

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 943

PS 029 526

AUTHOR Kelly, Paul D.  
TITLE The Safety of School Children in Arkansas. Special Report.  
INSTITUTION Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, Little Rock.  
SPONS AGENCY Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.  
PUB DATE 2001-05-00  
NOTE 7p.  
PUB TYPE Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Adolescents; Age Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; Public Opinion; Risk; \*School Safety; State Surveys; \*Student Attitudes; \*Student Behavior; Trend Analysis; \*Violence; Weapons  
IDENTIFIERS Arkansas; \*Fighting; School Shootings

## ABSTRACT

Noting that parents are very concerned about the safety of their children and the impact school violence has on their children's academic success, this report is intended to help parents and others understand how school safety is monitored in Arkansas. The report presents information on what students say about their access to weapons and involvement in aggressive behavior. The report summarizes and highlights information gathered from the Arkansas Youth Risk Behavior Survey and the "Communities That Care" survey, examines trends in data, and identifies state and federal resources with additional information about school safety. The key findings indicate that students who carried a weapon onto school property decreased from 12 percent in 1997 to 10 percent in 1999. Students who carried a weapon in locations other than school declined from 28 percent in 1997 to 23 percent in 1999. The percent of Arkansas students (28 percent) who carried a weapon was higher than the national rate (18.3 percent). Expulsions for carrying a firearm on school property increased by 16 percent between 1997-1998 and 1998-1999. Fighting on school property was more common among younger than older students. Arkansas' rate (15 percent) of fighting on school property was comparable to the national rate (14.8 percent). The report concludes by noting that although the rate of violent crime and school-associated violent deaths and the number of fights and gun possession in schools nationwide have decreased, school violence continues to alarm parents. (KB)

# SPECIAL REPORT

# THE SAFETY OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN ARKANSAS

Arkansas Advocates  
for Children & Families

May 2001

*Funding provided by the  
Annie E. Casey Foundation  
under its national Kids Count  
project.*



## Key Findings:

- Students who carried a weapon onto school property decreased from 12% in 1997 to 10% in 1999.
- Expulsions for carrying a firearm on school property increased by 16% between 1997-98 and 1998-99.
- Arkansas' rate (15%) of fighting on school property is comparable to the national rate (14.8%).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND  
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS  
BEEN GRANTED BY

A. Rossi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

The school shooting in Jonesboro in March 1998 put Arkansas at the epicenter of the school safety debate. As high profile school shootings continue to haunt the country, parents wonder about the safety of their children and the impact school violence has on their children's academic success.

This report is intended to help parents and others understand how school safety is monitored in Arkansas. It will present what Arkansas students are saying about their access to weapons and involvement in aggressive behavior. It will summarize and highlight information gathered from surveys and reports on schools in Arkansas; it will look for trends in data; and it will identify state and federal resources with more information about school safety.

The Arkansas Department of Education collects data on

school safety from the Arkansas Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a survey of students conducted every other year. Sixty-three schools and 2,296 students were selected to participate in the YRBS; 76 percent of those schools agreed to participate. Therefore, 1,991 9<sup>th</sup>- to 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students from 48 schools participated in the 1997 survey. In this report, Arkansas' YRBS survey results will also be compared to national results from 1997.

Data is also available from the 1998 "Communities That Care" survey conducted by the Arkansas Department of Health Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. More than 12,000 6<sup>th</sup>-, 8<sup>th</sup>-, 10<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders from randomly-selected schools participated in this survey. The findings from the 1999 "Communities That Care" survey are still preliminary, and because of changes in format and reporting, do not allow for yearly comparisons or trend analysis.

## ARKANSAS YRBS RESULTS ON WEAPONS

### Students Who Carried a Weapon\* on 1 or More of the Past 30 Days

	TOTAL	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
1995	26%				
1997	28%	30%	27%	28%	24%
1999	23%	25%	24%	25%	18%

\* Such as gun, knife or club

### Students Who Carried a Weapon on School Property 1 or More of the Past 30 Days

	TOTAL	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
1995	11%				
1997	12%	11%	11%	13%	13%
1999	10%	9%	12%	12%	8%

### Students Who Carried a Gun on 1 or More of the Past 30 Days

	TOTAL	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
1995	11%				
1997	11%	12%	11%	10%	10%
1999	9%	10%	9%	9%	7%

### Students Who Were Threatened or Injured by a Weapon on School Property 1 or More Times During the Last 12 Months

	TOTAL	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
1995	9%				
1997	8%	11%	8%	8%	6%
1999	10%	11%	10%	9%	8%

Fighting, carrying a weapon and gang involvement are all problem behaviors associated with threats to personal and school safety, future injury and death. Student surveys often ask about specific violent and delinquent behavior. In Arkansas' surveys, students were specifically asked how many times in the past year, if any, they had

- taken a handgun to school,
- attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them, or
- carried a handgun somewhere other than to school.

Any of these activities indicate participation in violent behavior. Students who possess weapons, are involved in acts of violence, or have underlying aggressive tendencies are the major focus in these surveys as indicators of a student's potential for school violence.

## WEAPONS

Perhaps the most frightening aspect of school safety is students' access to deadly weapons (gun, knife, club) both on and off the school grounds.

The trend in student weapon possession seems to be decreasing slightly in Arkansas, as reflected in the YRBS. However, **the percent of students who carried a weapon in Arkansas was 28 percent, compared to the national average of 18.3 percent.** Nationwide, 5.9 percent of students carried a gun, compared to 11 percent in Arkansas. Nationwide, the prevalence of weapon carrying on school

### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S REPORT ON FIREARMS IN SCHOOLS

	HANDGUNS		RIFLES/SHOTGUNS		OTHER FIREARMS		TOTAL	
	'97	'98	'97	'98	'97	'98	'97	'98
Elementary	1	3	0	0	3	2	4	5
Junior High	20	25	1	2	1	3	22	30
Senior High	23	25	5	5	3	1	31	31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>66</b>

## "COMMUNITIES THAT CARE" RESULTS ON WEAPONS

**QUESTION: Think of your 4 best friends. In the past year, how many have carried a handgun?**

	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
None	90.3%	87.4%	85.3%	81.9%
1-4	6.7%	10.6%	13.6%	17%
# Surveyed	2,087	1,773	1,785	1,545

**QUESTION: How many times in the past year have you carried a handgun?**

	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
None	88.7%	90.1%	90.4%	88.1%
1 or more	8.4%	8.8%	9%	10.1%
# Surveyed	2,093	1,787	1,793	1,535

**QUESTION: How many times in the past year have you taken a handgun to school?**

	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
None	96%	96.3%	96.6%	93.2%
1 or more	1%	1.3%	1.8%	3.1%
# Surveyed	2,101	1,786	1,791	1,535

property was 8.5 percent, compared to 12 percent in Arkansas. However, in Arkansas, 8 percent of students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, much like the nationwide reported figure of 7.4 percent.

Another indicator of weapon possession at school is revealed in the number of students expelled for bringing firearms to school in Arkansas. As a part of the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools effort, the Arkansas Department of Education Office of Comprehensive Health Education is required to file annual reports on firearms in the school. According to this report, the number of total expulsions for carrying a firearm increased by 16 percent between the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years. State law requires that students who bring firearms to school be expelled for one year. However, on a case-by-case basis, the chief administrative officer of the school district may modify the length of expulsion. In the

1997-98 school year, 16 of the 57 cases (28%) were shortened expulsions. School administrators are becoming stricter with expulsions involving firearms: in 1998-99, only 11 of the 66 cases (17%) were shortened.

## FIGHTING

While the potential for school violence resulting in death or serious injury is clearly influenced by access to deadly weapons, the amount of fighting that occurs in school or in a student's life is a barometer of the potential for serious violence. Numerous survey questions addressed the involvement of students in fights and their beliefs about the use of violence to resolve interpersonal problems.

YRBS survey results indicated that fighting is decreasing slightly, and as students mature into secondary schools, they are less likely to fight. Arkansas' overall rate of physical fighting on school property (15%) is comparable

## ARKANSAS YRBS RESULTS ON FIGHTING

### Students Who Were in a Physical Fight 1 or More Times in the Past 12 Months

	TOTAL	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
1995	38%				
1997	36%	43%	36%	35%	30%
1999	33%	41%	35%	29%	24%

### Students Who Were in a Physical Fight on School Property 1 or More Times in the Past 12 Months

	TOTAL	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
1995	17%				
1997	15%	22%	15%	13%	8%
1999	16%	21%	16%	14%	9%

## "COMMUNITIES THAT CARE" RESULTS ON FIGHTING

**QUESTION: How Many Times in the Past Year Have You Attacked Someone with the Idea of Seriously Hurting Them?**

	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
None	82.9%	81%	79.1%	78.2%
1-2	8.5%	11.5%	12.9%	10.6%
3 or more	6%	6.3%	7.1%	9%
# Surveyed	2,097	1,786	1,788	1,532

## REALITY vs. PUBLIC PERCEPTION: Data and Poll Results in Context

THE REALITY	THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION
<b>40%</b> The decrease in school-associated violent deaths between 1997-98 and 1998-99.	<b>49%</b> The increase in poll respondents who fear a school shooting in their community (1998-99).
<b>1 in 2 Million</b> The chance that a school-aged child will die in a school in 1998-99.	<b>71%</b> The portion of poll respondents who thought a school shooting was "likely" to happen in their community.
<b>56%</b> The decline in juvenile homicide arrests between 1993 and 1998.	<b>62%</b> The portion of poll respondents who believe that juvenile crime is on the increase.
<b>4%</b> The portion of juvenile homicides that occur in rural areas.	<b>1st</b> The rank rural parents give "fear for their children's safety" in polls.

Source: "School House Hype: Two Years Later," Juvenile Policy Institute.

to the nationwide rate of 14.8 percent. Nevertheless, survey results in Arkansas seem to contradict the notion that older students are less likely to fight, with the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students being just as likely to attack someone.

**T**aken together, the survey information and data give mixed signals about school violence. The decreases in violent incidences in Arkansas range from only 1 percent to 5 percent and are a reflection of what is going on at a national level. Indicators from student surveys suggest that Arkansas schools are only slightly safer places than they were in 1995. The 15 percent increase in the number of students expelled for bringing firearms to schools is either an indication of increased firearm possession or improved monitoring and reporting within Arkansas schools.

The whole issue of school violence must also be put into a larger perspective. The rate of juvenile violent crime and school-associated violent deaths and the number of fights and gun possession in schools nationwide have decreased. However, a disconnect exists between what is perceived to be going on in schools and the emerging trends toward reductions in school violence

Although rare, school violence continues to alarm parents. The Arkansas student survey data alone should make parents worry and has made school violence a cause of major concern for the state's policymakers. During recent years, Arkansas has received more than \$15 million in additional federal funds for "Safe School" initiatives in the Jonesboro and Little Rock areas. The activities of the Little

Rock Safe School Initiative include:

- four centers serving suspended students (120 daily);
- community mentors;
- neighborhood associations to monitor student travel, conflict resolution and conflict management training;
- treatment for students with substance-abuse problems;
- school-based care for students with mental health problems;
- middle school teachers trained to identify students with mental health needs;
- prenatal care for pregnant adolescents;
- parenting education for teen parents; and
- a home-visitor model program for teen parents.

The Jonesboro Safe School Initiative also includes a wide variety of efforts to reduce school violence. Some of these efforts involve:

- modifying and re-designing physical plant structures to control access;
- enhancing security measures at schools and bus stops, and on busses;
- drug- and alcohol-prevention intramural programs;
- violence prevention training;
- alternative school;

- mental health services;
- education and day care for at-risk children of teen parents;
- summer in-home services;
- teacher training; and
- development of policies and procedures.

Both of these school-based programs utilize outside evaluations to measure the effectiveness of their efforts.

In addition to these two local initiatives, more than \$3 million in Safe and Drug Free Schools federal funds is provided to local school districts to reduce drug use and school violence. These funds are primarily spent on teaching curriculum and materials used by all local school districts. All of these resources are an indication of the concern for school violence and the extent of work being done to prevent another school shooting like what occurred in Jonesboro.

**T**he schools are often the repository of the unresolved problems confronted by youth everyday in their community. Parents can help encourage partnerships between community service organizations and local schools to better address some of these problems. Parents

are also encouraged to contact their local school or the Arkansas Health or Education departments to ensure that their school participates in these student surveys as a way to document and monitor student behaviors and attitudes related to school violence. With two major safe school initiatives now underway in Arkansas, it will be important for other Arkansas schools to learn from the evaluation of these programs and to duplicate effective methods for reducing school violence. The tragedy of Jonesboro in 1998 must serve as an enduring "wake-up call" to all parents and concerned citizens to identify and address problems before they erupt again and shatter our notion that schools are safe places where our children will learn and grow.

*By Paul D. Kelly, LCSW  
Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families  
501/ 371-9678*

## RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program  
400 Maryland Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202-6123  
Phone: (202) 260-3954.  
E-mail: safeschc@ed.gov  
Web site: [www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS)

The Center for Policy Alternatives is partnering with the Applied Research Center's Grass Roots Innovative Policy Program (GRIPP).  
Center for Policy Alternatives  
1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 710  
Washington, DC 20009  
Phone: (202) 387-6030  
Fax: (202) 986-2539.  
Web site: [www.cfpa.org](http://www.cfpa.org)

Justice Policy Institute [www.cjci.org/schoolhouse](http://www.cjci.org/schoolhouse)

Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1998  
<http://nces.ed.gov>

School Violence Resource Center [www.svrc.net](http://www.svrc.net)

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids  
Phone: (202) 776-0027  
E-mail: [info@fightcrime.org](mailto:info@fightcrime.org).

"School-Associated Violent Deaths in the United States, 1992 to 1994." Journal of the American Medical Association 275 (22) (1996) 1729-1733.

### Surveys Available From:

Arkansas Youth Risk Behavior Survey  
Arkansas Department of Education  
Office of Comprehensive School Health  
2020 West 3rd, Suite 320  
Little Rock, AR. 72205  
(501) 324-9743

"Communities That Care"  
Arkansas Department of Health  
Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention  
Freeway Medical Center  
5800 West 10th, Suite 907  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72204  
(505) 280-4500



**U.S. Department of Education**  
*Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)*  
*National Library of Education (NLE)*  
*Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*



## **NOTICE**

### **Reproduction Basis**



This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

EFF-089 (3/2000)