7.3	10.6	2.9
Dorchester	18.8	10.0	0.6
Frederick	7.0	4.0	0.3
Garrett	6.2	3.4	3.3
Harford	7.7	4.4	0.9
Howard	9.5	2.9	1.4
Kent	19.4	9.4	2.8
Montgomery	9.5	5.8	0.1
Prince George's	3.0	3.0	0.2
Queen Anne's	10.6	4.9	0.3
St. Mary's	2.7	1.4	0.1
Somerset	4.1	4.8	0.4
Talbot	15.8	9.8	1.1
Washington	9.8	6.0	1.9
Wicomico	12.0	12.2	1.0
Worcester	2.5	1.6	1.2

## LOCATIONS OF INCIDENTS

There are variations in the percentage rates of incidents reported within each location category across the three years of data. As detailed in Figure 2, in the 2020-2021 school year (51.4 percent) occurred on school property, which is lower than the previous two years of data. The largest number of incidents occurred remotely via the internet (62.7 percent), followed by incidents on school buses (9.9 percent).

**Figure 2: Statewide Locations of Reported Incidents**

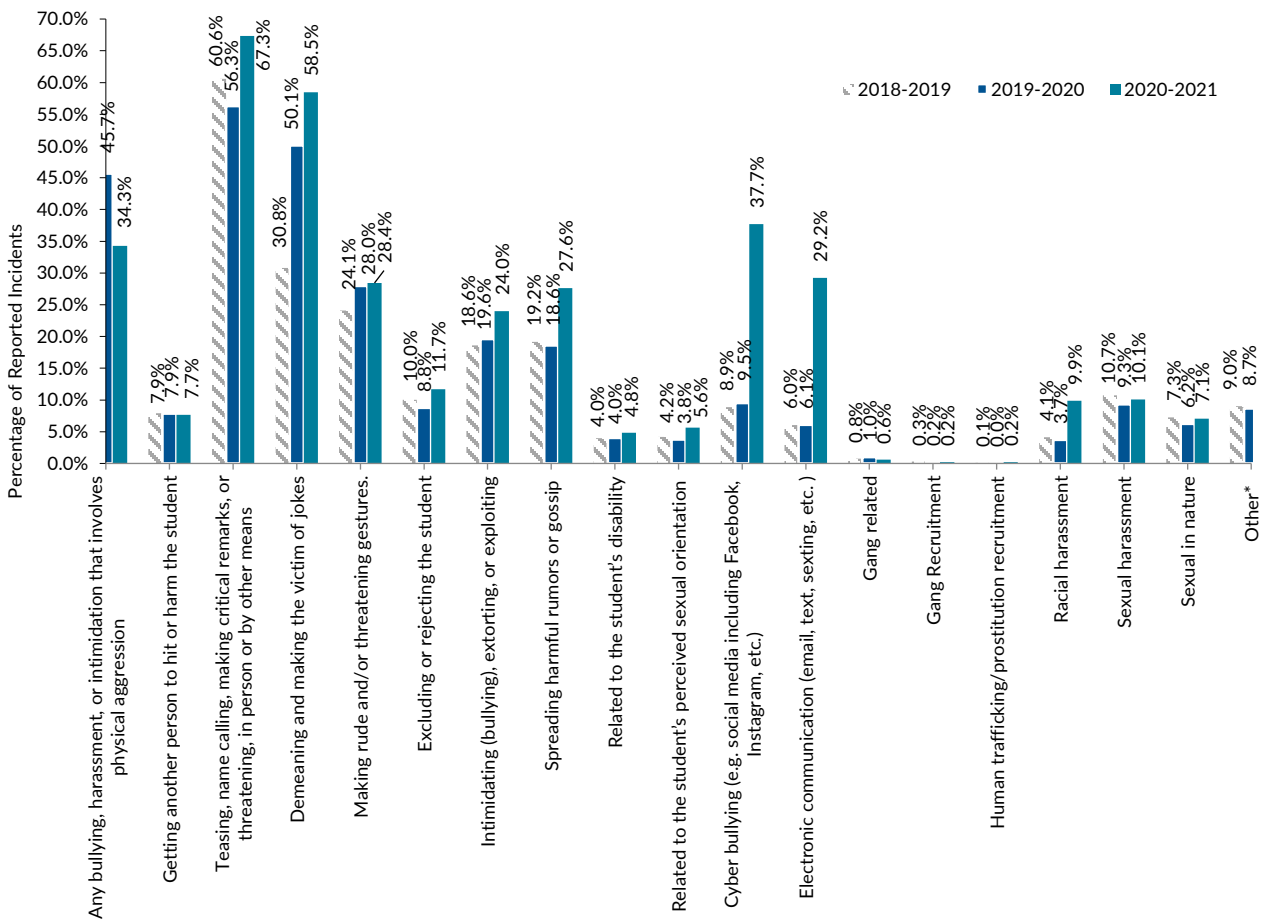




### DESCRIPTIONS OF REPORTED INCIDENTS

Individuals completing the reporting form were asked to choose from a list of descriptions to convey the alleged bullying behavior. The list was compiled from research of the most prevalent types of bullying (see Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form). As detailed in Figure 3, in the 2020-2021 school year the largest number of incidents involved the category of “teasing, name-calling, making critical remarks, or threatening, in person or by other means” (67.3 percent). This was an increase of 12 percent from the 2019-2020 school year. Direct verbal bullying/harassment was reported as being more common than other types of bullying such as physical bullying, exclusion, gestures, extortion, or spreading rumors. There was an increase in the second most reported category of “demeaning and making the victim of jokes” (50.1 to 58.5 percent), which indicates an 8.4 percent increase from the previous years. The involvement of some form of physical aggression was reported in 34.3 percent of incidents in the 2020-2021 school year, which was a decrease from the previous year of 11.4 percent.

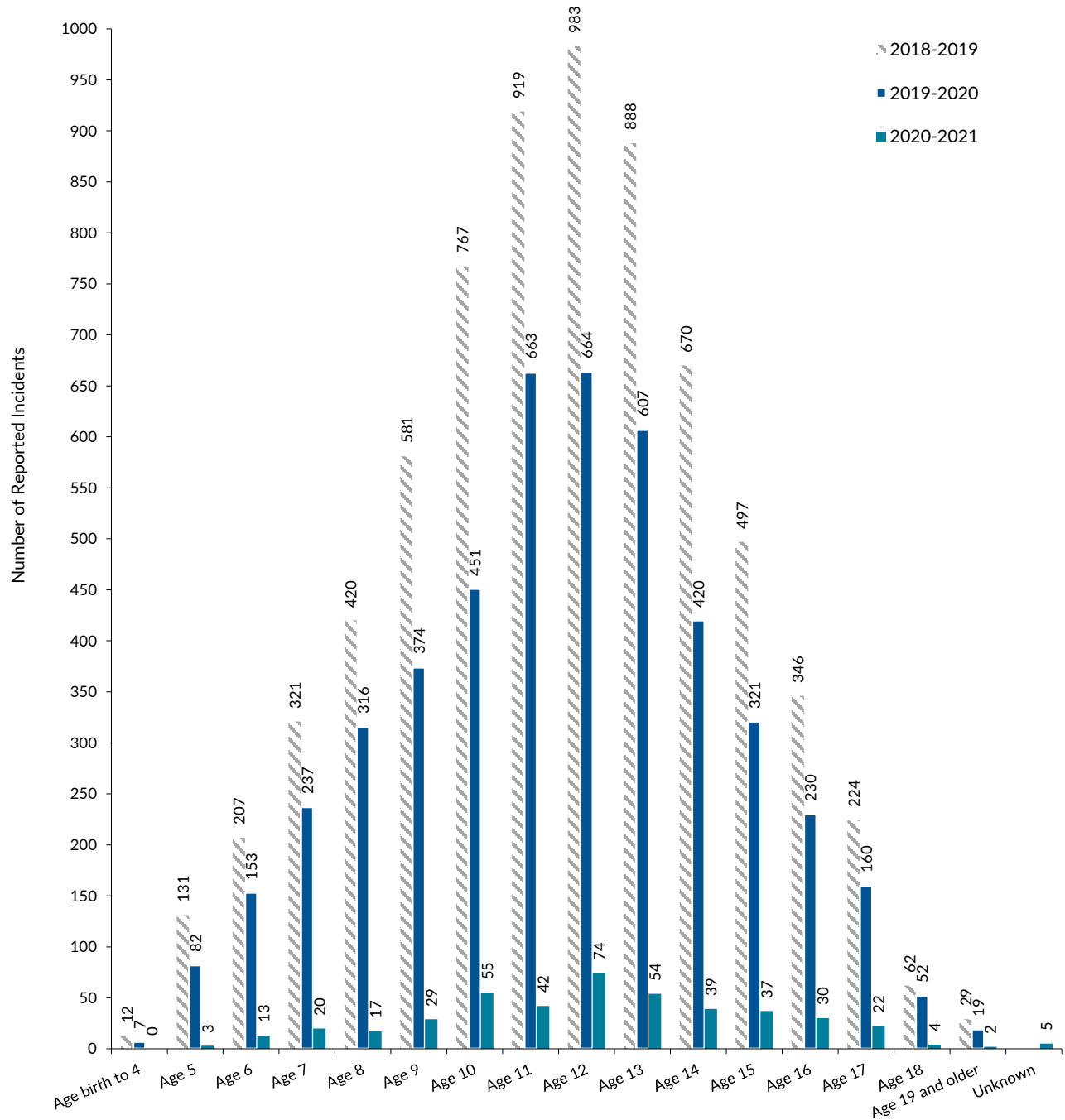
Figure 3: Statewide Descriptions of Reported Incidents



### AGE OF VICTIMS

Figure 4 represents the age of victims reported in bullying, harassment, and/or intimidation incidents ranging from birth to four years of age, through to 19 years of age or older. In the 2020-2021 school year, the majority of victims were between 10 and 13 years of age, representing the middle school years. For the 2020-2021 school year there were significant decreases in all age groups.

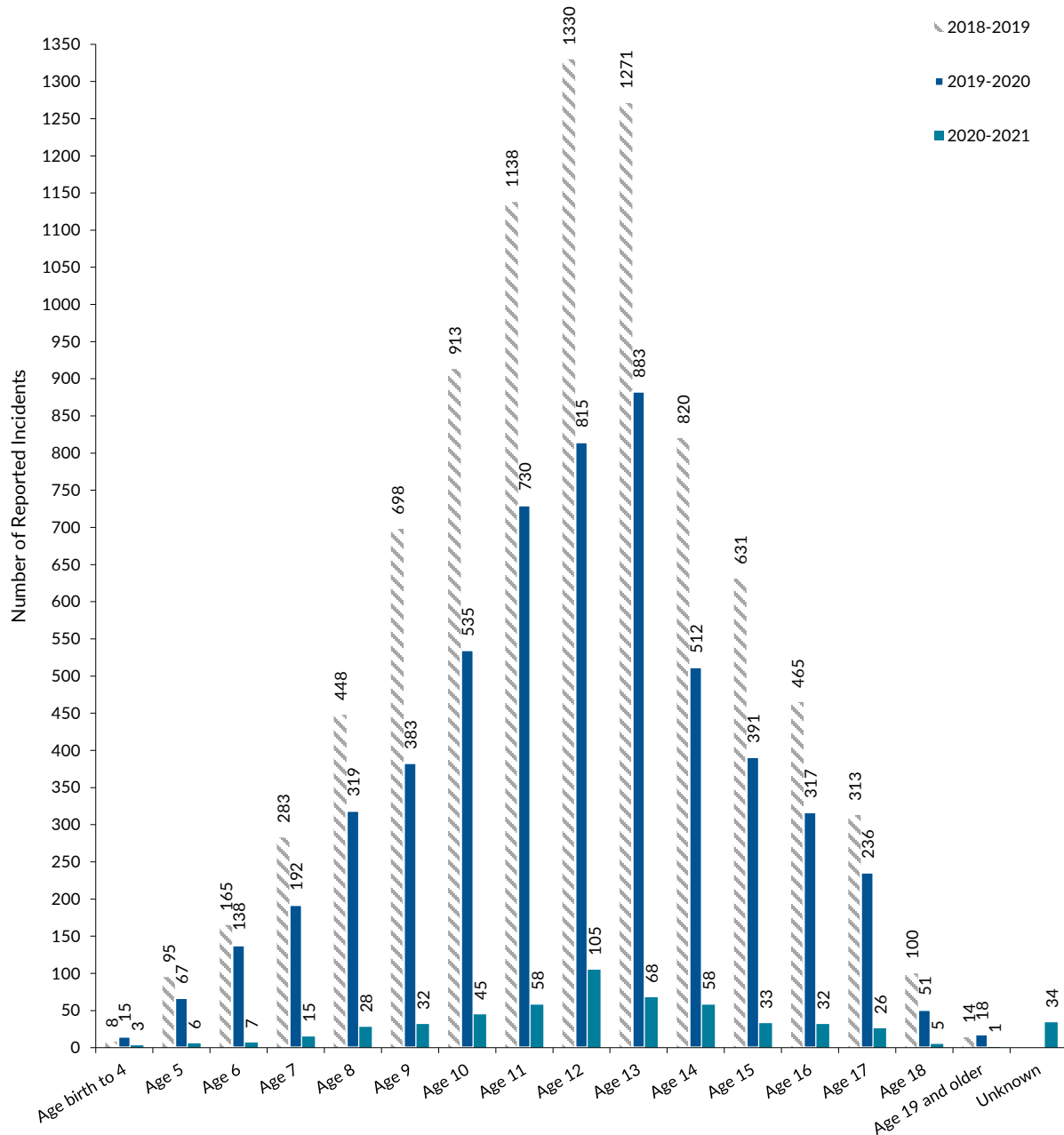
**Figure 4: Statewide Ages of Victims**



### AGE OF ALLEGED OFFENDERS

As detailed in Figure 5, the age of alleged offenders ranged from birth to four years of age, through 19 years of age or older, with the majority of alleged offenders between 10 and 14 years of age. The 2020-2021 school year demonstrated significant decreases in all age groups.

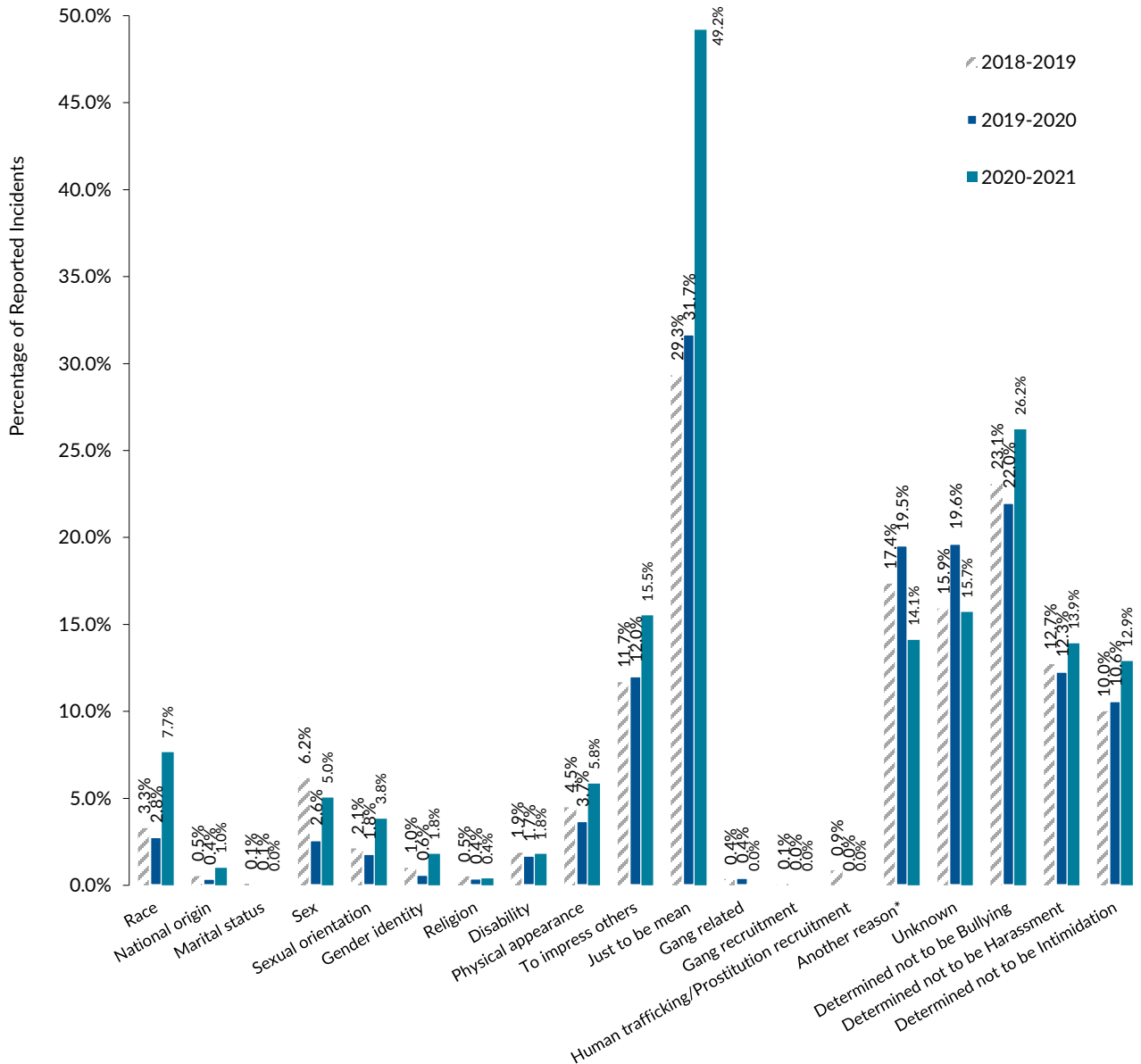
Figure 5: Statewide Ages of Alleged Offenders



### ALLEGED OFFENDER'S MOTIVES

The Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form provides a list of possible alleged offender's motives. The motive most frequently cited in the 2020-2021 school year was "just to be mean" (49.2 percent of incidents), followed by "to impress others" (15.5 percent of incidents).

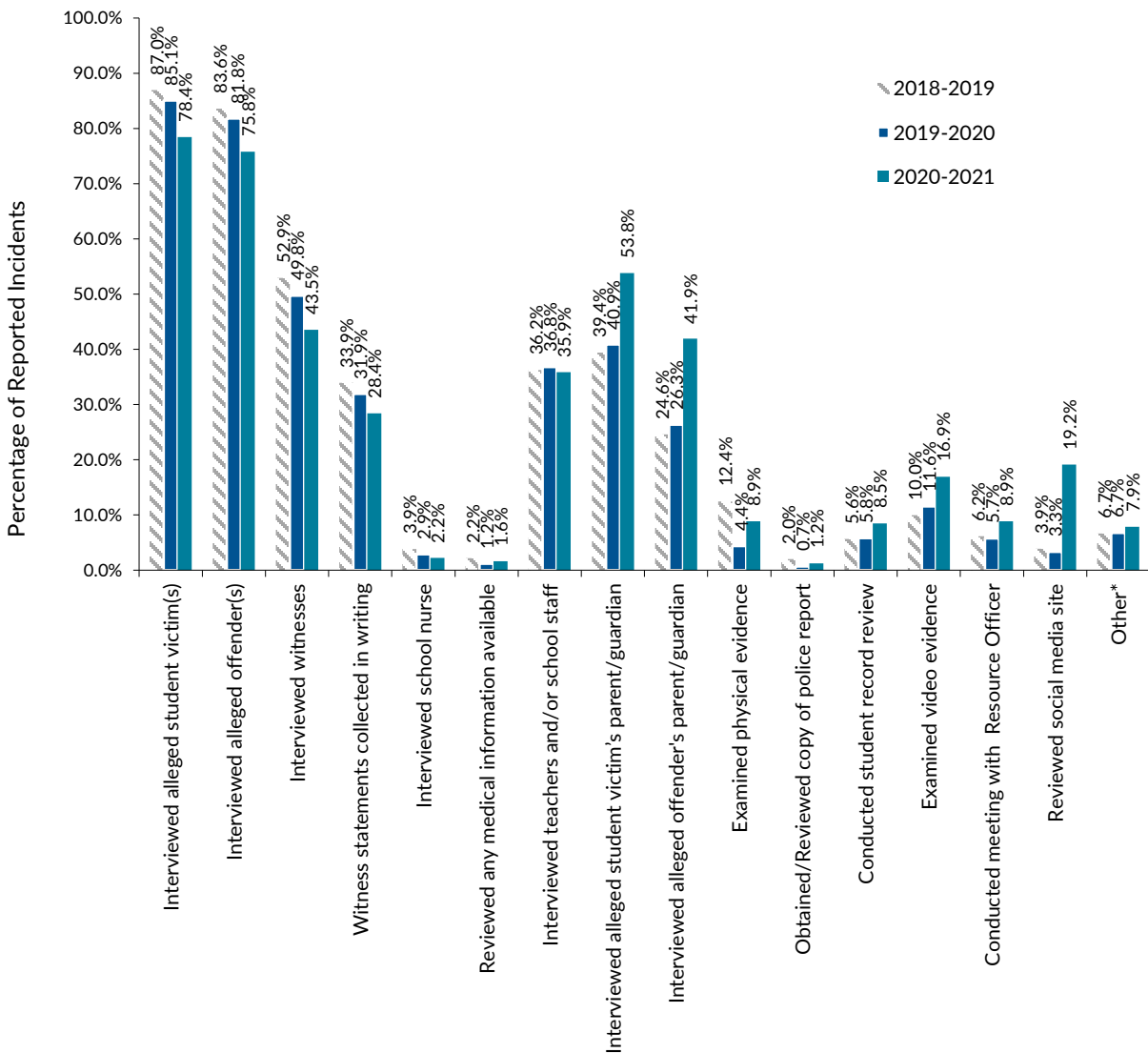
Figure 6: Statewide Description of Alleged Motives as Reported by Investigator



## INCIDENT INVESTIGATION METHODS

A variety of investigative methods have been developed and utilized by school staff investigating bullying incidents. As detailed in Figure 7, the most frequent investigative methods used in the 2020-2021 school year included interviews of student victims (78.4 percent of incidents), interviews of alleged offenders (75.8 percent of incidents), interviews of alleged student victim’s parent/guardian (53.8 percent of incidents), interviews of witnesses (43.5 percent of incidents), interviews of teachers or school staff (35.9 percent of incidents), and collecting witness statements in writing (28.4 percent of incidents).

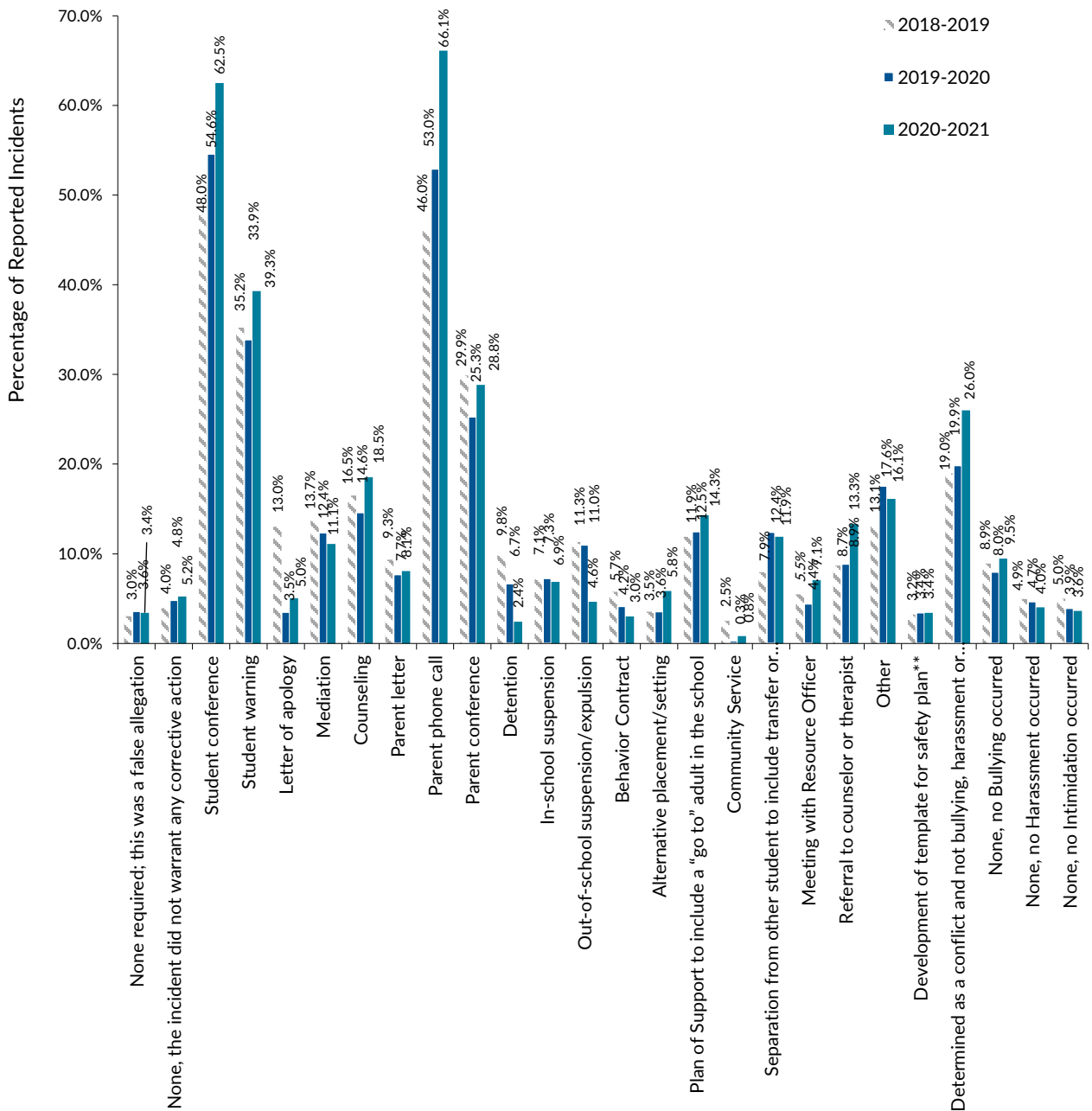
**Figure 7: Statewide Methods Used to Investigate Incident as Reported by Investigator**



### CORRECTIVE ACTIONS TAKEN

Schools took corrective action for reported incidents that were not categorized as false allegations. As detailed in Figure 8, in the 2020-2021 school year the most frequently used corrective action was parent phone call (66.1 percent of incidents), followed by student conference (62.5 percent of incidents), student warning (39.3 percent of incidents), and parent conference (28.8 percent of incidents).

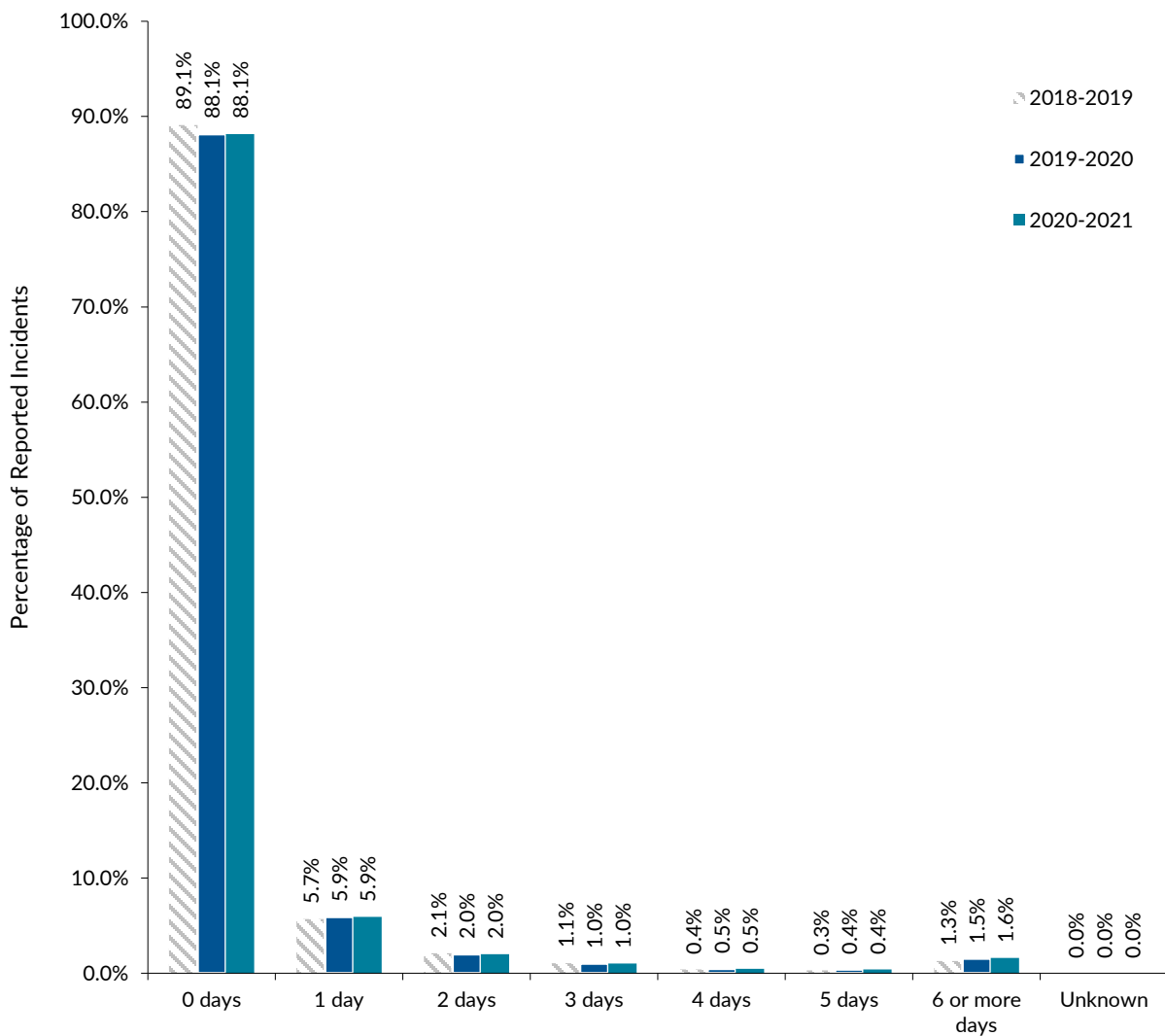
Figure 8: Statewide Corrective Actions Taken as Reported by Investigator



### NUMBER OF DAYS MISSED FROM SCHOOL BY STUDENT VICTIMS

As detailed in Figure 9, 88.1 percent of victims did not miss any days of school in the 2020-2021 school year. In the 2020-2021 school year, student victims missed school in 10.9 percent of cases. It was reported that 5.9 percent of student victims missed one day of school, while 2.0 percent of student victims missed two days of school, 1.9 percent of student victims missed three to five days of school, and 1.6 percent of student victims missed six or more days of school. It is unknown from the data provided whether victims missed school due to injury, fear of attending, or other reasons.

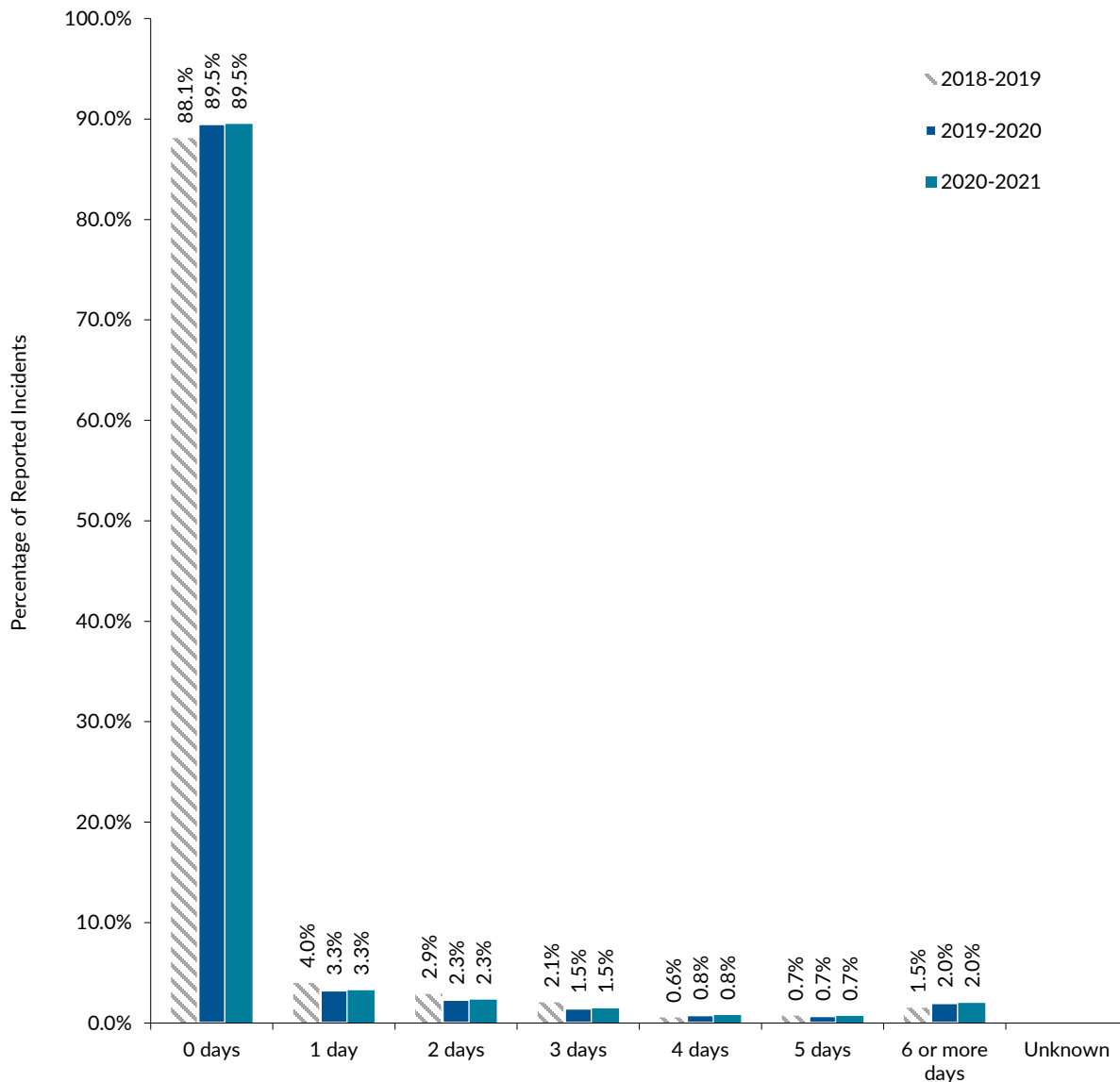
**Figure 9: Statewide Absences as a Result of Incidents for Student Victims**



### NUMBER OF DAYS MISSED FROM SCHOOL BY ALLEGED OFFENDERS

As detailed in Figure 10, 89.5 percent of offenders did not miss any days of school in the 2020-2021 school year. It was reported that 5.9 percent of alleged offenders missed one day of school, 2.0 percent of alleged offenders missed two days of school, 1.9 percent of alleged offenders missed three to five days of school, and 1.6 percent of alleged offenders missed 6 or more days of school. It is unknown from the data whether the offenders missed school due to suspensions, injury, or other reasons.

Figure 10: Statewide Absences as a Result of Incidents for Alleged Offender



### NUMBER OF FALSE ALLEGATIONS REPORTED



A false allegation is an unfounded accusation of bullying, harassment, and/or intimidation. According to the Maryland Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation (2016 Update), “Consequences and remedial actions for persons...engaged in reprisal or retaliation and for persons found to have made false accusations should be consistently and fairly applied after appropriate investigation has determined that such an offense has occurred.”

Table 2 indicates the number of investigations that resulted in the conclusion that a reported incident was a false allegation by the LSS. A total of 14 false allegations were reported by the 24 LSSs and the SEED School of Maryland in the 2020-2021 school year. This number represented 2.8 percent of the total number of incidents (496) reported statewide.

**Table 2: Number and Percentage of Incident Reports That Were Categorized as False Allegations by the LSS**

**Number and Percentage of Incident Reports that Were Categorized as False Allegations by Local School System**

Local School System	Year					
	Count 2018-2019	Percent 2018-2019	Count 2019-2020	Percent 2019-2020	Count 2020-2021	Percent 2020-2021
Allegany	4	12.9%	1	6.3%	0	N/A
Anne Arundel	34	3.5%	34	4.7%	1	1.1%
Baltimore City	8	1.7%	11	3.9%	0	0.0%
Baltimore County	15	1.3%	11	1.5%	0	0.0%
Calvert	3	2.3%	1	2.1%	0	0.0%
Caroline	1	2.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Carroll	4	2.4%	1	0.9%	0	0.0%
Cecil	3	2.0%	4	2.9%	0	0.0%
Charles	6	3.0%	7	2.4%	6	7.8%
Dorchester	1	1.1%	1	2.1%	0	0.0%
Frederick	6	2.0%	2	1.1%	1	7.1%
Garrett	0	0.0%	1	7.7%	1	8.3%
Harford	10	3.4%	14	8.2%	1	2.9%
Howard	15	2.7%	14	8.2%	4	4.9%
Kent	4	10.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Montgomery	53	3.4%	47	4.9%	0	0.0%
Prince George's	12	3.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Queen Anne's	4	4.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
St. Mary's	2	4.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Somerset	1	8.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Talbot	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Washington	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Wicomico	4	2.2%	6	3.2%	0	0.0%
Worcester	2	11.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
SEED School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	N/A

## 3: Summary and Considerations

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The MSDE is submitting this report to provide the Governor and the Maryland General Assembly with the information requested by Education Articles §7-424 and §7-424.1, Annotated Code of Maryland. During the 2020-2021 school year, incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation were reported in Maryland's public schools using the reporting system mandated by the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005.

Compared to the previous school year, the 2020-2021 school year saw significantly fewer reports of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in Maryland. However, the data presented in this report should be considered within the context that the primary instructional platform across the State was a virtual setting as local school systems engaged students in a virtual instruction platform for a significant portion of the 2020-2021 school year. This could account for the 89.68 percent decrease in reported incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

Overall analysis of reported data remains consistent with information contained in previous reports, most victims and alleged offenders were middle-school age. Many of the victims reported being teased, called names, or threatened, while others reported incidents of physical aggression or cyber-bullying. The investigation of reported bullying incidents primarily involved interviewing the victim, offender, witnesses, the victim's parent/guardian, and/or teachers and/or other school staff. The following actions will be taken as a means of improving the prevention of bullying, harassment, and intimidation in Maryland schools.

- The Maryland's Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation guides local school systems in their bullying prevention efforts and their responses to incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation. Maryland's Model Policy, required by the General Assembly, has been updated and was approved by the Maryland State Board of Education in December 2021. Included in the updated policy are additional supports for students and families in addressing the needs of both the alleged perpetrator and the targeted student, as well as an approach to professional development that encourages school staff to adopt an integrated multi-tiered, multi-component approach that focuses on equity, healing, and providing opportunities for students to develop the social and emotional competencies needed to help them contribute to a positive school climate.
- The MSDE will engage in a process to gather additional information beyond the data collection related to bullying prevention practices occurring in each LSS over the course of this next year. This process will include outreach to the LSS, as well as engaging with stakeholders in an effort to learn how the MSDE can provide targeted technical support and guidance to the LSSs as a means of decreasing incidents of bullying, harassment, and intimidation in all schools.
- The MSDE will create a repository of evidence-based bullying prevention programs and practices. The repository will be made available for LSSs as part of the ongoing effort to support schools as they develop and implement system-wide, school-wide, and classroom-based prevention and intervention programs to address bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

- It is essential that school systems continue to educate staff, students, and parents about bullying, harassment, and intimidation, provide resources for bullying prevention, encourage victims to report incidents when they occur, notify parents immediately when incidents occur, and follow up with investigations. The MSDE will continue to ensure appropriate time, attention, and resources are allocated toward this purpose and particular resources and attention will be made to address the persistent rates of occurrences at the middle school level.