Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation in Maryland Public Schools
School Year 2021-2022

Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment, and Educational Policy

Annual Legislative Report

March 2023

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

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Introduction

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) required all county boards of education and the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners to report incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation against students in public schools within their jurisdiction to the Maryland General Assembly. Additionally, MSDE was required to submit an annual report to the Maryland General Assembly summarizing the information included on the victim of bullying, harassment or intimidation forms filed with local boards during the previous school year.

To ensure effective implementation of the law according to the reporting requirements, MSDE has engaged with each local educational agency (LEA) 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 2023 report encompasses information from the 2021-2022 school year.

MSDE requires each LEA 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 LEA;
- 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.

By The Numbers: A Look at Statewide Reported Bullying Data

The 24 LEAs and the SEED School of Maryland reported bullying data for the 2021-2022 school year. The analysis in this report compares these data from the 2021-2022 school year with the three prior school years, which includes one school year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and two school years in which in person instruction was reduced due to the pandemic. Data presented in figures one through ten represent information for the 2018-2019 school year in orange, the 2019-2020 school year in gray, the 2020-2021 school year in light blue, and the 2021-2022 school year in purple.

NUMBER OF INCIDENTS

There were 5,884 bullying incidents reported during the 2021-2022 school year in Maryland public schools. This represents a large increase from the 2020-2021 school year but, as the 2020-2021 school year included the abbreviation of in-person learning due to the pandemic, a more appropriate comparison is with school year 2018-2019 . The number of total incidents decreased from 7,134 In 2018-2019 to 5,884 In 2021-2022, a decrease of 17.5%. The change in total incidents from 2018-2019 to 2021-2022 varied across LEAs, with nine LEAs reporting an increase, 10 LEAs reporting a decrease, and five LEAs reporting a similar number. The number of reported incidents in each LEA is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Number of Incidents
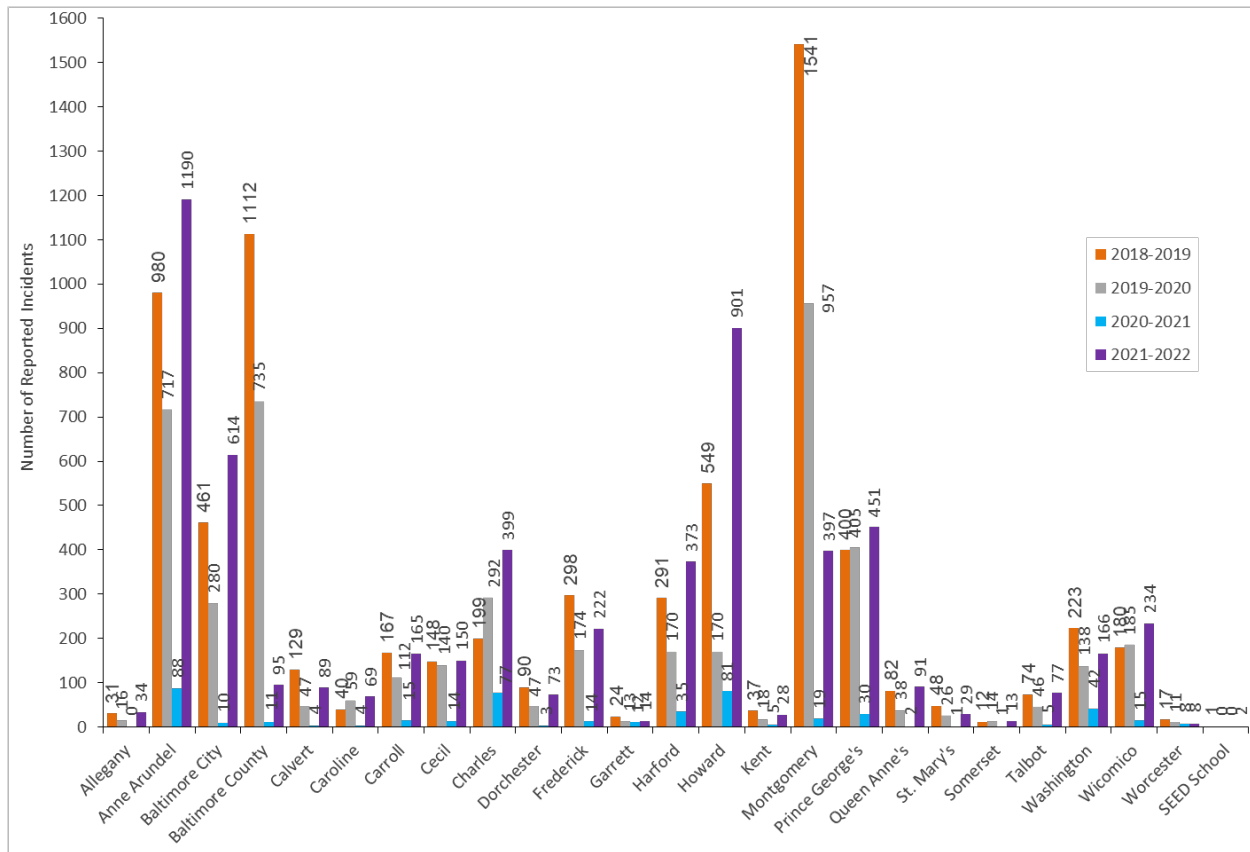
The rate of reported bullying incidents in LEAs per 1,000 students enrolled during the last four years is shown in Table 1. Statewide, the number of reported incidents decreased from 8.0 in 2018-2019 to 6.7 in 2021-2022. Ten LEAs had rates of incidents per 1,000 students above 10.0, while four LEAs had rates below 2.0. In comparison to school year 2018-2019, 13 LEAs had higher rates of bullying in 2021-2022, 10 LEAs had lower rates, and one remained constant. The full report on Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation in Maryland Public Schools for the school year 2018-19 can be found on the Maryland Department of Legislative Services website:

https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MSDE/ED7-424(g)(1)_2020.pdf

Table 1: Number of Reported Incidents Per 1,000 Enrolled Students by Local Education Agency and School Year (2019-2020 to 2021–2022)

Local Education Agencies	2018 2019	2019 2020	2020 2021	2021 2022
Allegany	3.6	1.9	0.0	4.2
Anne Arundel	11.8	8.4	1.1	14.3
Baltimore City	5.8	3.5	0.1	7.9
Baltimore County	9.8	6.4	0.1	0.9
Calvert	8.1	2.9	0.3	5.8
Caroline	6.9	10.0	0.7	12.4
Carroll	6.6	4.4	0.6	6.6
Cecil	9.7	9.2	1.0	10.1

Local Education Agencies	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Charles	7.3	10.6	2.9	14.8
Dorchester	18.8	10.0	0.6	16.0
Frederick	7.0	4.0	0.3	4.9
Garrett	6.2	3.4	3.3	4.0
Harford	7.7	4.4	0.9	9.8
Howard	9.5	2.9	1.4	15.7
Kent	19.4	9.4	2.8	15.7
Montgomery	9.5	5.8	0.1	2.5
Prince George's	3.0	3.0	0.2	3.5
Queen Anne's	10.6	4.9	0.3	12.2
St. Mary's	2.7	1.4	0.1	1.7
Somerset	4.1	4.8	0.4	4.7
Talbot	15.8	9.8	1.1	17.0
Washington	9.8	6.0	1.9	7.5
Wicomico	12.0	12.2	1.0	16.0
Worcester	2.5	1.6	1.2	1.2

LOCATION OF INCIDENTS

The most common location of reported incidents in 2021-2022 was on school property. The percentage of incidents on school property was similar to previous years, with the exception of 2020-2021, when most students spent limited time on school property due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, there were increased rates of reported incidents that occurred via internet in 2020-2021, but these rates have returned to pre-pandemic levels with the return of in person instruction in 2021-2022. The rates of reported Incidents at other locations, including at a school-sponsored event off school property, on a school bus, or on the way to or from school have remained relatively steady since 2018-2019 and collectively account for less than a fifth of all reported incidents.

**Figure 2: Statewide Locations of Reported Incidents**
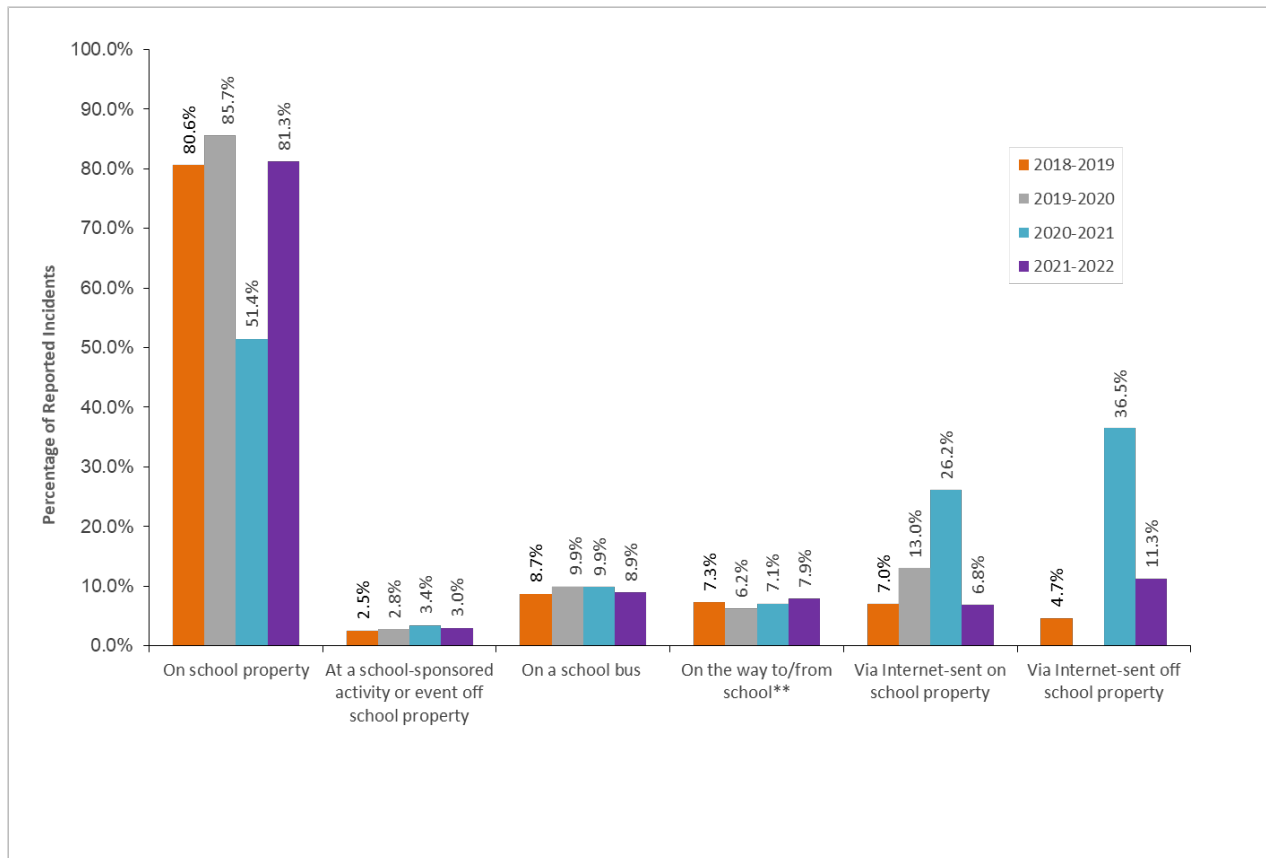
DESCRIPTIONS OF REPORTED INCIDENTS

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, the three most common descriptions of reported incidents in 2021-2022 were:

- Teasing, name calling, making critical remarks, or threatening In person by other means
- Any bullying, harassment, or intimidation that involves physical aggression
- Demeaning and making the victim of jokes

The largest increases in report incidents from 2018-2019 to 2021-2022 were for "Demeaning and making the victim of jokes" and "Making rude and/or threatening gestures." While no categories of reported Incidents saw considerable decreases from 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, several categories decreased from 2020-2021, including cyber bullying, electronic communication, and racial harassment.

Figure 3: Statewide Descriptions of Reported Incidents
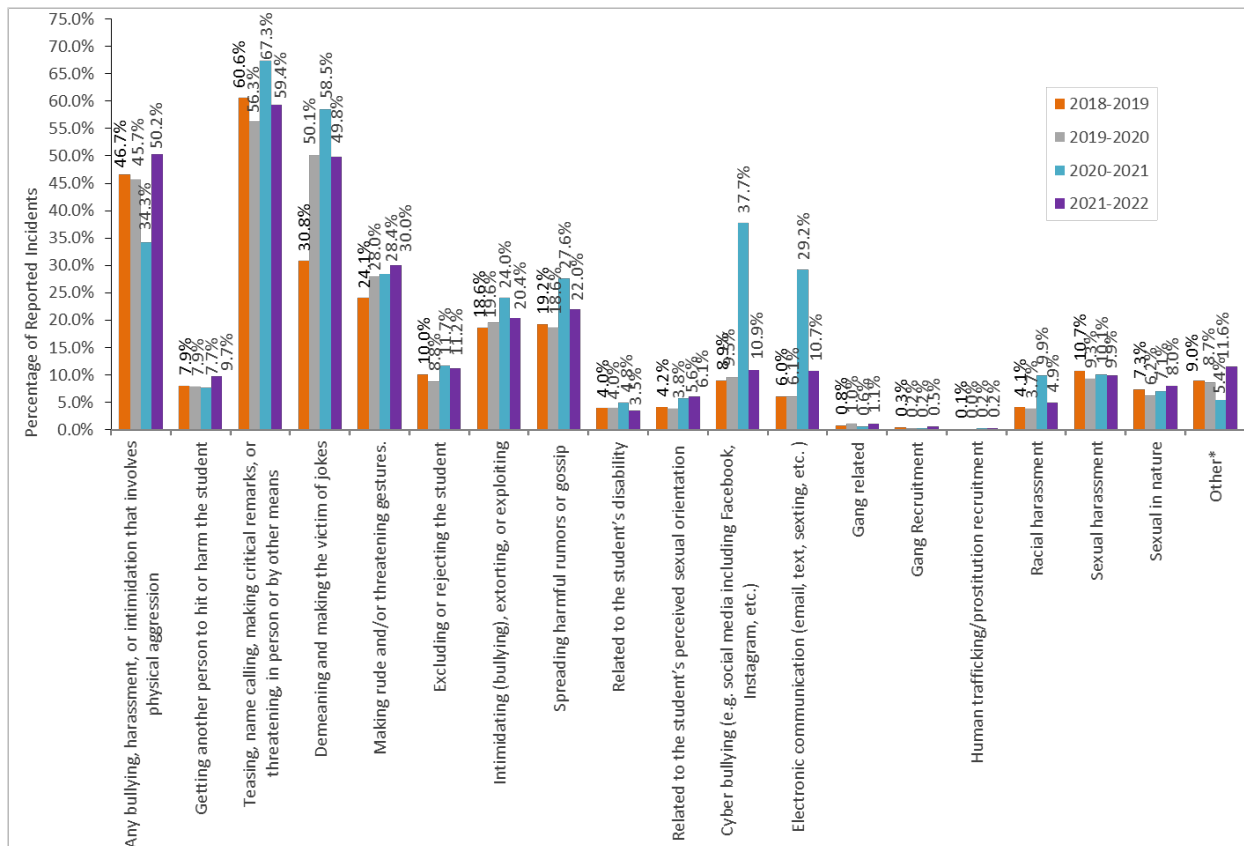
AGE OF VICTIMS

Figure 4 represents the age of victims reported in bullying, harassment, or intimidation incidents ranging from birth to four years of age, through to 19 years of age or older. For the 2021-2022 school year, the most common age of victims was between 11 and 13, collectively accounting for almost half of all victims of reported incidents. There were increases for ages 12 and 13 compared to previous school years, while ages 7 to 10 saw decreases from previous years.

Figure 4: Statewide Ages of Victims
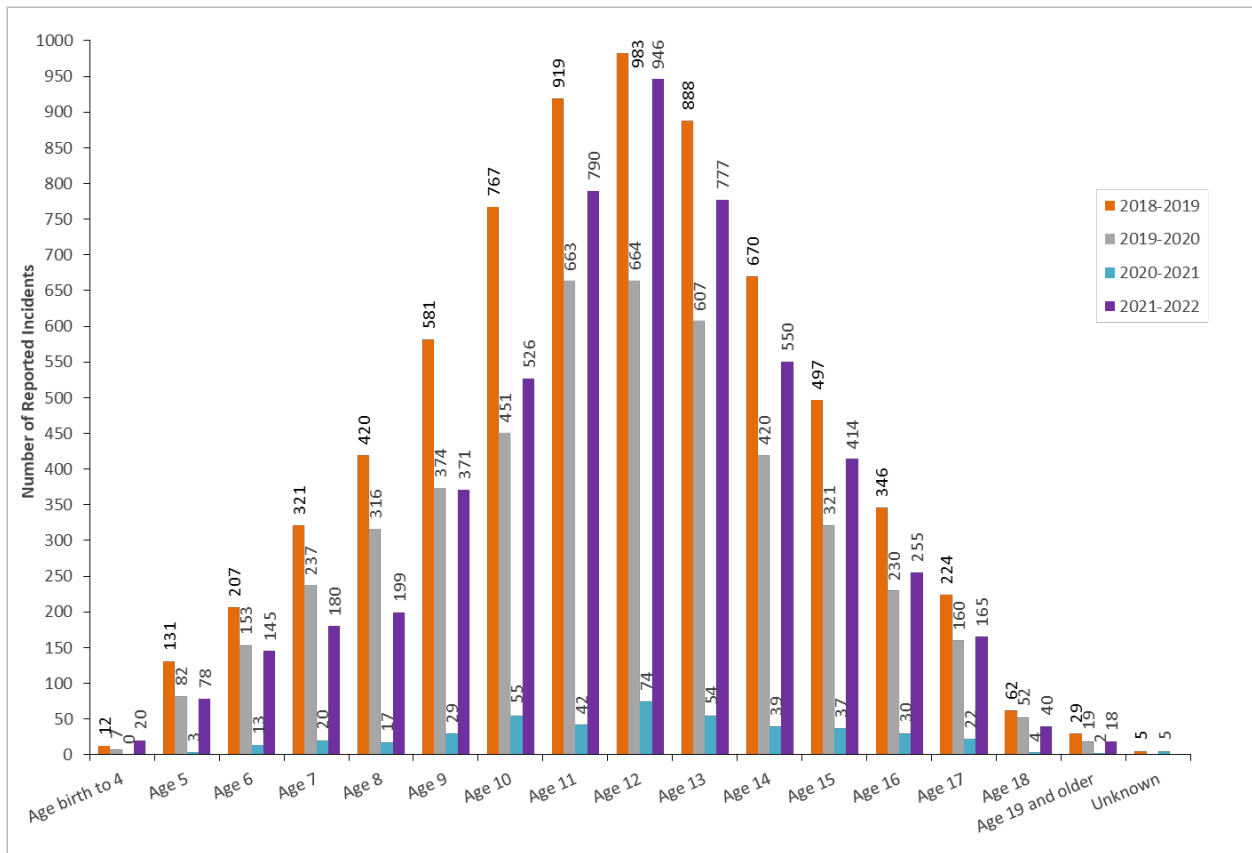
AGE OF ALLEGED OFFENDERS

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 11 and 13 years of age. When comparing the age of the reported offenders from 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, there were increases in the proportion of offenders aged eight and 11 and decreases for students aged nine.

Figure 5: Statewide Ages of Alleged Offenders
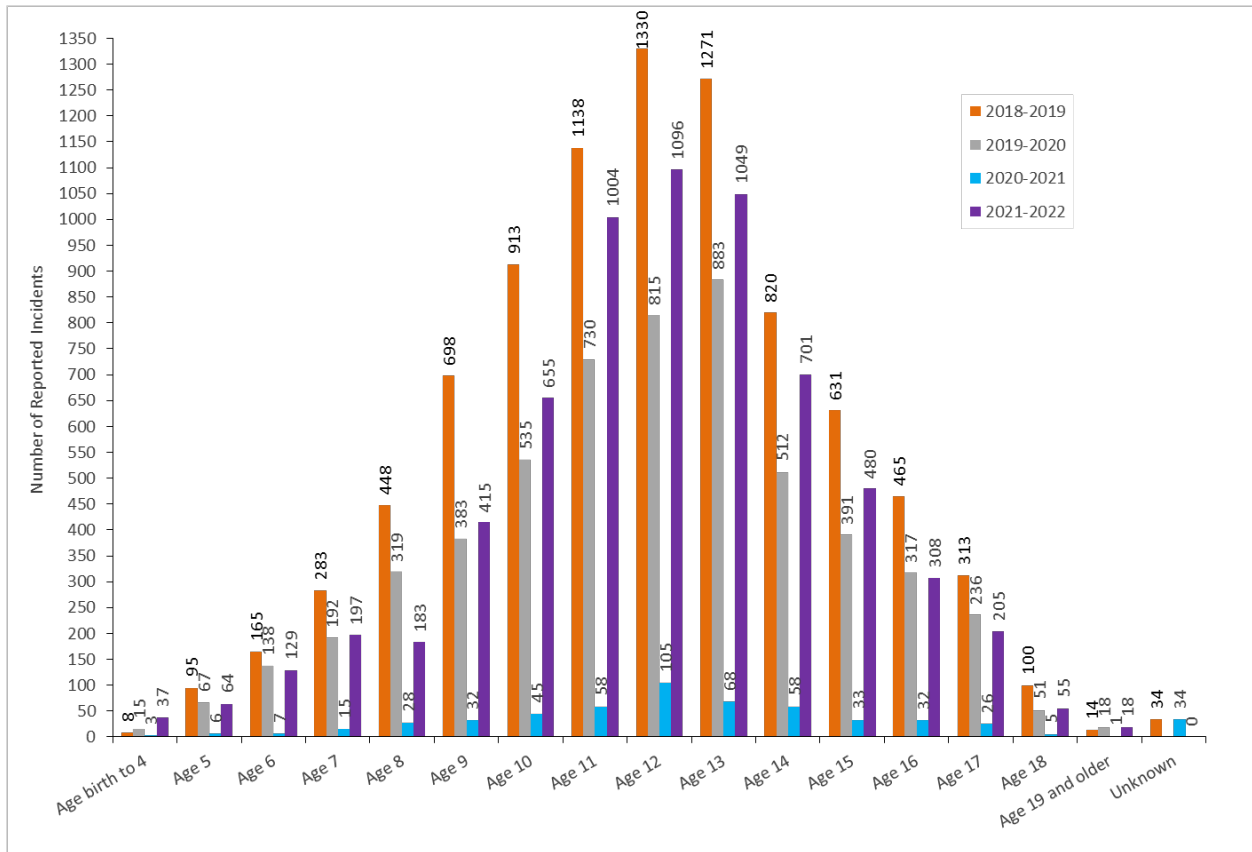
ALLEGED OFFENDER'S MOTIVES

The *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form* provides a list of possible alleged offender's motives. The most common possible motive was "Just to be mean" accounting for more than 35% of reported incidents, a slight increase from 2018-2019, but a considerable decrease from 49% in 2020-2021. The second most common motive was "To impress others" at 15%.

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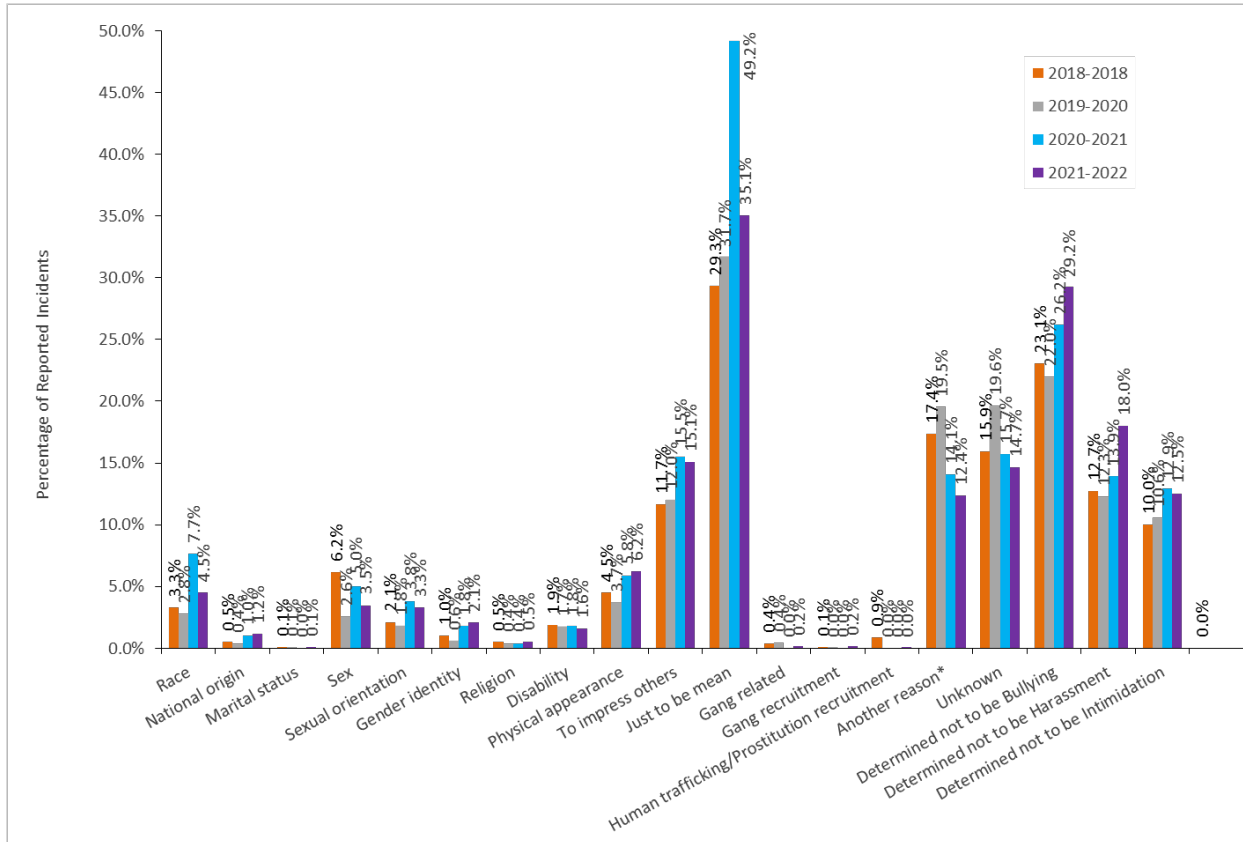
INCIDENT INVESTIGATION METHODS

A variety of investigative methods have been developed and utilized by school staff investigating bullying incidents. As detailed in Figure 7, the most common investigative methods in 2021-2022 were interviews of alleged victims and alleged offenders, followed by interviews of witnesses. The frequency of these methods used in investigations in 2021-2022 was similar to 2018-2019, despite small decreases during the pandemic school year of 2020-2021. Compared to 2018-2019, there was an increase in the frequency of interviews of the alleged victim's parent/guardian and interviews of the alleged offender's parent/guardian and a decrease in the examination of physical evidence.

Figure 7: Statewide Methods Used to Investigate Incident as Reported by Investigator
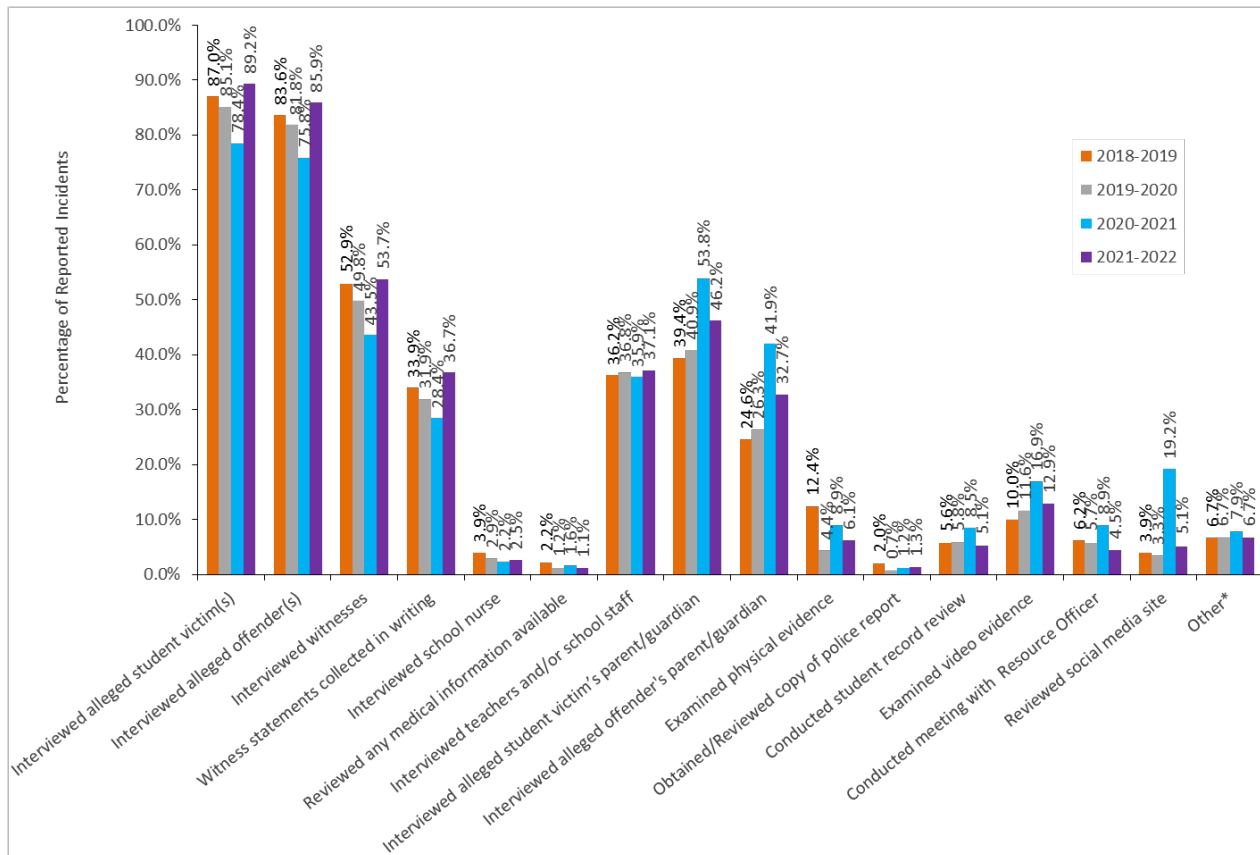
CORRECTIVE ACTIONS TAKEN

Schools took corrective action for reported incidents that were not categorized as false allegations. As detailed in Figure 8, the most common corrective actions taken were a a parent phone call, student conference, and student warning. While all three of these corrective actions decline from 2020-2021, they returned to similar rates as in 2018-2019.

Figure 8: Statewide Corrective Actions Taken as Reported by Investigator
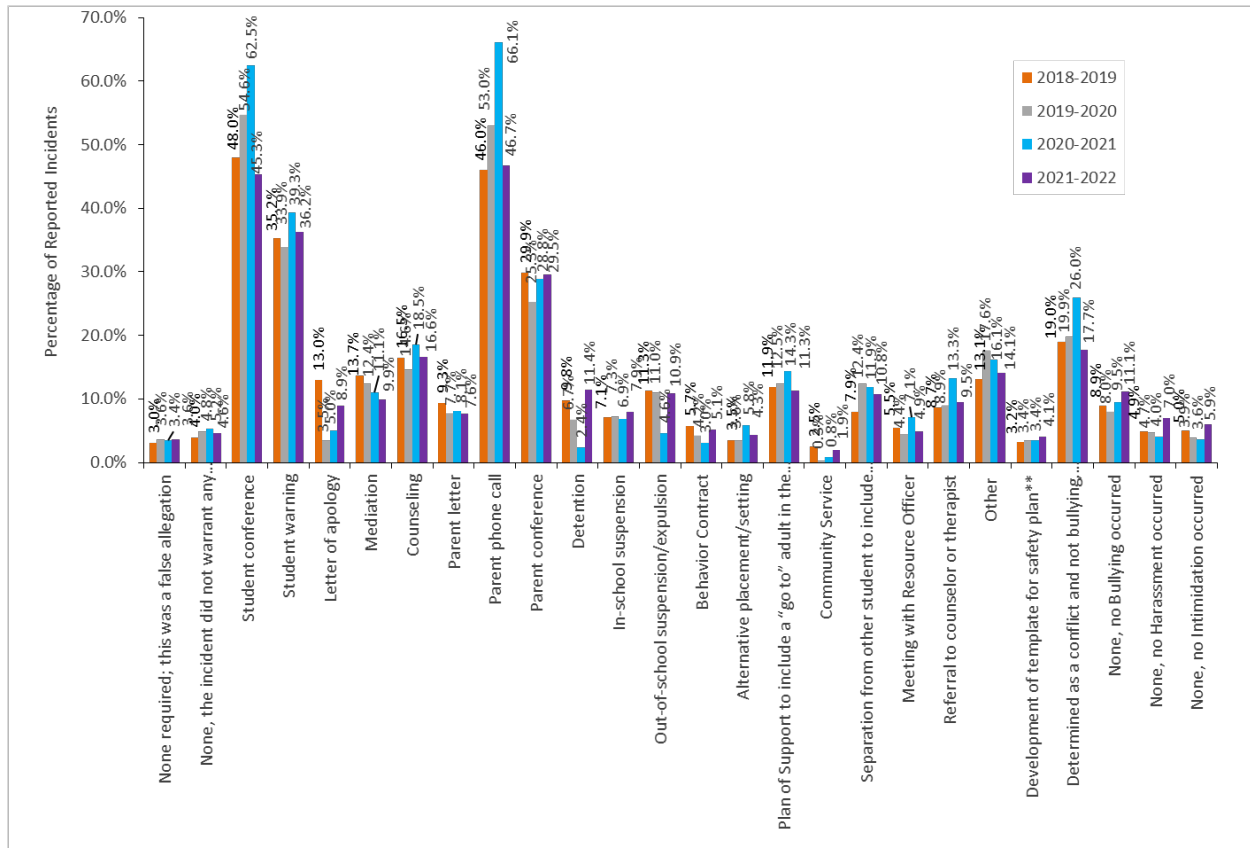
NUMBER OF DAYS MISSED FROM SCHOOL BY STUDENT VICTIMS

As detailed in Figure 9, 87.6% of victims did not miss any days of school in the 2021-2022 school year. This rate, as well as the distribution of the number of days missed from school for the remaining victims, has remained largely unchanged over the last four school years. 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
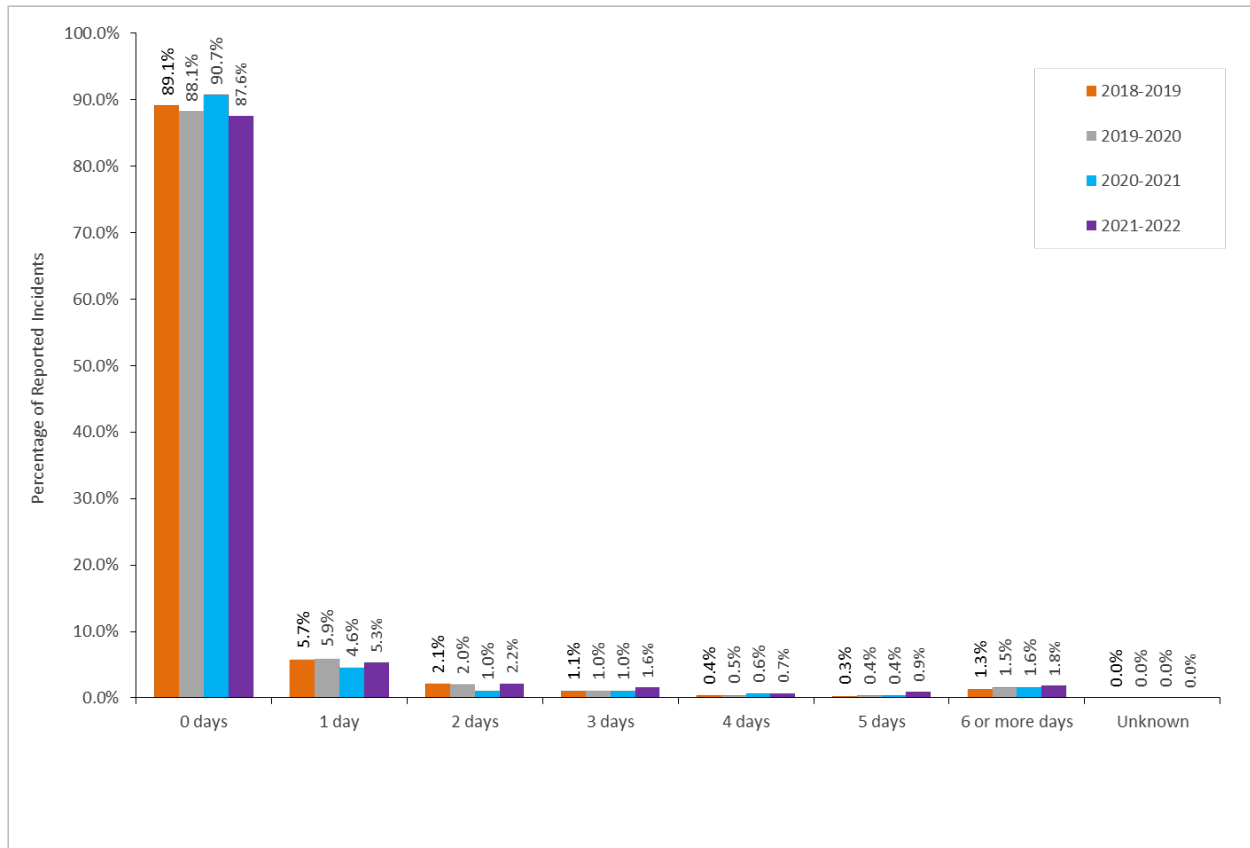
NUMBER OF DAYS MISSED FROM SCHOOL BY ALLEGED OFFENDERS

As detailed in Figure 10, 87.6 % of offenders did not miss any days of school in the 2021-2022 school year. It was reported that 5.3% of alleged offenders missed one day of school, 2.2% of alleged offenders missed two days of school, 3.2% of alleged offenders missed three to five days of school, and 1.8% of alleged offenders missed six or more days of school. It is unknown from the data whether the offenders missed school due to suspensions, injury, or other reasons. When comparing the numbers from 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, the percentages of reported incidents that resulted in one or two days of school missed by the alleged offender decreased, while the percentage missing zero days has stayed around 90%.

Figure 10: Statewide Absences as a Result of Incidents for Alleged Offender
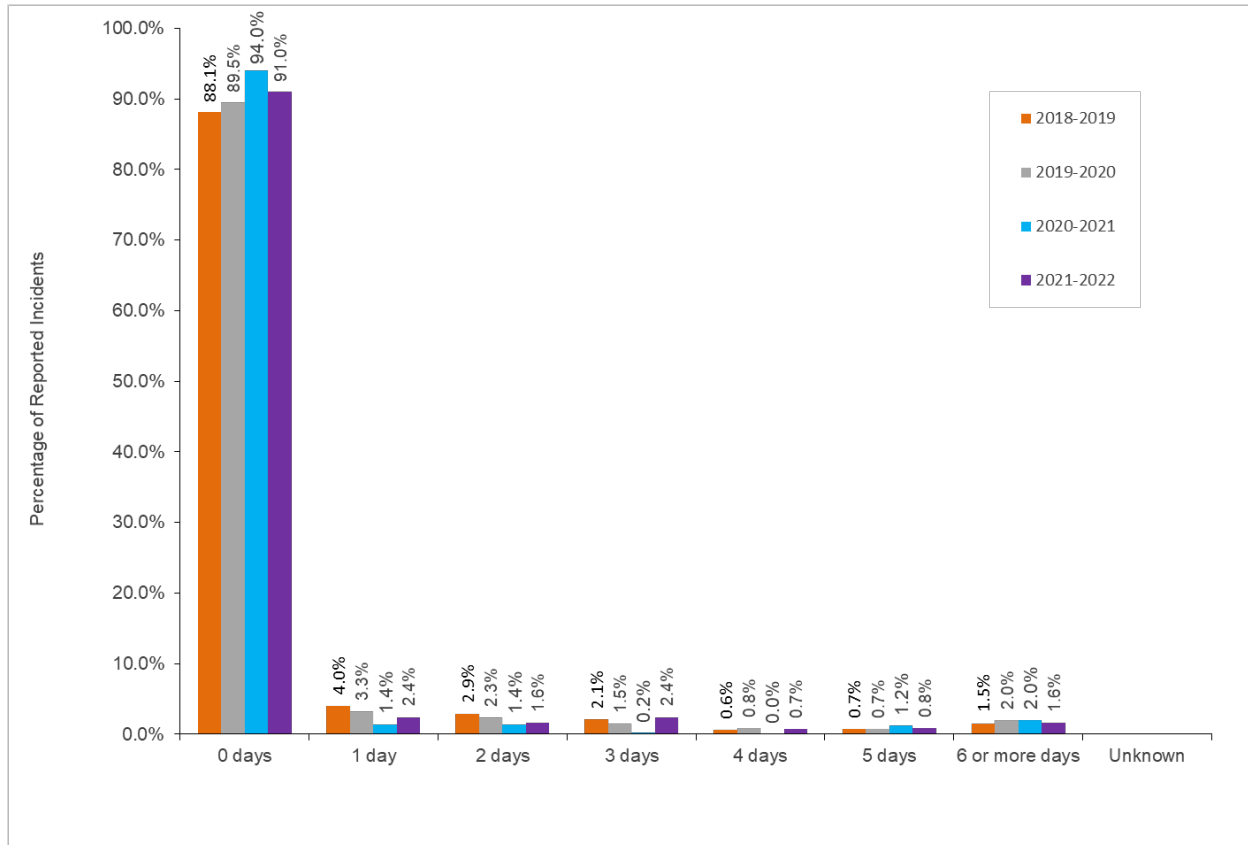
NUMBER OF FALSE ALLEGATIONS REPORTED

A false allegation is an unfounded accusation of bullying, harassment, and/or intimidation. Table 3 shows the number reported of false allegations and percentage of total reported incidents by LEA and school year. Statewide, false allegations represented 3.5% of all reported Incidents in 2021-2022, a slight increase from 2.7% in 2018-2019. In 2021-2022, eight LEAs reported no false allegations, and 11 LEAs had a false allegation rate lower than the state average.

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

Local Education Agencies	Count 2018-2019	% 2018-2019	Count 2019-2020	% 2019-2020	Count 2020-2021	% 2020-2021	Count 2021-2022	% 2021-2022
Allegany	4	12.9%	1	6.3%	0	N/A	1	2.9%
Anne Arundel	34	3.5%	34	4.7%	1	1.1%	52	4.4%
Baltimore City	8	1.7%	11	3.9%	0	0.0%	16	2.6%
Baltimore County	15	1.3%	11	1.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Calvert	3	2.3%	1	2.1%	0	0.0%	3	3.4%
Caroline	1	2.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Carroll	4	2.4%	1	0.9%	0	0.0%	4	2.4%
Cecil	3	2.0%	4	2.9%	0	0.0%	5	3.3%
Charles	6	3.0%	7	2.4%	6	7.8%	7	1.8%
Dorchester	1	1.1%	1	2.1%	0	0.0%	1	1.4%
Frederick	6	2.0%	2	1.1%	1	7.1%	4	1.8%
Garrett	0	0.0%	1	7.7%	1	8.3%	0	0.0%
Harford	10	3.4%	14	8.2%	1	2.9%	29	7.8%
Howard	15	2.7%	14	8.2%	4	4.9%	36	4.0%
Kent	4	10.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Montgomery	53	3.4%	47	4.9%	0	0.0%	19	4.8%
Prince George's	12	3.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	21	4.7%
Queen Anne's	4	4.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	2.2%
St. Mary's	2	4.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Somerset	1	8.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Talbot	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	2.6%
Washington	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Wicomico	4	2.2%	6	3.2%	0	0.0%	3	1.3%

Local Education Agencies	Count 2018-2019	% 2018-2019	Count 2019-2020	% 2019-2020	Count 2020-2021	% 2020-2021	Count 2021-2022	% 2021-2022
Worcester	2	11.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
SEED School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	N/A	0	0.0%

Summary and Considerations

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 2021-2022 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.

When comparing data from the 2021-2022 school year with the data from the 2018-2019 school year, the last full school year of in person instruction, there was a decrease in total reported incidents and a decrease in the rate of incidents per student population. Maryland's schools did see a significant increase in reports of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in the 2021-2022 school year compared to the 2020-2021 school year but it is important to note that during the 2020-2021 school year, LEAs primarily engaged students in a virtual setting, which presented fewer opportunities for negative student interactions, compared to the 2021-2022 school year when most students returned to in-person learning. The comparison of the 2021-2022 school year data to the 2018-2019 school year data is a better measure since both school years reflect a similar instructional model.

The overall analysis of reported data remains consistent with information contained in previous reports. Most victims and alleged offenders were of 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(s), offender(s), 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, and the response to, bullying, harassment, or intimidation in Maryland schools:

- Maryland's Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation guides LEAs in their bullying prevention and response efforts. Maryland's Model Policy, required by the General Assembly, mandates that each LEA develop their own policies and regulations requiring professional development for staff, student lessons, increased support for students, and information and awareness for families about the bullying reporting process. Additionally, Maryland's Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation encourages schools to adopt a restorative approach that focuses on relationships, equity, healing, and opportunities for students to develop the social and emotional competencies needed to help them contribute to a positive school climate and their own social and emotional development.

- MSDE continues to engage with each LEA with monthly meetings, one-on-one check-ins, data sharing, targeted technical assistance, and guidance as a means of increasing awareness and increasing the efficacy of school staff to address situations of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in Maryland schools.

It is essential that each LEA continue to educate staff, students, and families about bullying, harassment, or intimidation, provide resources for bullying prevention, encourage targeted students to report incidents when they occur, notify families immediately when incidents occur, follow up with prompt and effective investigations, and take the steps necessary to reduce the number of bullying situations in their schools. MSDE will continue to ensure appropriate time, attention, and resources are allocated toward this initiative.