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

Presented by the
Maryland State Department of Education

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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 harassment or intimidation against students in public schools within their jurisdiction to the Maryland General Assembly. Additionally, the MSDE was 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 2021 report encompasses information from the 2019-2020 school year, which included the abbreviation of in-person learning. After schools closed in March 2020 to in-person learning, parents, caregivers, students, staff, and close relatives were still able to make reports during virtual learning.

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.

FINDINGS

The 24 LSSs and the SEED School of Maryland reported data for the 2019-2020 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 2017-2018 school year in gray, the 2018-2019 school year in light blue, and the 2019-2020 school year in purple.

Incident Rates

There were 4,810 bullying incidents reported during the 2019-2020 school year in Maryland public schools. This represents a statewide decrease of 2,837 reported incidents from the 2018-

2019 school year (a 37.1% 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 2019-2020 school year is shown in Table 1. Nineteen LSSs and the SEED School indicated a decrease in the number of reported incidents while five LSSs indicated an increase. In reviewing the total number of incidents it is important to consider totals relative to student enrollment.

Figure 1: Number of Reported Incidents by Local School System and the SEED School of Maryland

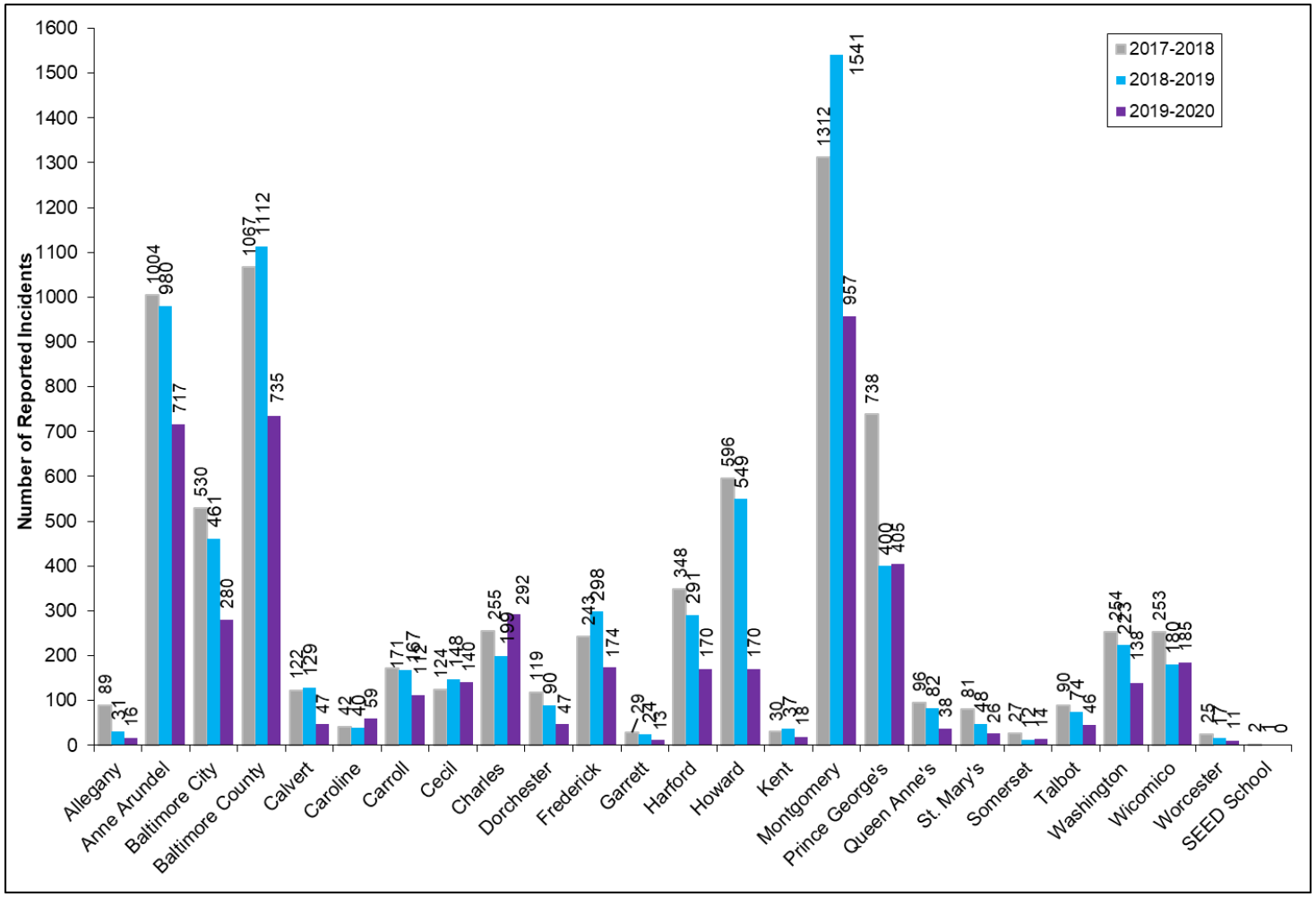


Table 1: Number of Reported Incidents Relative to Enrollment by Local School System

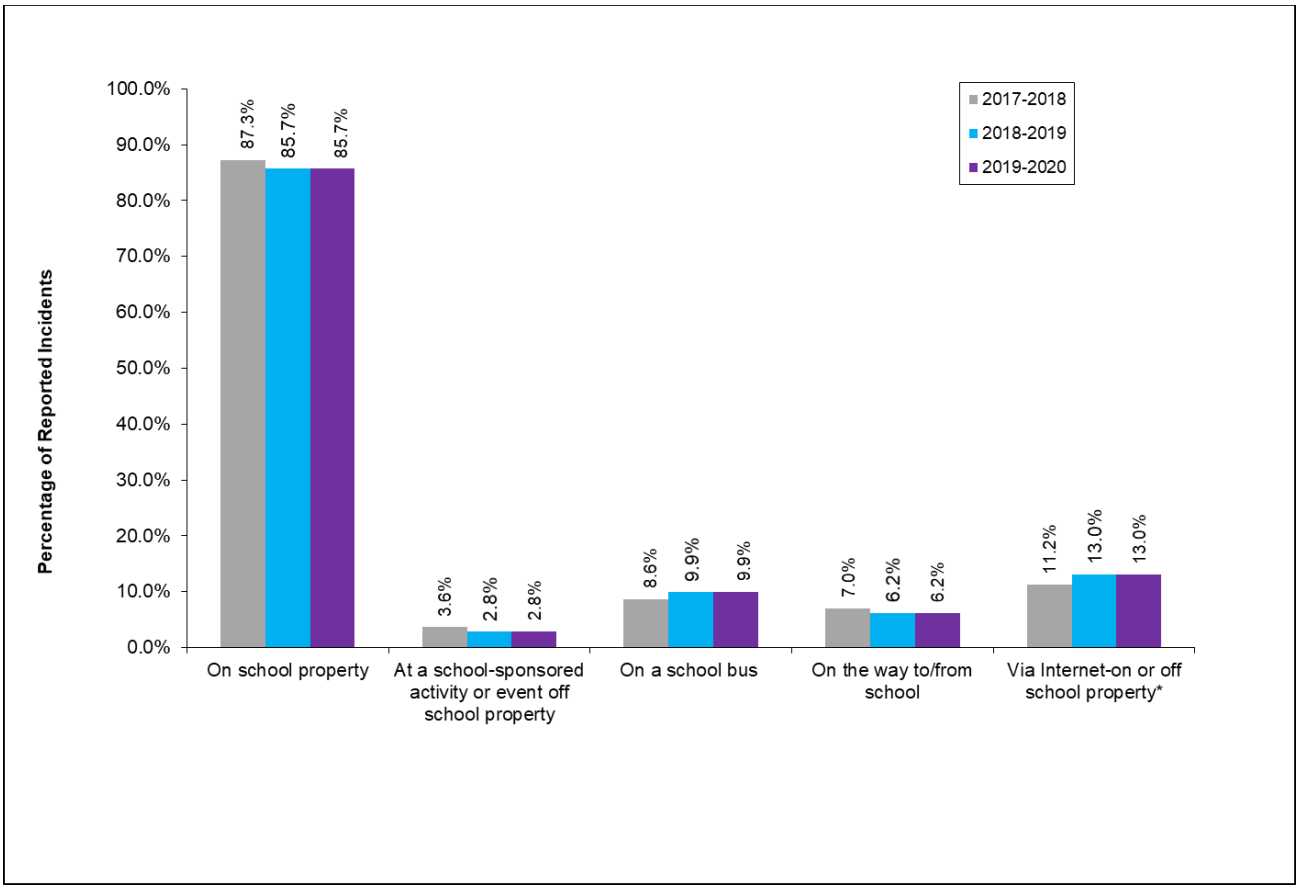
Number of Reported Incidents Per 1,000 Enrolled Students			
	School Year		
Local School System	**Local School System 2017-2018**	**Local School System 2018-2019**	**Local School System 2019-2020**
Allegany	10.3	3.6	1.9
Anne Arundel	12.1	11.8	8.4
Baltimore City	6.6	5.8	3.5
Baltimore County	9.4	9.8	6.4
Calvert	7.7	8.1	2.9
Caroline	7.3	6.9	10.0
Carroll	6.8	6.6	4.4
Cecil	8.1	9.7	9.2
Charles	9.5	7.3	10.6
Dorchester	25.0	18.8	10.0
Frederick	5.8	7.0	4.0
Garrett	7.6	6.2	3.4
Harford	9.2	7.7	4.4
Howard	10.5	9.5	2.9
Kent	15.1	19.4	9.4
Montgomery	8.1	9.5	5.8
Prince George's	5.6	3.0	3.0
Queen Anne's	12.3	10.6	4.9
St. Mary's	4.5	2.7	1.4
Somerset	9.3	4.1	4.8
Talbot	19.4	15.8	9.8
Washington	11.2	9.8	6.0
Wicomico	16.9	12.0	12.2
Worcester	3.7	2.5	1.6

Note: The SEED School of Maryland is not included in this table because it enrolls fewer than 1,000 students. Therefore, data cannot be meaningfully expressed in terms of incidents per 1,000 enrolled students.

Locations of Incidents

There are not 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 2019-2020 school year the majority of incidents (85.7 percent) occurred on school property, which is consistent with the previous two years of data. The second largest number of incidents occurred remotely via the internet (13 percent), followed by incidents on school buses (9.9 percent).

Figure 2: Statewide Locations of Reported Incidents



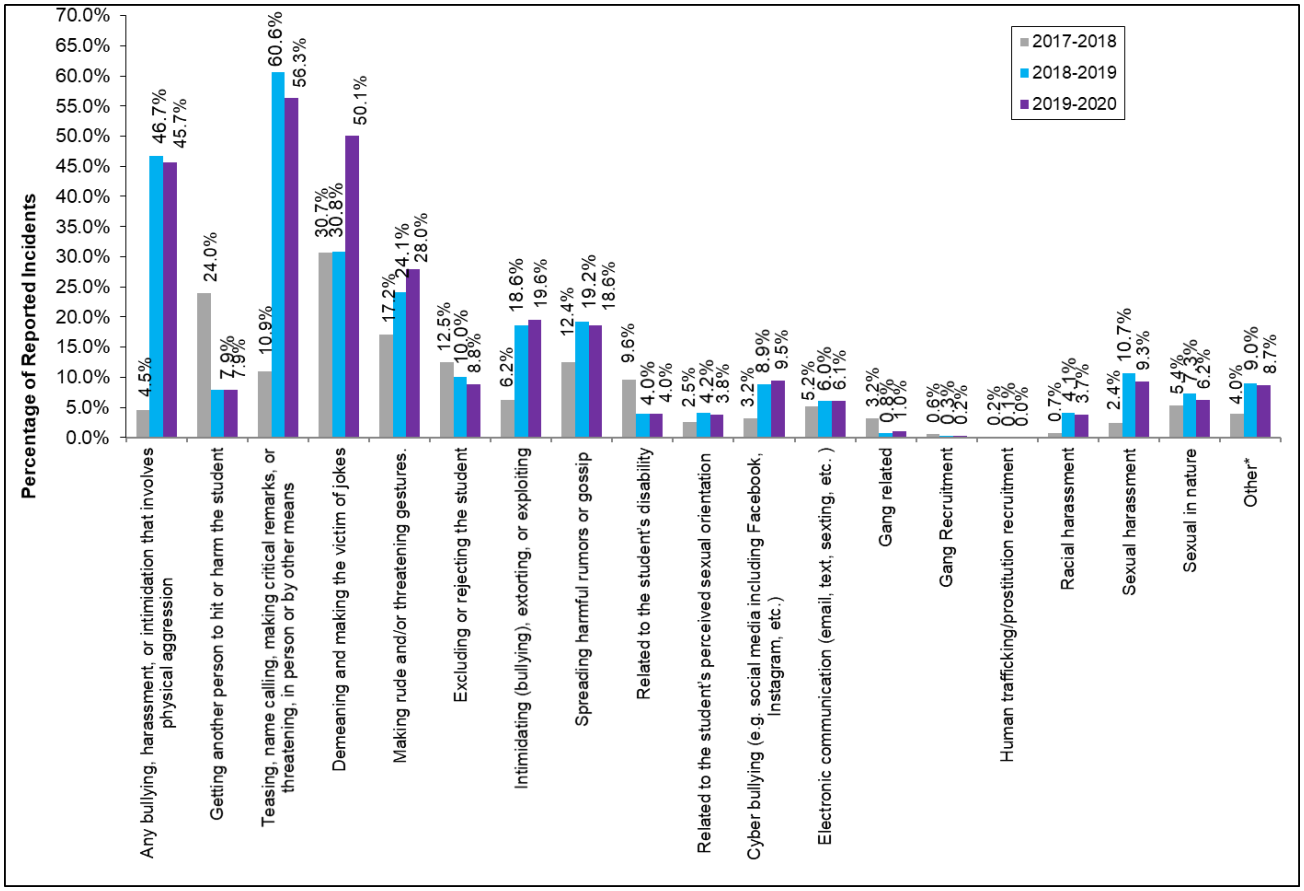
*

Note: Each incident report could identify more than one location; therefore, the percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

Descriptions of Reported Incidents

Individuals completing the reporting form were asked to choose from a list of descriptions. 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 2019-2020 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" (56.3 percent). 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" (30.8 to 50.1 percent), which indicates a 19.3 percent increase from the previous years. The involvement of some form of physical aggression was reported in 45.7 percent of incidents in 2019-2020.

Figure 3: Statewide Descriptions of Reported Incidents

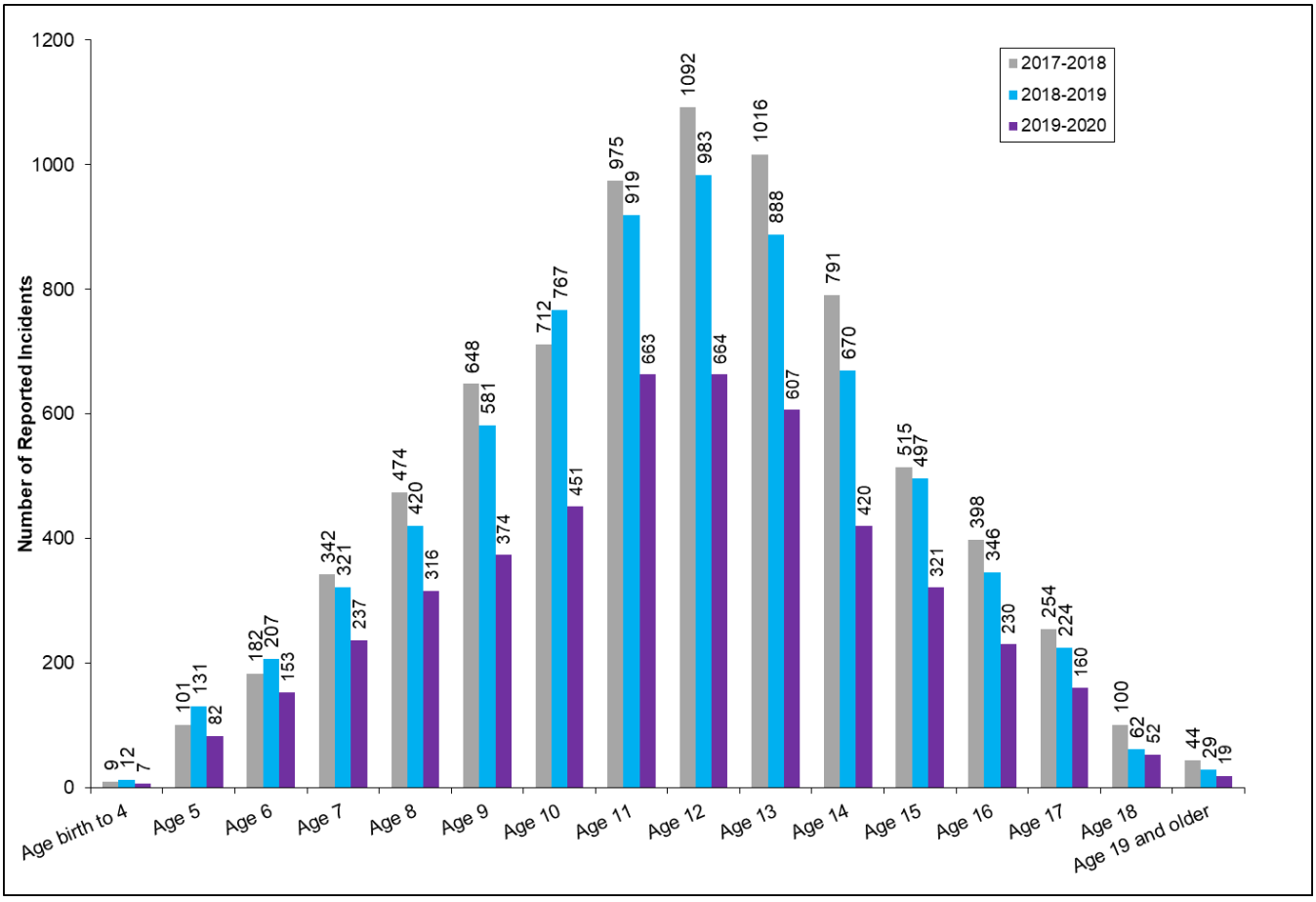


Note: Each incident report could identify more than one description; therefore, the percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

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 2019-2020 school year, the majority of victims were between 10 and 13 years of age, representing the middle school years. Overall, across all three years of data, there is a steady year-to-year increase in the number of incidents from birth to age four, peaking at 12 years of age. Thereafter, the number of incidents progressively decreases year-to-year.

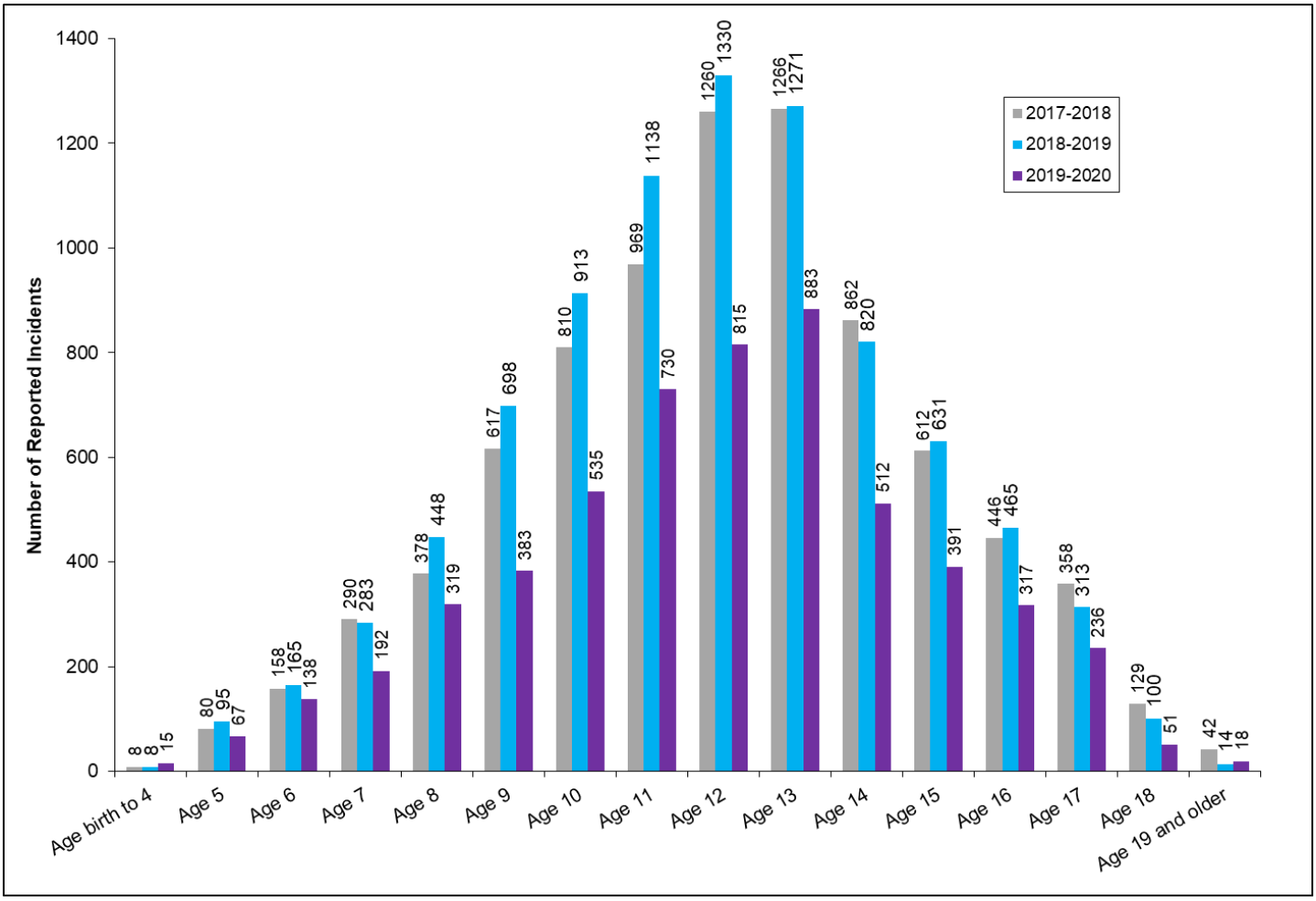
Figure 4: Statewide Ages of Victims



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 13 years of age. Overall, across all three years of data presented in Figure 5, there is a steady year-to-year increase in the number of incidents from birth to age four onwards, peaking at 12 or 13 years of age. Thereafter, the number of incidents by age group progressively decreases year-to-year.

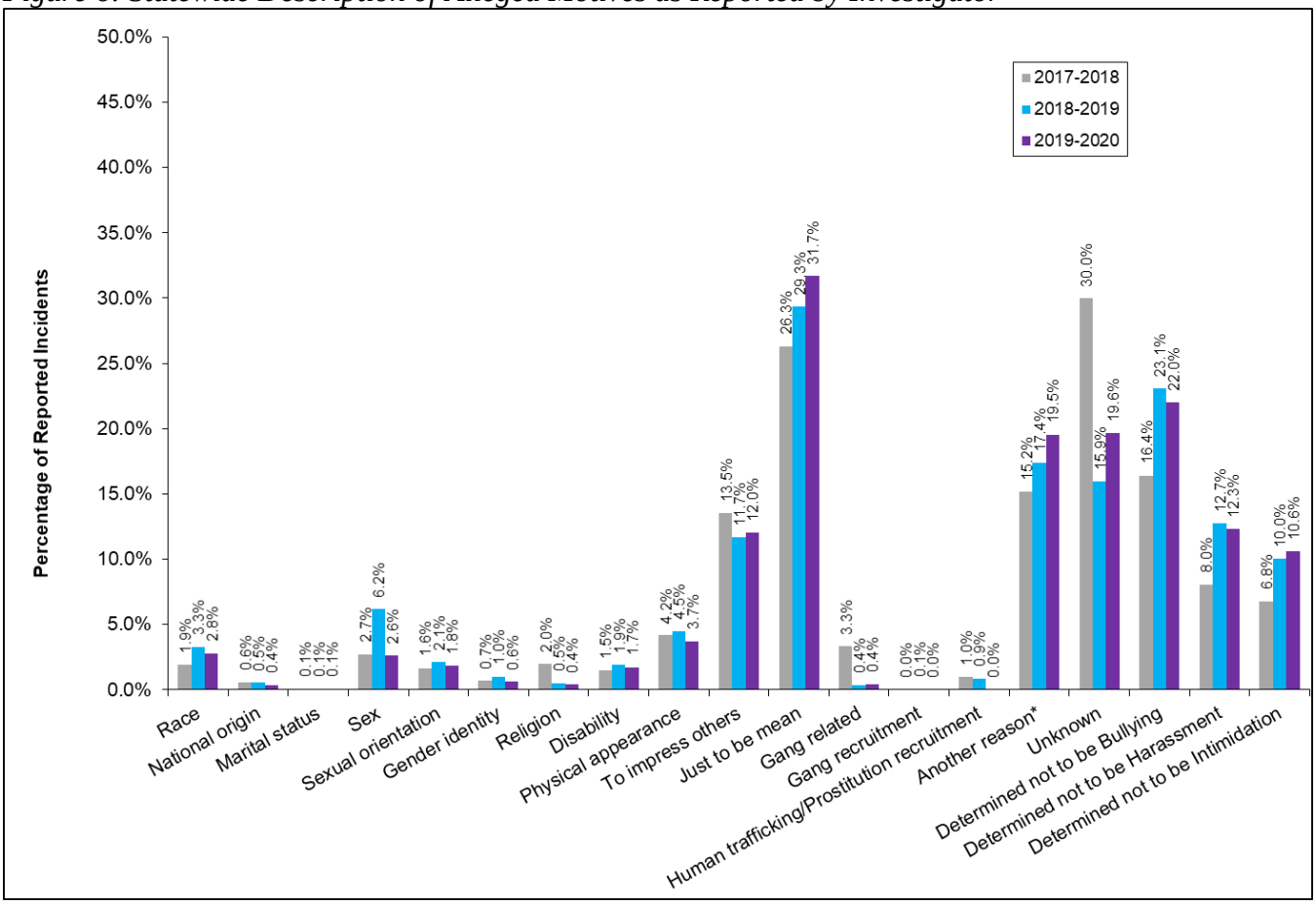
Figure 5: Statewide Ages of Alleged Offenders



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 2019-2020 school year was "just to be mean" (31.7 percent of incidents), followed by "to impress others" (12.0 percent of incidents).

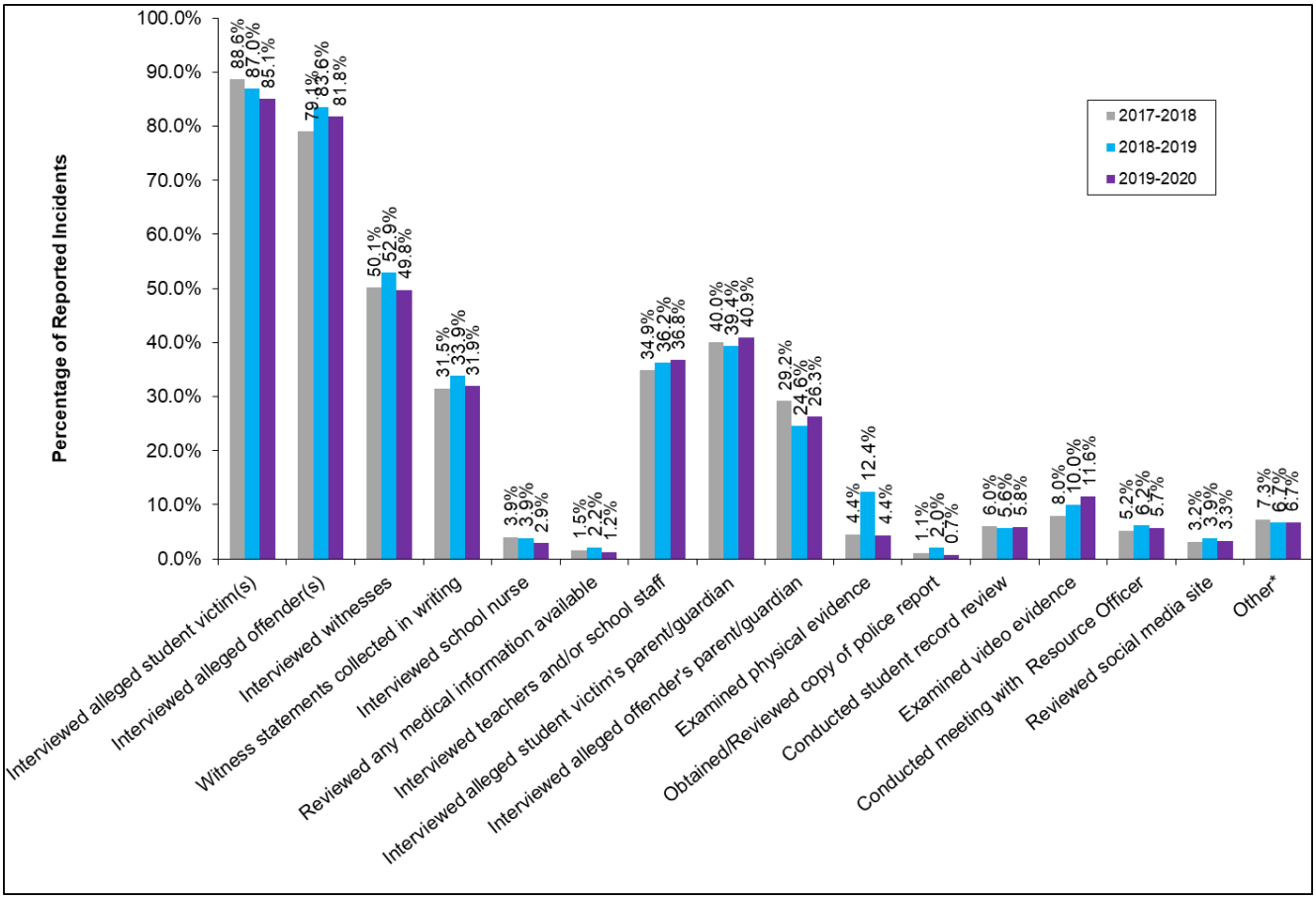
Figure 6: Statewide Description of Alleged Motives as Reported by Investigator



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 2019-2020 school year included interviews of student victims (85.1 percent of incidents), interviews of alleged offenders (81.8 percent of incidents), interviews of witnesses (49.8 percent of incidents), interviews of alleged student victim's parent/guardian (40.9 percent of incidents), interviews of teachers or school staff (36.8 percent of incidents), and collecting witness statements in writing (31.9 percent of incidents).

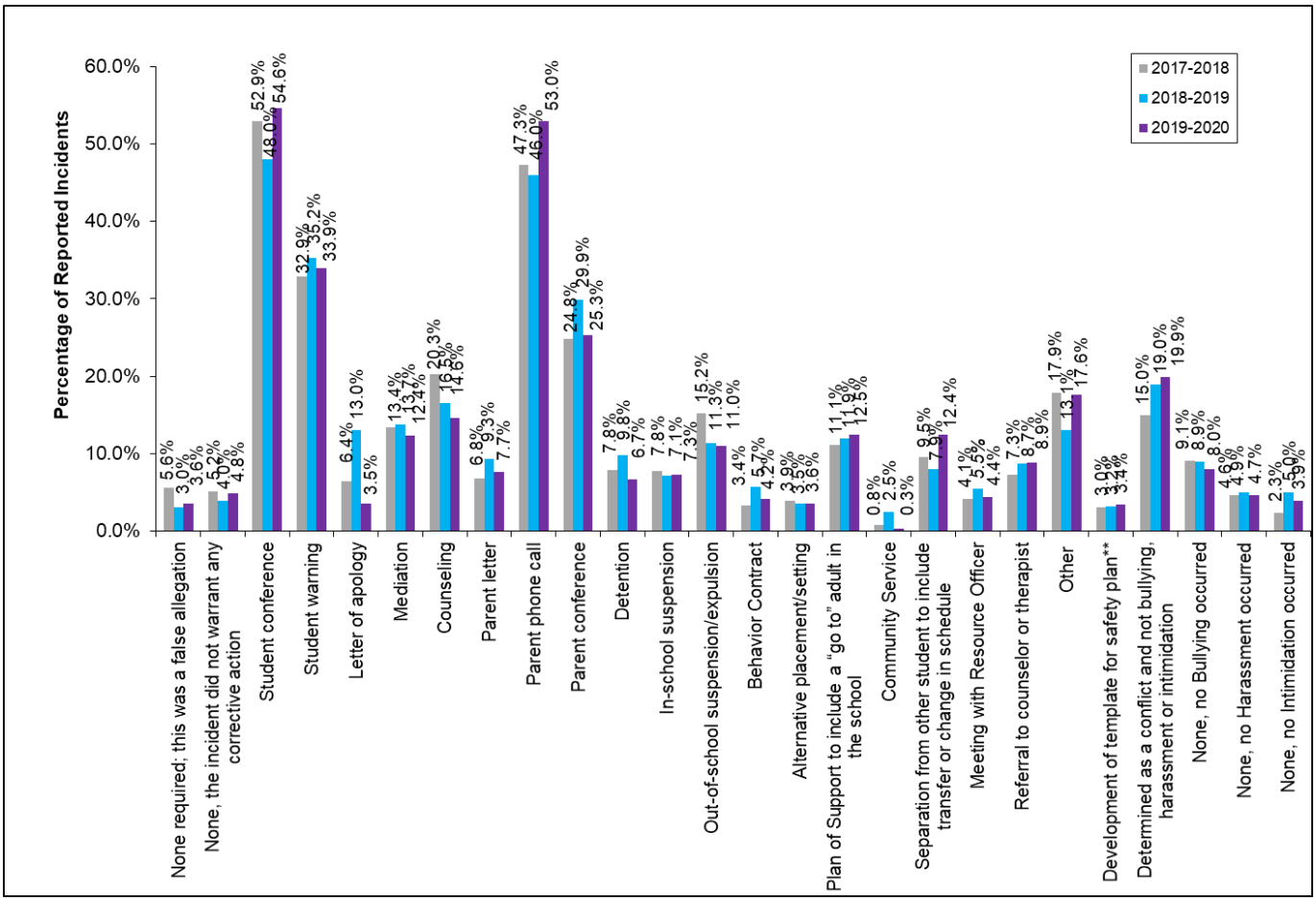
Figure 7: Statewide Methods Used to Investigate Incident as Reported by Investigator



Corrective Actions Taken

Schools took corrective action for reported incidents that were not categorized as false allegations. As detailed in Figure 8, in the 2019-2020 school year the most frequently used corrective action was student conference (54.6 percent of incidents), followed by parent phone call (53 percent of incidents), student warning (33.9 percent of incidents), and parent conference (25.3 percent of incidents).

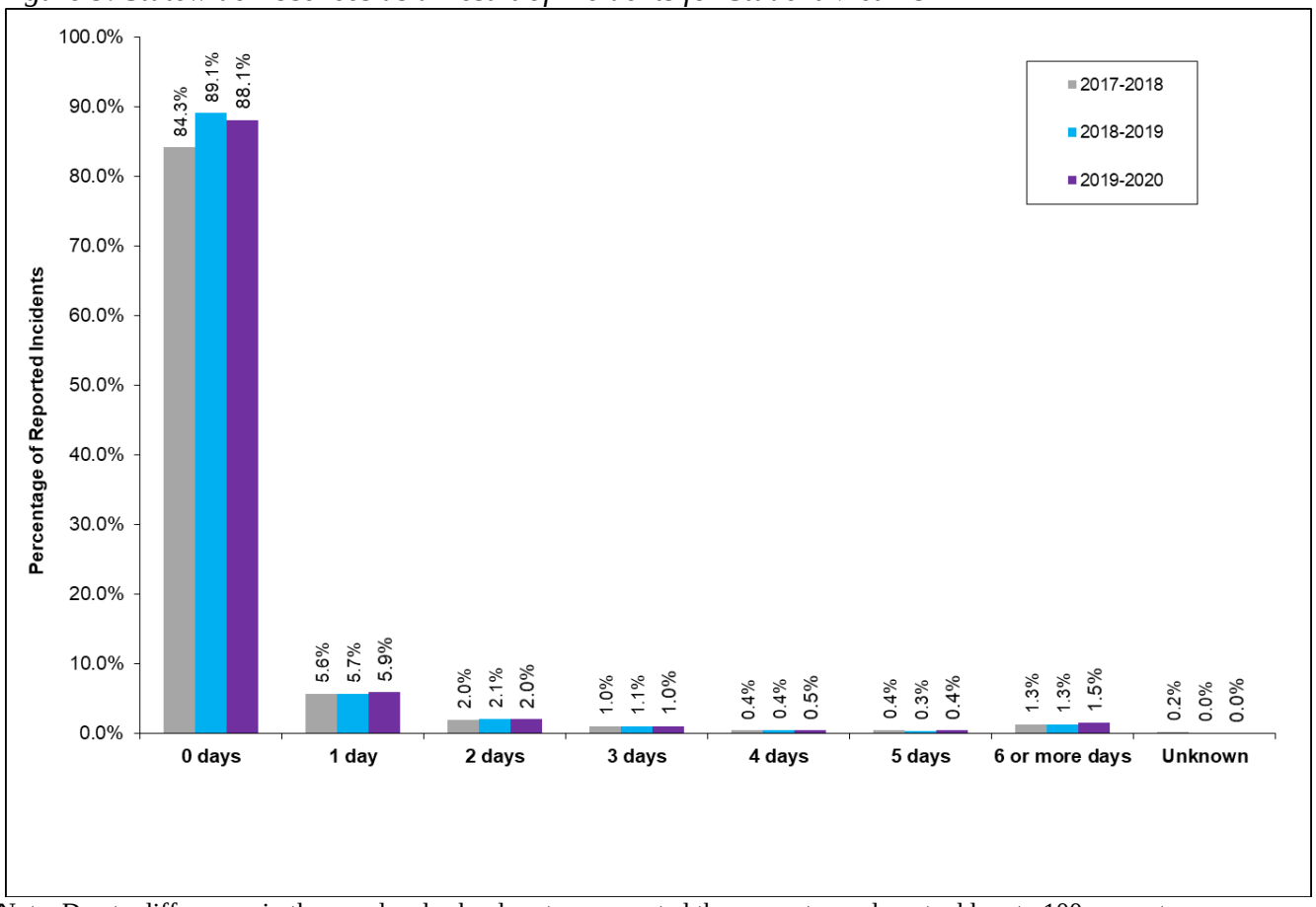
Figure 8: Statewide Corrective Actions Taken as Reported by Investigator



Number of Days Missed from School by Student Victims

As a group, student victims did not miss many school days as a result of bullying incidents. In the 2019-2020 school year, student victims missed school in 11.9 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 1.5 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

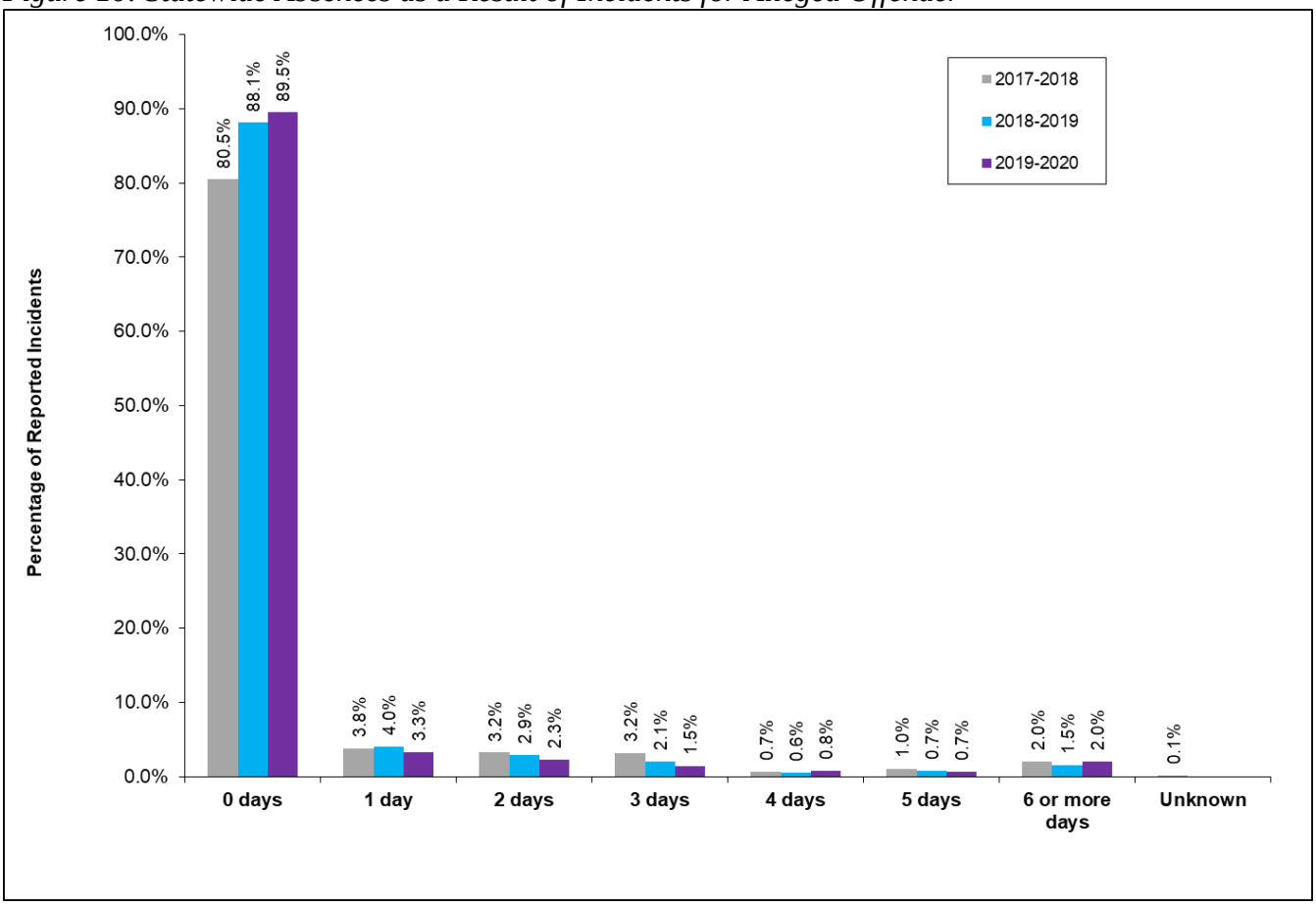


Note: Due to differences in the way local school systems reported the percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

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 2019-2020 school year. It was reported that 3.3 percent of alleged offenders missed one day of school, 2.3 percent of alleged offenders missed two days of school, 3.0 percent of alleged offenders missed three to five days of school, and 2.0 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



Note: Due to differences in the way local school systems reported data on this, the percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

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, "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 155 false allegations were reported by the 24 LSSs and the SEED School of Maryland in the 2019-2020 school year. This number represented 3.2 percent of the total number of incidents (4,810) 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 2017-2018	**Percent 2017-2018**	**Count 2018-2019**	**Percent 2018-2019**	**Count 2019-2020**	**Percent 2019-2020**
Allegany	4	4.5%	4	12.9%	1	6.3%
Anne Arundel	40	4.0%	34	3.5%	34	4.7%
Baltimore City	14	2.6%	8	1.7%	11	3.9%
Baltimore County	14	1.3%	15	1.3%	11	1.5%
Calvert	6	4.9%	3	2.3%	1	2.1%
Caroline	0	0.0%	1	2.5%	0	0.0%
Carroll	4	2.3%	4	2.4%	1	0.9%
Cecil	7	5.6%	3	2.0%	4	2.9%
Charles	13	5.1%	6	3.0%	7	2.4%
Dorchester	1	0.8%	1	1.1%	1	2.1%
Frederick	1	0.4%	6	2.0%	2	1.1%
Garrett	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	7.7%
Harford	32	9.2%	10	3.4%	14	8.2%
Howard	190	31.9%	15	2.7%	14	8.2%
Kent	15	50.0%	4	10.8%	0	0.0%
Montgomery	49	3.7%	53	3.4%	47	4.9%
Prince George's	12	1.6%	12	3.0%	0	0.0%
Queen Anne's	3	3.1%	4	4.9%	0	0.0%
St. Mary's	1	1.2%	2	4.2%	0	0.0%
Somerset	1	3.7%	1	8.3%	0	0.0%
Talbot	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Washington	9	3.5%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%
Wicomico	22	8.7%	4	2.2%	6	3.2%
Worcester	0	0.0%	2	11.8%	0	0.0%
SEED School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

SUMMARY AND CONSIDERATIONS

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 2019-2020 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. All school systems, along with the SEED School of Maryland, reported bullying incidents. 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. Bullying acts were most likely to occur on school property and the investigation of 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 in the prevention of bullying, harassment, and intimidation in Maryland schools.

- The *Maryland's Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation* is what guides LSSs in bullying prevention efforts as well as reporting and investigation methods. The Maryland Model Policy is required by the General Assembly to be updated every five years. The MSDE will use information gathered within this report to inform updates to the policy this summer 2021.

- The MSDE will engage in a process by which to gather additional information beyond data collection related to bullying prevention practices occurring in each LSS over the course of this next year. Information obtained will allow the MSDE to 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 bully 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 important 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. Particular resources and attention will be made to address the persistent rates of occurrences at the middle school.

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