

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Commissioner's Annual Report to the Education Committees of
the Senate and General Assembly on**

**Student Safety and Discipline in
New Jersey Public Schools**

For the period of July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018

New Jersey Department of Education
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Executive Summary

This report has been revised to best highlight information from the new Student Safety Data System for the 2017-18 school year. The New Jersey Department of Education (Department) migrated to a new reporting system, the Student Safety Data System (SSDS), which includes improved definitions, new reporting fields, and updated guidance for reporting incidents. As such, comparing this year's report to previous years' data can lead to inaccurate conclusions in many reporting categories. As such, the 2017-18 report should be considered a baseline year. Among reported incidents:

- School personnel reported incidents to the police on 7,449 occasions, 2,829 of which were mandatory referrals, and led to 1,385 student school-related arrests.
- Most HIB incidents occurred on school grounds, with 56 percent in middle schools. For 55 percent of confirmed HIB incidents, the nature of the bullying did not fit into one of the protected categories listed.
- Schools reported 18,556 HIB trainings in 2017-18 and 25,784 HIB programs in 2017-18.
- Asian and Black students were more likely than students of other races to be targets of HIB due to their race, while students with disabilities were more likely to be targeted for their disabilities and females were more likely to be targeted for their gender or gender identity and expression.
- Over 50,000 students were suspended from school during the school year on at least one occasion, a little under 4 percent of the total New Jersey student population.
- 1,176 students were removed from school and sent to another school or other education program, and 31 students were expelled from school and no longer received educational services.
- Males were more likely to be suspended than females, black students more likely than students of other races, and high school students more likely than students in other grade levels.

Introduction

This report presents information provided by New Jersey public schools on disciplinary infractions and their consequences for the 2017-18 school year to the Student Safety Data System (SSDS). The information is presented annually by the New Jersey Department of Education to the Governor and Legislature to fulfill the requirements of the *Public School Safety Law N.J.S.A. 18A:17-46 through 48*. Districts are encouraged to review their incidents in comparison to state-level results and consider whether proactive steps are needed to improve school climate and student safety.

The SSDS was available for the first time in the 2017-18 school year. The system replaced both the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS) and the Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying – Investigations, Trainings, and Programs (HIB-ITP) system. The Department anticipated that districts would improve data reporting with the new system, but expected fluctuations in reporting as schools and districts adjusted to the new system, which includes updates to definitions and reporting guidance from previous years' reports. Guidance and training documents regarding what is reported to the SSDS are available on the [SSDS homepage](#). Data from the 2017-18 report should be considered a baseline year.

The report has been revised to best highlight information from the new data system. The SSDS continues collection of incidents of violence, vandalism, weapons, substance use, and harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB), as well as HIB trainings and programs. In addition, the system now collects details on all allegations of HIB, along with all student suspensions and other removals from school, as well as reports to the police and arrests. The new features and data reporting changes in the SSDS were developed to capture details required for state and federal data collection, including School Performance requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act and *N.J.S.A. 18A:7E-3* and the federal Civil Rights Data Collection. Changes were also made to make reporting easier for schools and districts and to improve data quality.

Key Findings

SSDS Incidents

School districts in New Jersey reported 24,938 incidents of violence, vandalism, weapons, substance use, and harassment, intimidation and bullying in the 2017-18 school year. Violence and weapons offenses were found in both high schools and middle schools, substance offenses and other incidents leading to removal primarily occur in high schools, and HIB incidents were more likely to occur in middle school than in high school or elementary school.

Figure 1. Incidents by Category

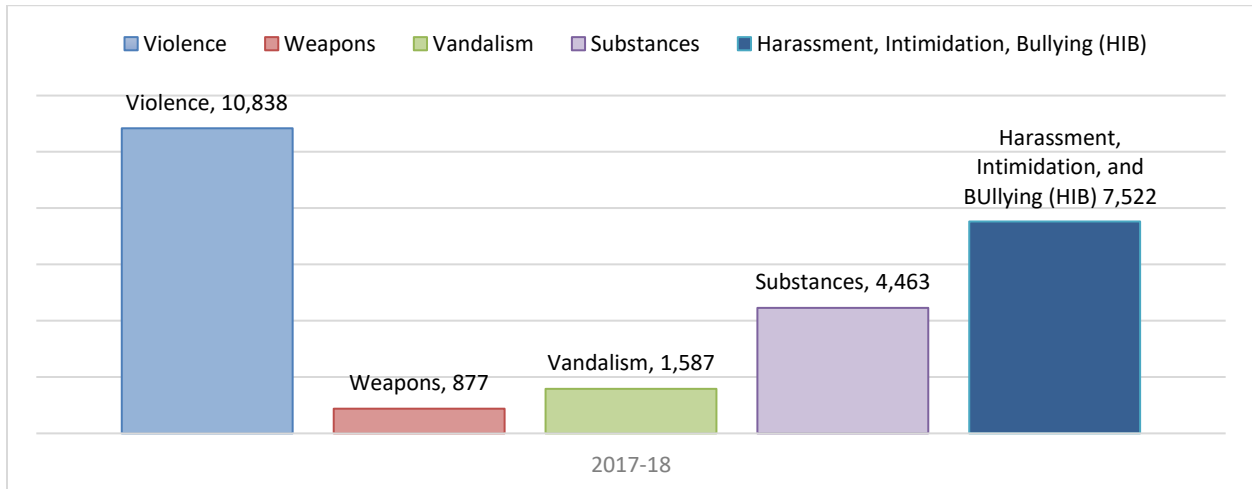


Figure 2. Incidents of Violence

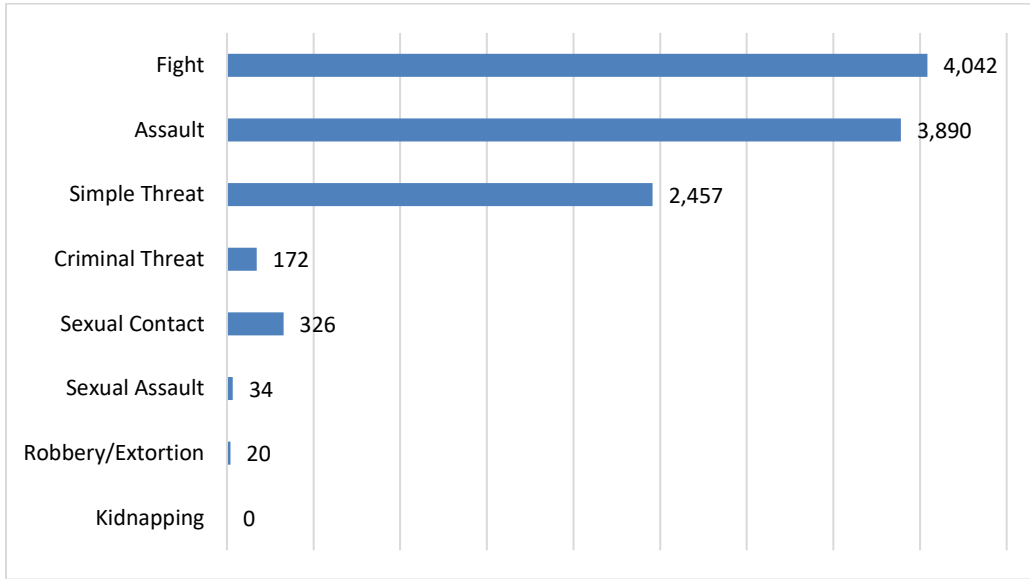


Figure 3. Incidents of Weapons

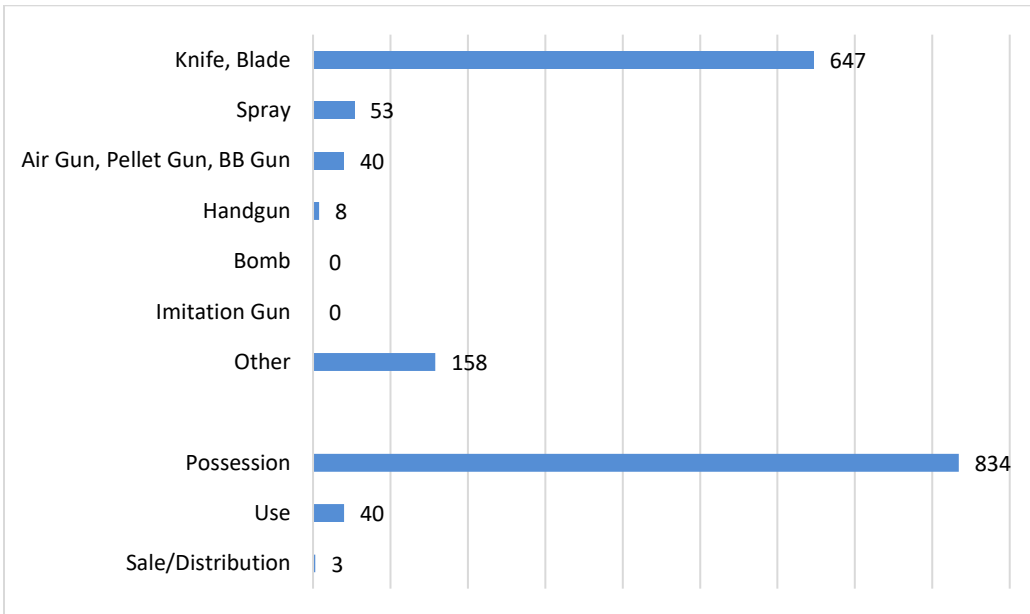


Figure 4. Incidents of Vandalism

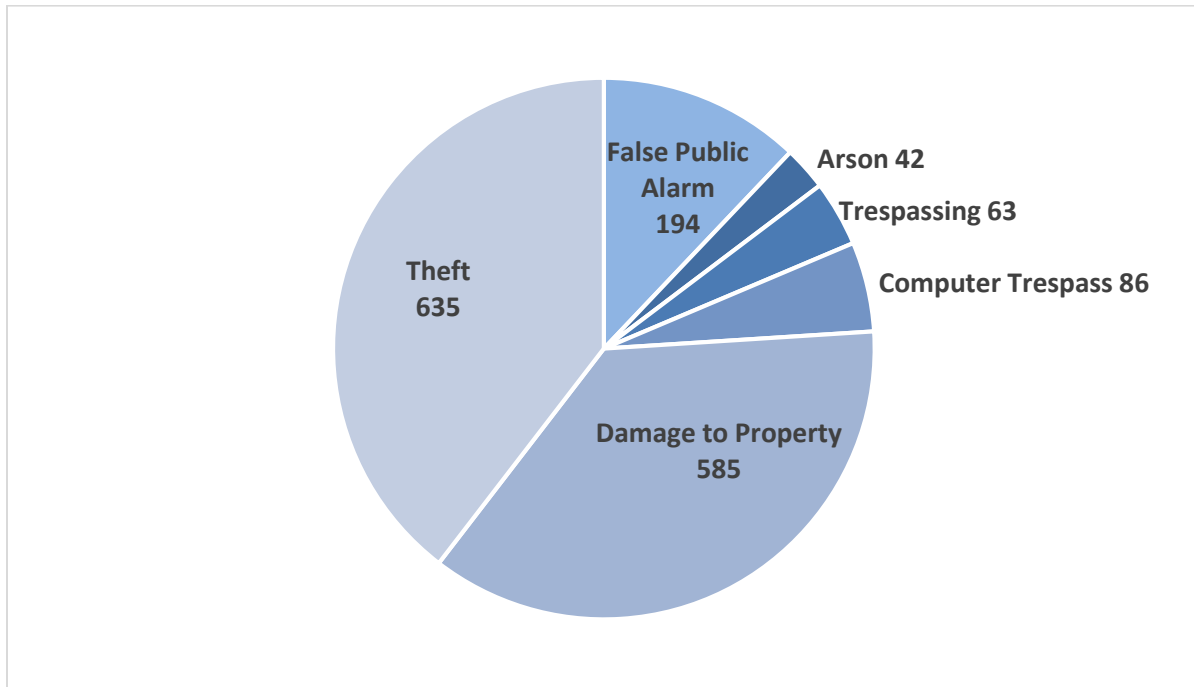


Figure 5. Incidents of Substances

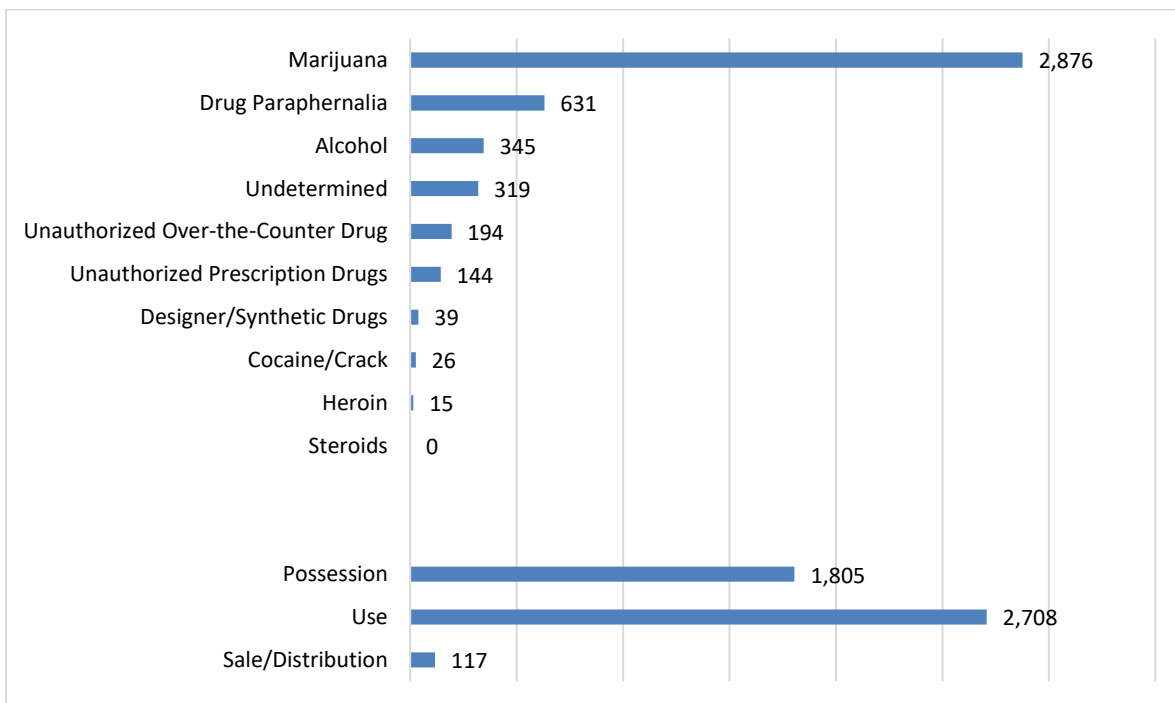
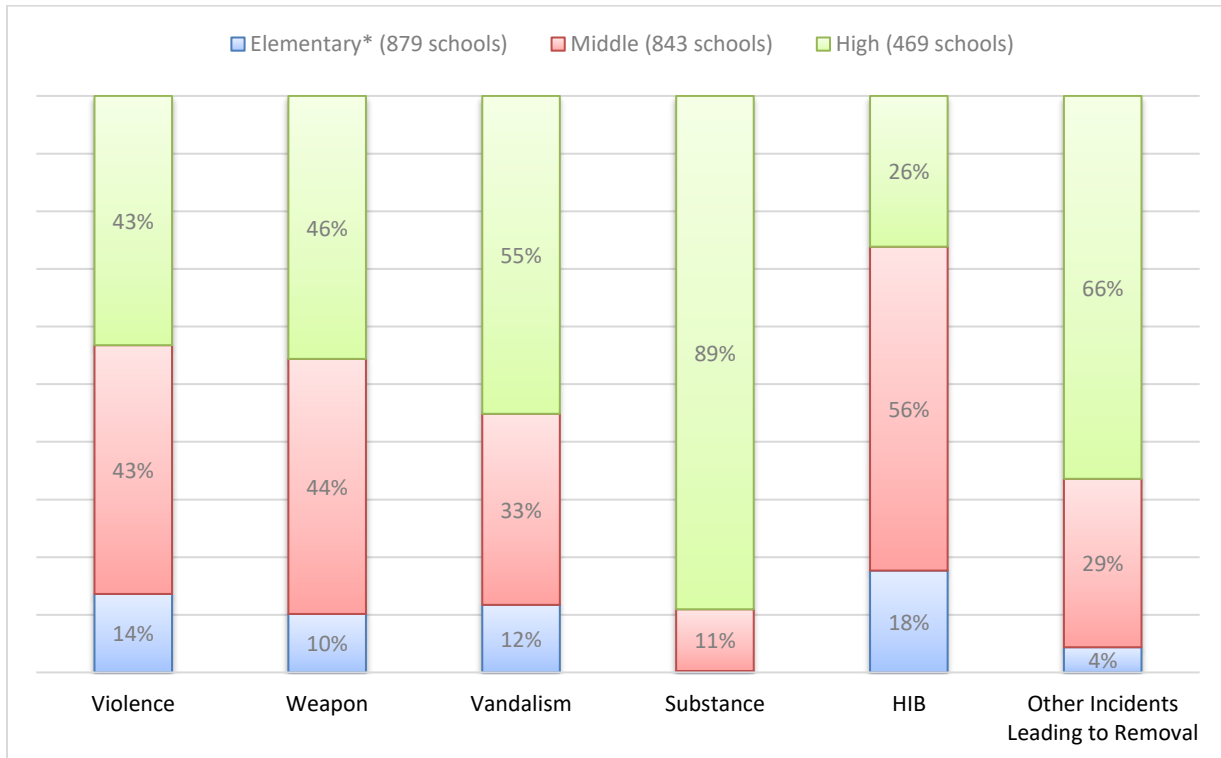


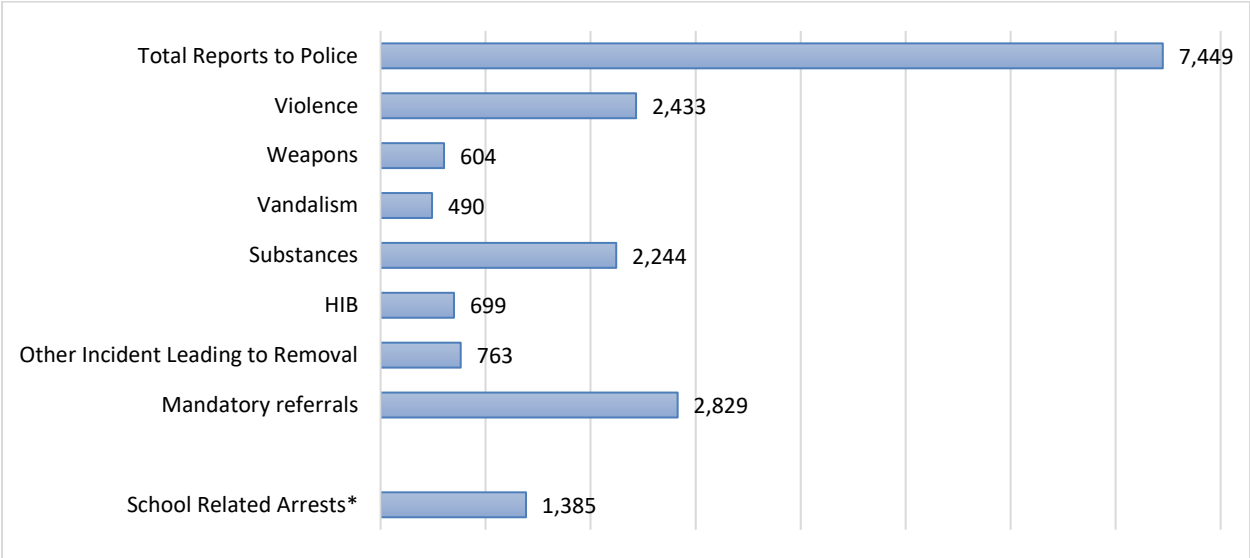
Figure 6. Incident Types by School Type



School Police Reports

During the 2017-18 school year, school personnel reported incidents to the police on 7,449 occasions. In 763 instances, reports involved student infractions that did not fit into a category of violence, weapons, vandalism, substance, or HIB. Of all reports to police, 2,829 were mandatory referrals, or school-related incidents required to be reported to law enforcement per New Jersey statute or regulation. This includes incidents involving firearms or knives, assaults with weapons, assaults on staff members, criminal threats, sexual assault, controlled dangerous substance possession, and bias-related incidents. In addition, 1,385 student arrests occurred at school. Male offenders were more likely to be arrested than females for incidents reported to SSDS, high school students more likely than students in other grade levels, and students with disabilities more likely than students without disabilities.

Figure 7. School-Related Reports to Police



*More than one offender may be arrested per incident, and one student may be arrested more than one time per school year.

HIB Investigations and Confirmed Incidents

There were 18,741 HIB investigations during the 2017-18 school year. Eighty-one percent of HIB incidents occurred on school grounds. Though suspensions are common, schools often report disciplinary actions for HIB offenders rather than removing the student from school. Student counseling for both offenders and victims is the most common remedial action.

Figure 8. HIB Investigations

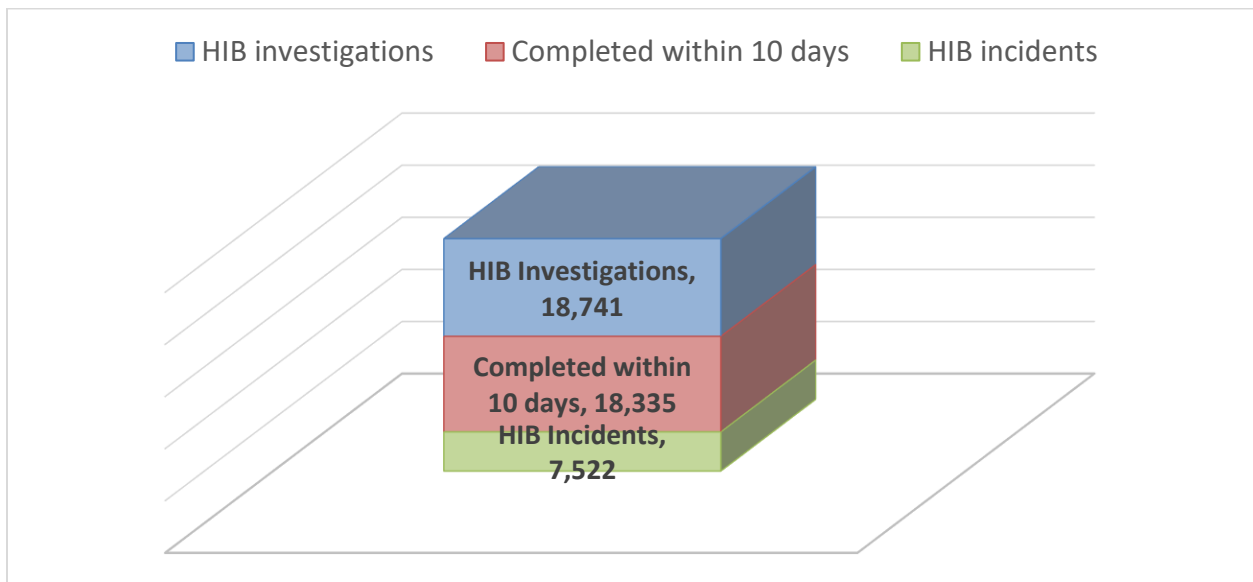


Figure 9. HIB Incident Location

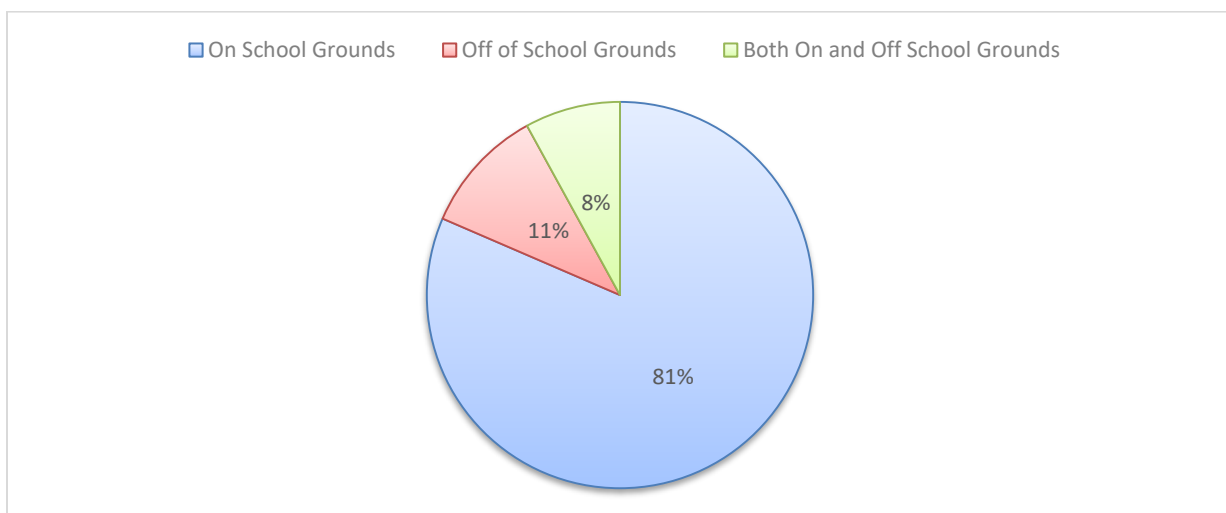


Figure 10. HIB Mode

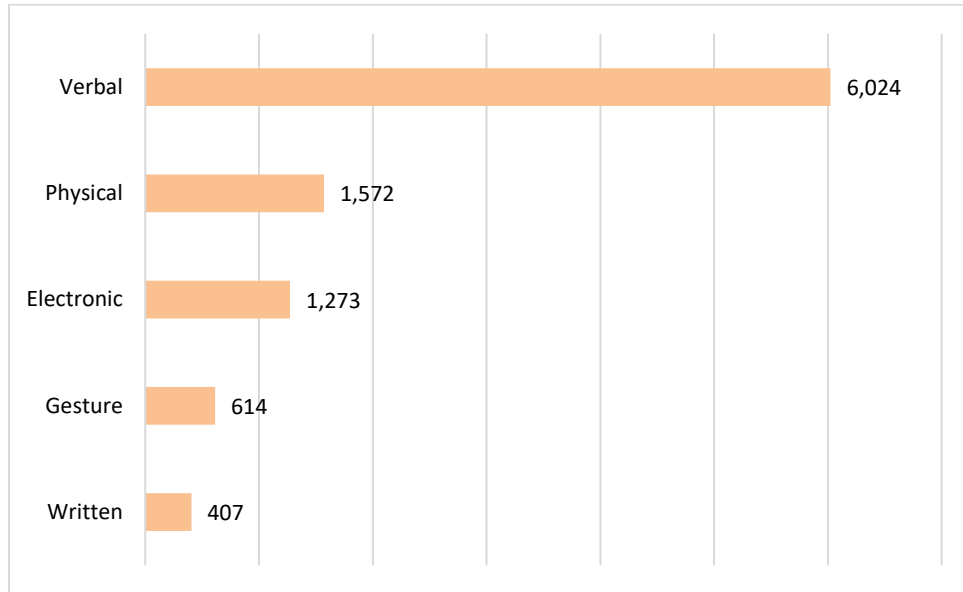


Figure 11. HIB Effect

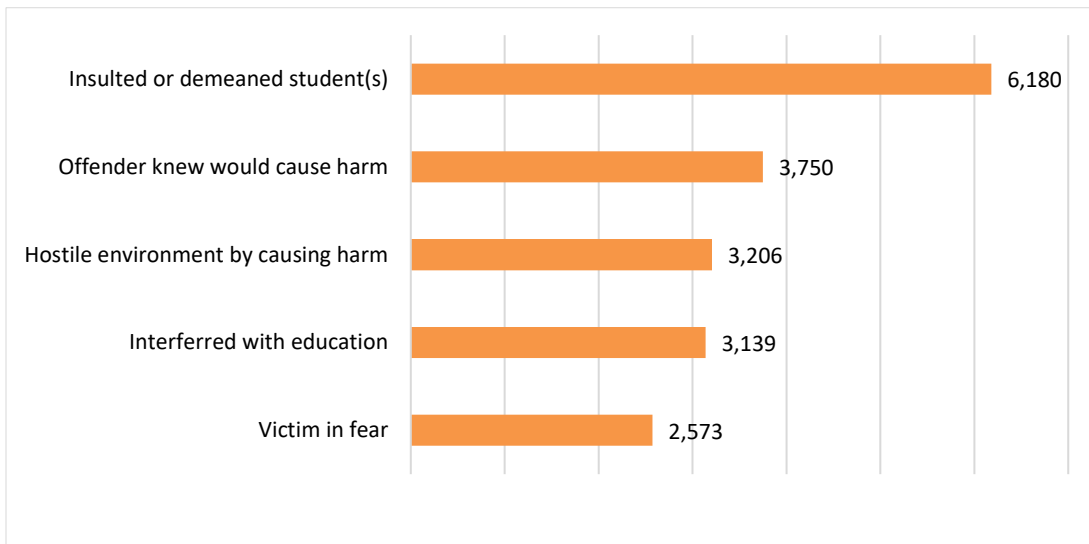


Figure 12. HIB Disciplinary Actions

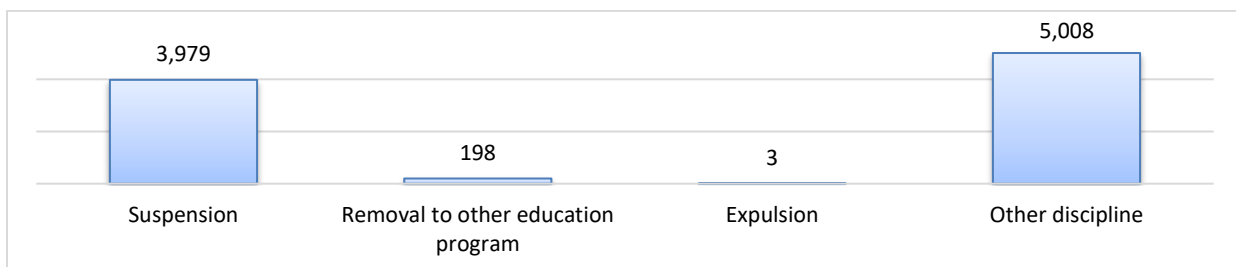
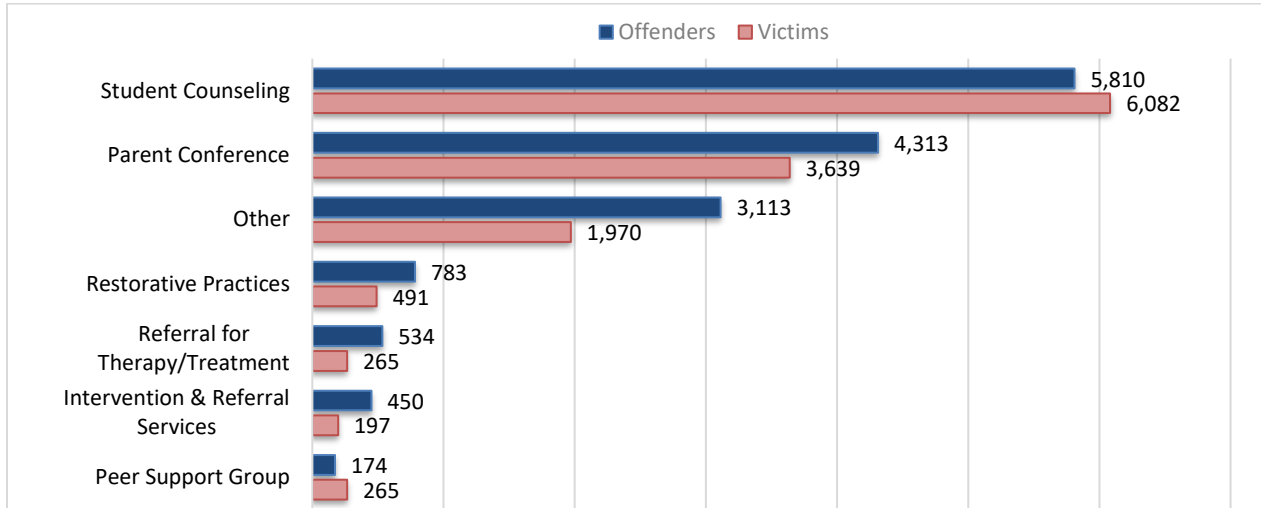


Figure 13. HIB Remedial Actions



Nature of HIB

Forty percent of HIB investigations led to affirmed HIB incidents. Cases involving certain protected categories were more likely to be affirmed, including gender (75%), ancestry (74%), sexual orientation (71%) or race (70%). Asian and Black students were more likely than students of other races to be targets of HIB due to their race. Students with disabilities were more likely to be targeted for their disabilities and females were more likely to be targeted for their gender or gender identity and expression.

Figure 14. HIB Investigations and HIB Confirmed by HIB Nature

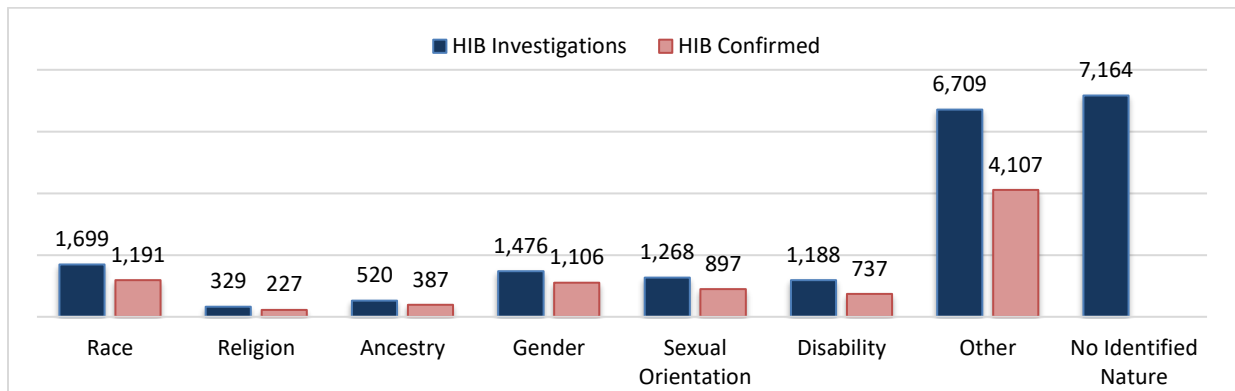


Figure 15. HIB Nature of Bullying Incident

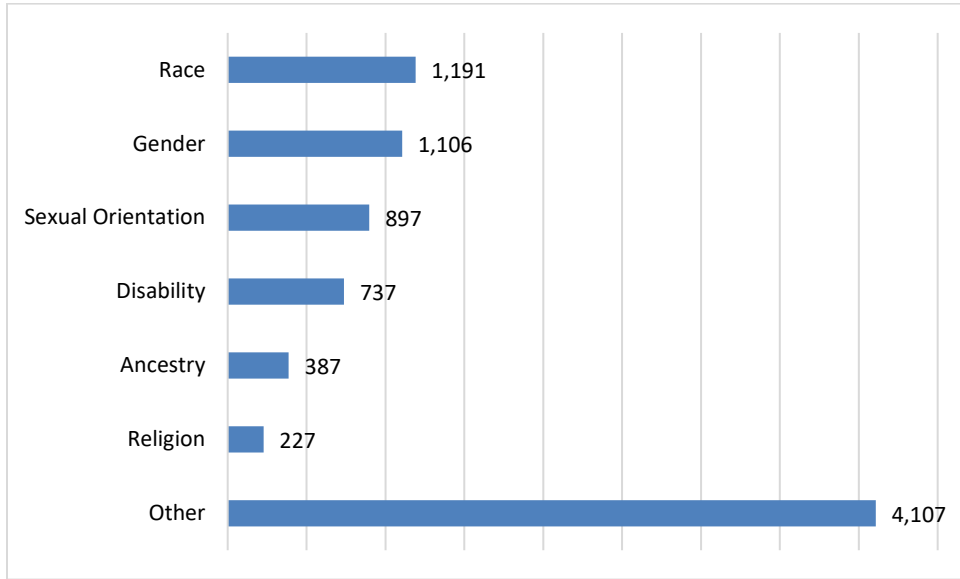


Figure 16. HIB Target by Race of Students and Nature of Bullying

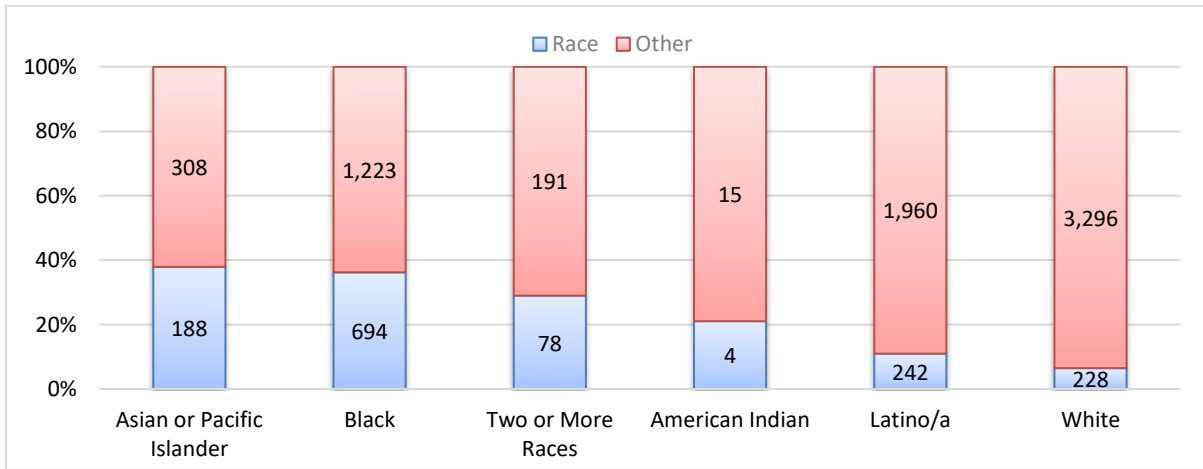


Figure 17. HIB Target by Student ELL Status and Nature of Bullying

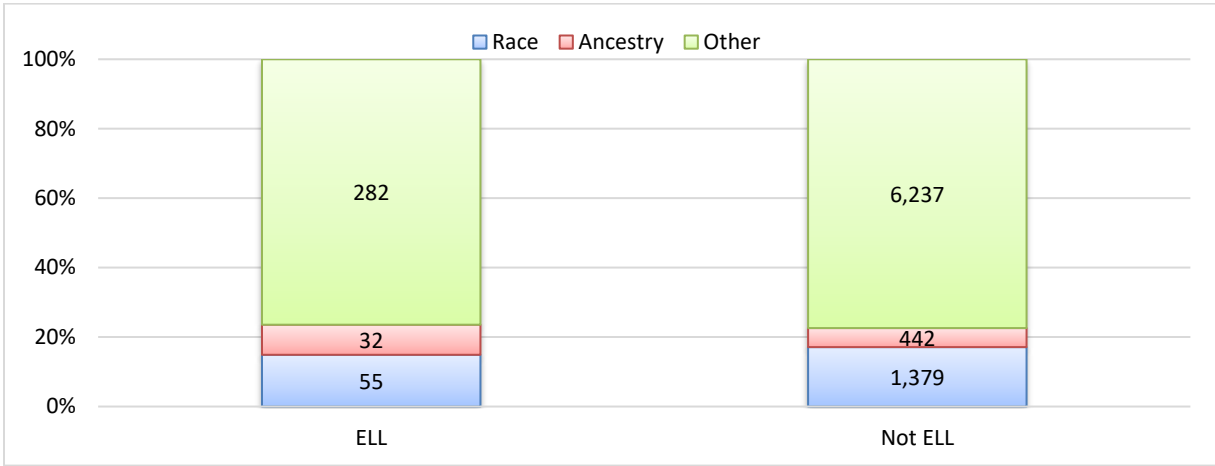


Figure 18. HIB Target by Student Disability Status and Nature of Bullying

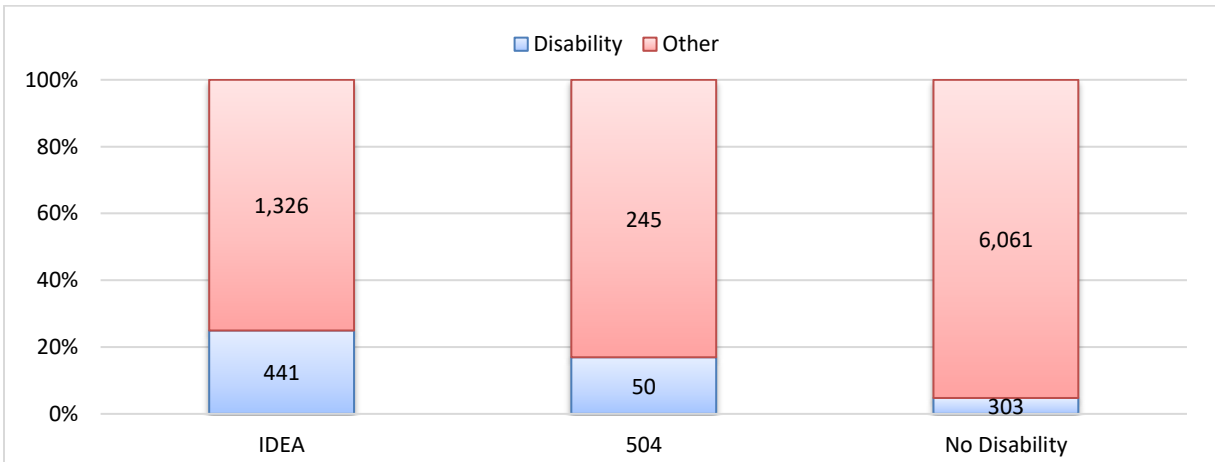
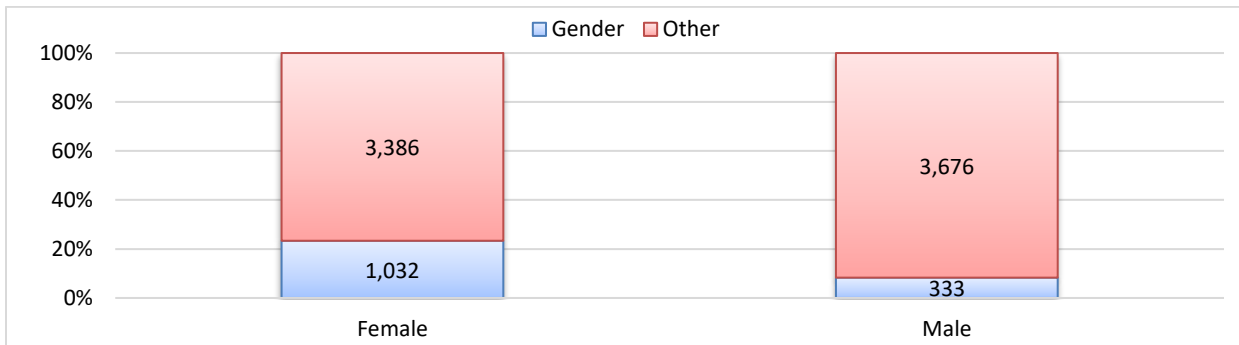


Figure 19. HIB Target by Student Gender and Nature of Bullying



HIB Trainings

Schools reported 18,556 HIB trainings in 2017-18. Most districts offered at least one training on the district's HIB policy with bullying prevention instruction (84%) and most offered at least one training to key school staff members (96%), other school staff (89%), and district staff (88%).

Figure 20. Districts offering one or more HIB Trainings by Attendee Type

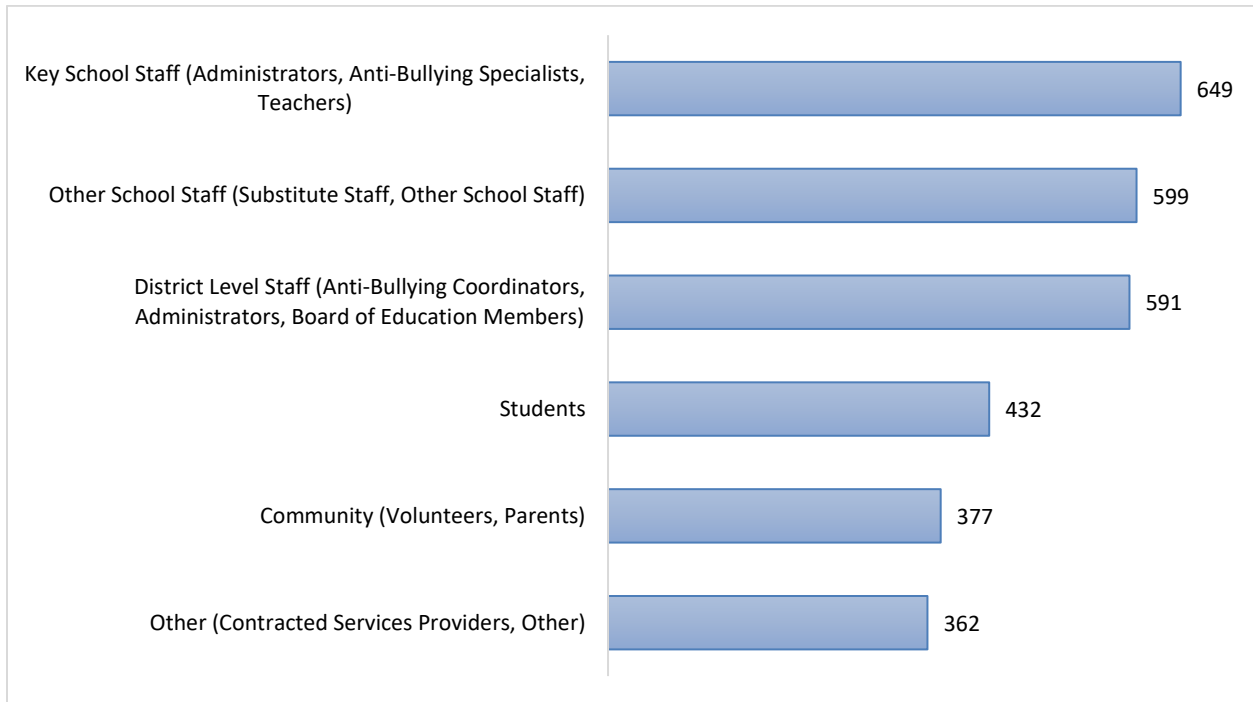
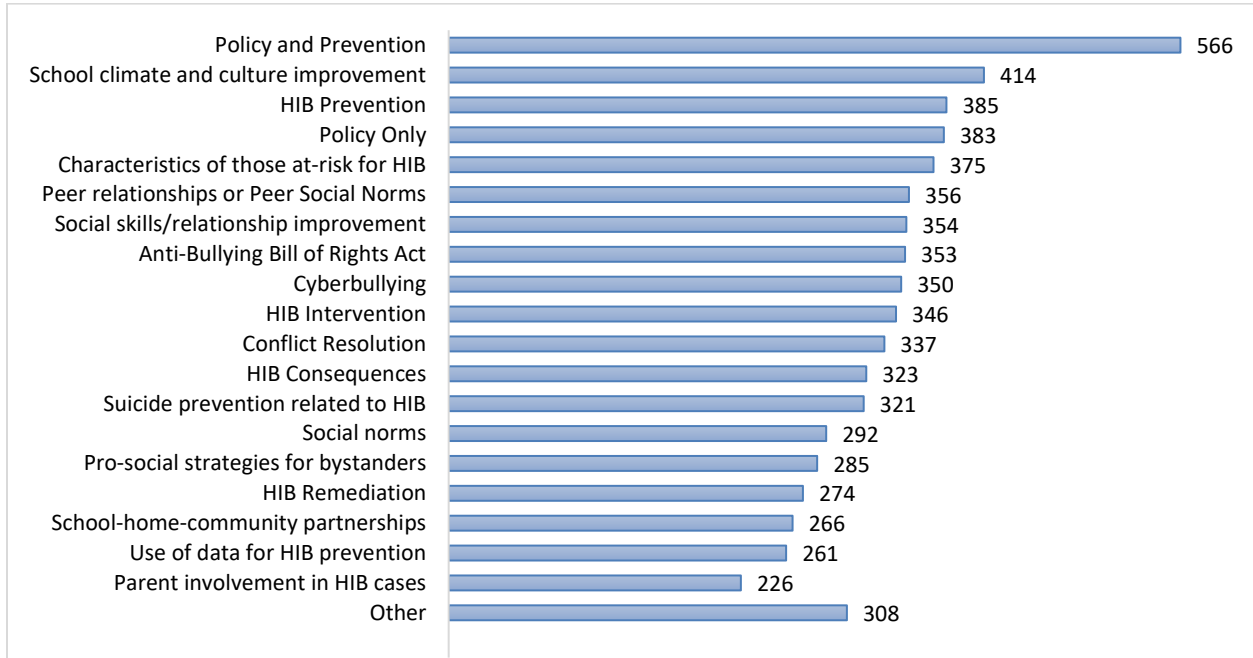


Figure 21. Districts offering one or more HIB Trainings by Training Type



HIB Programs

Schools reported 25,784 HIB programs in 2017-18. Most districts offered programs addressing various school-wide conditions, especially student relationships (89%), the emotional environment of the school (86%), morale in the school community (85%), safety (84%) and teaching and learning (85%). Districts primarily offered these programs to students (88%) and key school staff (86%).

Figure 22. Number of districts offering one or more HIB Program by Program Goal

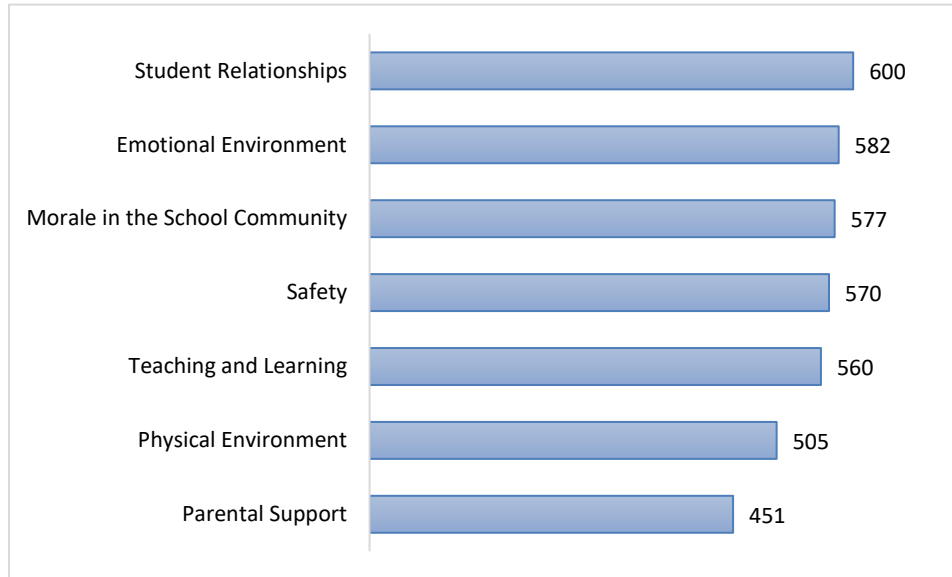
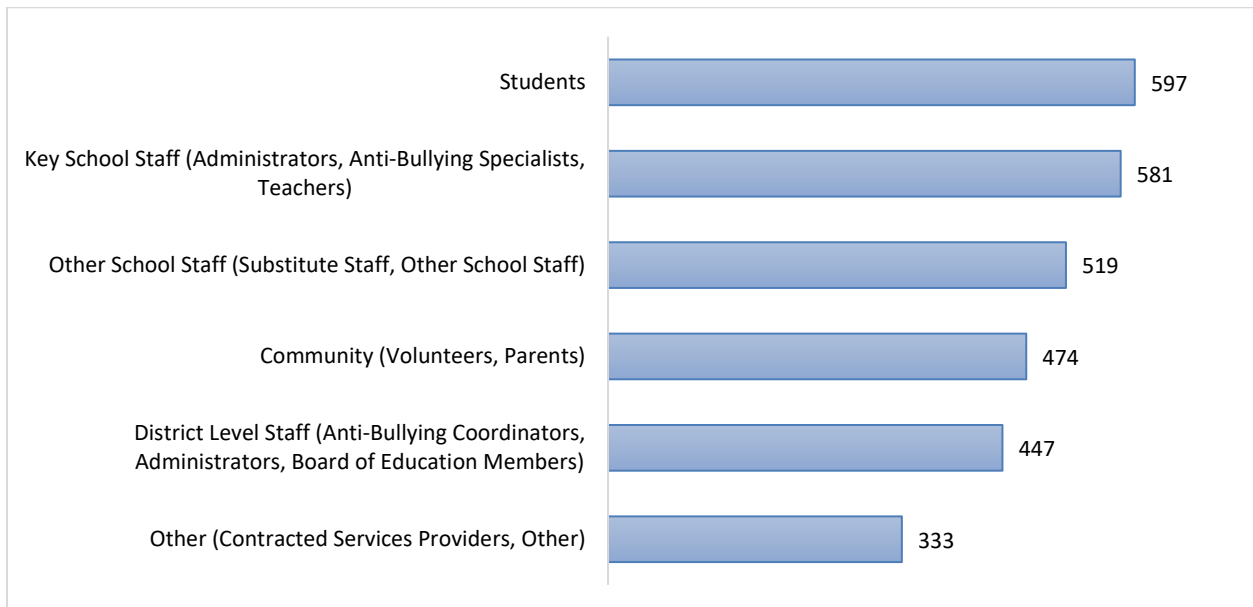


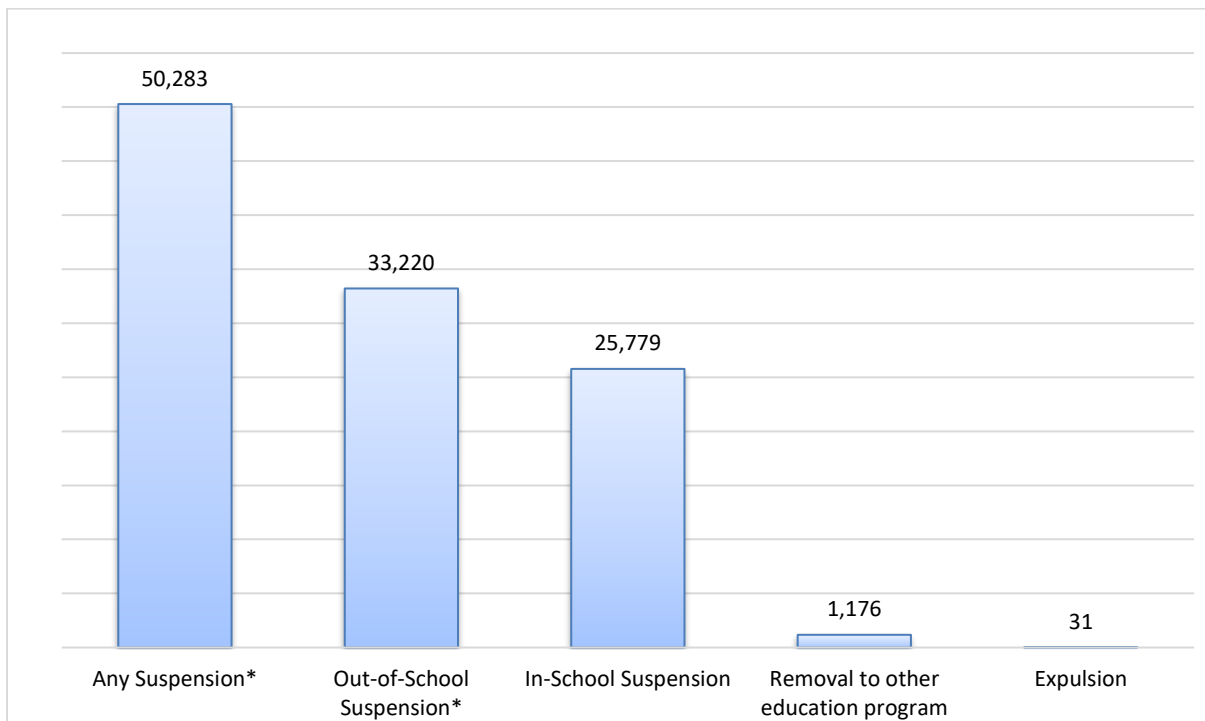
Figure 23. Districts offering one or more HIB Programs by Attendee Type



Disciplinary Actions

Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, the SSDS began collecting all student suspensions and other removals. Over 50,000 students were suspended from school during the 2017-18 school year on at least one occasion. Of the 50,000 students, 33,220 received one or more out-of-school suspension and 25,779 received one or more in-school suspensions. Among suspended students, most were suspended only once and for less than one week of school during the course of the year, but many were suspended multiple times and for many days. In addition, 1,176 students were removed from school and sent to another school or other education program, and 31 students were expelled from school and no longer received educational services. Males were more likely to be suspended than females, black students more likely than students of other races, and high school students more likely than students in other grade levels.

Figure 24. Students Removed from School by Type of Removal



*These counts include students with disabilities who received unilateral removals or removals by a hearing officer.

Figure 25. Students Suspended from School by Number of Suspensions

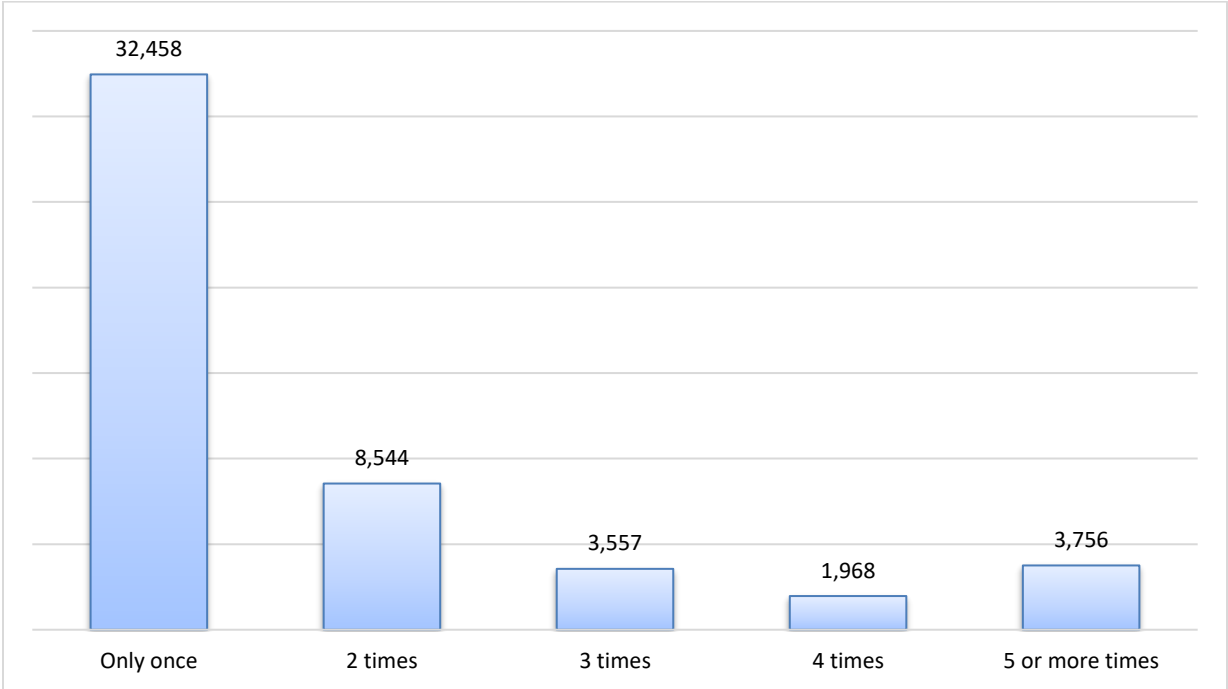


Figure 26. Students Suspended by Total Number of Days Suspended during Year

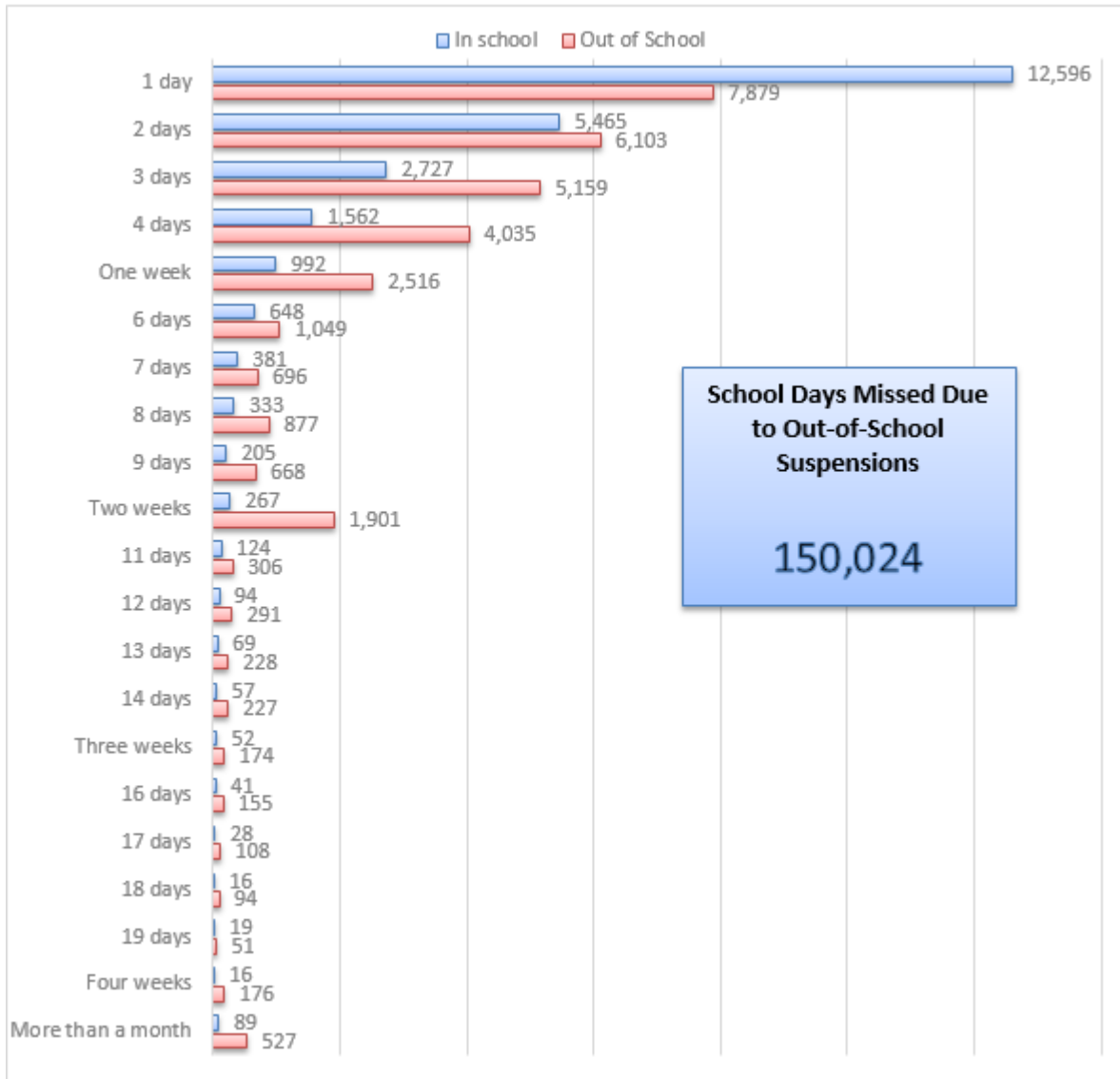
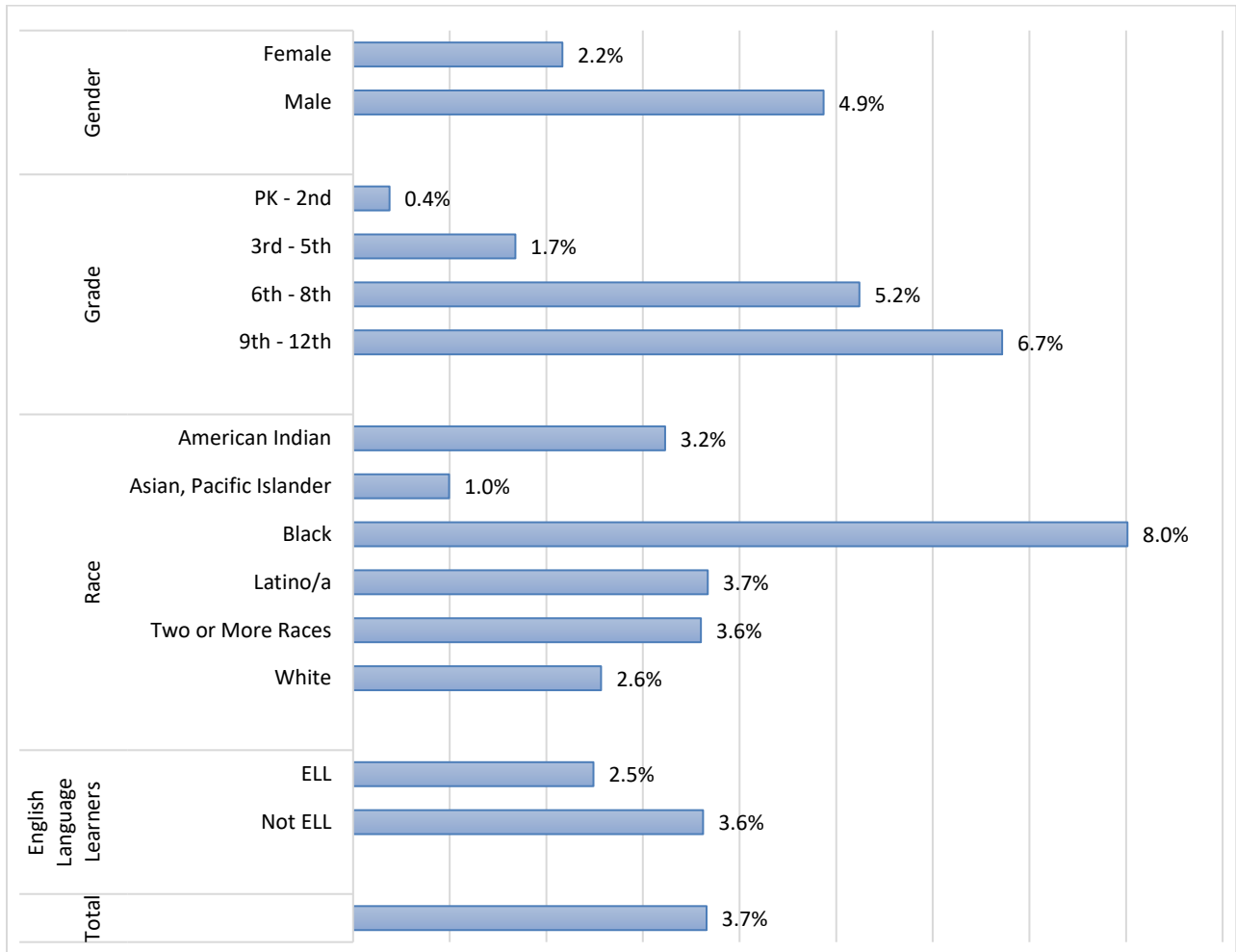


Figure 27. Student Suspension Rate by Offender Type



Programmatic Response

Department's Response

The Department has been working with districts to identify programs, practices and other resources to improve school climate and social and emotional development for students and educators. In addition, the Department continues to work with districts to ensure accurate reporting. Some examples of this work include increased public data reporting using the SSDS, revisions to regulations, and supports for implementation of social and emotional learning programming and tiered systems of support.

Data Transparency and Quality

In spring 2018, the 2016-17 New Jersey School Performance Reports were made available. In order to increase data transparency, and to adhere to *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* requirements for School Report Cards, these reports contained information on the school's reported violence, vandalism, weapons offenses, substance offenses, and HIB incidents. This data was based on information reported to the EVVRS system for the 2016-17 school year. The 2017-18 School Performance Reports, released on March 12, 2019, contain additional data from the Student Safety Data System including in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, school-related arrests, referrals to law enforcement, incidents of violence, and incidents of bullying and harassment.

This report provides information as collected through the SSDS that has previously been unavailable in regards to discipline reporting in New Jersey. The intention is to be responsive to issues of current concern, such as race disparities in discipline reporting and reports to law enforcement. In addition, the intent is that increased data transparency will help to improve overall data quality.

Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR) Implementation

To support schools in enhancing implementation of the ABR, the Department has completed revisions to Chapter 16 of the New Jersey Administrative Code that focuses on programs to support student development and includes the regulations detailing the requirements placed on schools and districts through the ABR. The most notable changes clarify regulations applying to Approved Private Schools for Students with Disabilities (APSSD) when there is an incident or alleged incident of bullying involving a student enrolled in an APSSD. In addition, the amended regulations offer schools, districts and APSSDs guidance when there are incidents or allegations of bullying that occur involving both school districts and APSSDs. The amendments clarify existing rules for implementing the ABR to ensure all students have the opportunity to achieve academic and behavioral success in safe and supportive learning environments. Moving forward, the Department will provide school districts with guidance and resources on implementation.

QSAC Revisions

In addition to the aforementioned actions, the State Board of Education recently approved amendments to the Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) indicators that clarify the requirements for districts related to bullying to be more robust, thus accounting for a greater number of points for a school's overall QSAC score. The language of the indicator changed from, "Develops and implements policies and procedures prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB); distributes them to students, parents and staff; and posts the policies and procedures on the district's website (N.J.S.A. 18A:37-14-18 and N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.7)" to, "The school district implements a process to ensure the school safety/school climate team in each school, with support from the CSA (Chief School Administrator): (1) reviews and takes action to strengthen school climate policies; (2) educates the community, including students, teachers, staff, and parents, to prevent HIB; (3) provides professional development opportunities that address effective practices of successful school climate programs or approaches; and (4) completes the HIB self-assessment. The CSA submits to the Department the statement of assurance and the district board of education approval date for the HIB self-

assessment for each school in the school district by September 30. (N.J.S.A. 18A:17-46 and 18A:37-14 through 18 and N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.7).”

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

The Department strongly believes in the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools and recognizes the research that students who were taught SEL skills were less likely to have conduct problems and engage in substance abuse. The Department continues to provide support for the implementation of SEL in schools and the integration of the NJ SEL Competencies and Sub-Competencies. In order to support the professional development of educators, the Department is collaborating with the American Institute for Research and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center to develop online SEL modules specific to NJ that will support both school and district staff in implementing a comprehensive SEL program. There will be a total of six modules, including an introductory module that provides a self-assessment tool that educators can use to evaluate their own SEL competence. The other modules will further support the implementation of the NJ SEL Competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. The modules can be used by educators seeking to integrate SEL into their classrooms or during professional learning communities (PLCs). Along with the modules, there will be a facilitator’s guide and resources that support the content being presented. In addition to professional development, the Department recognized the need for districts to tailor the SEL programming in response to the context of their local community. Schools are embedding school-wide activities that emphasize the SEL competencies, integrating SEL skills in their instruction, and incorporating SEL in their efforts to build positive school climates.

School Climate Improvement

The Department has been active in supporting school climate improvement and proactively addressing student behavior by implementing the [New Jersey Positive Behavior Supports in Schools \(NJPBSIS\)](#) initiative, which includes training and technical assistance. In addition, the Department has accepted its third cohort into the School Climate Transformation Project. Currently there are 30 schools participating in the

project. During the three years of project participation, schools receive tailored consultative services and training from Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University staff to effectively apply a six-step school climate change process. Schools participating in the project utilize the [New Jersey School Climate Survey](#) to assess the conditions for learning, and in response, develop school climate improvement plans to address specific needs.

New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS)

The NJTSS is a framework for maximizing all students' receipt of effective reading instruction that is based on their skill needs. In addition, it is a mechanism to reduce unnecessary referrals for special education and to enhance the range of opportunities for students with IEPs to be educated with their nondisabled peers. Grant activities enhanced NJTSS, the state's model of multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), and practices in schools by bringing general and special educators together through leadership teams to analyze data and align resources and instruction and interventions planning. Specifically, the development of a universal screening protocol and expansion of Tier 1 instructional strategies moved schools toward an integrated approach to supporting all students. Intensive, high quality professional learning conducted by Rutgers University-New Brunswick project leads resulted in increased knowledge and capacity of state-level staff for empowering educators to apply the principles of improvement science and to use data to enhance services to students. Intensive, research-based coaching by project staff enhanced knowledge of district and school personnel in early reading development and essential components of the NJTSS, which aligns with most models of response to intervention (RTI) and MTSS.

School leadership team members increased skills with respect to (a) promoting active involvement of school personnel in implementing an MTSS framework for reading support; (b) selecting and administering effective screening tools; (c) interpreting reading screening data; (d) utilizing student benchmark data to guide refinements and supplements to core instruction; and (e) utilizing classroom observations to evaluate curriculum-alignment and consistency in implementation. These team members also worked to formalize practices in their schools for implementing screening and data-based instructional decisions.

A partnership that included the State Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN), project partners on family engagement, and staff representing federal programs (Title 1, Title 3, and 21st century Afterschool Programs) and other state staff responsible for engaging families in school activities resulted in development of a tool for school leadership teams to utilize to assess and improve family and school partnerships. These resources will also be shared with schools in need of comprehensive and targeted support, as well as statewide, to facilitate stakeholders involvement in the development, implementation, and evaluation of school improvement strategies and interventions.

The Department transitioned to new leadership during this project period. Project activities and goals, however, align with the new agenda of fairness and equity for all students and strengthening teaching, leading and learning in all schools across the state.

Department's Objectives for the 2018-19 School Year

The Department will continue to support the initiatives detailed within this report including the school climate survey, social-emotional learning, and the New Jersey Tiered Systems of Support (NJTSS), which provide districts with the necessary tools to address incidents of HIB and safety within schools. Also, in the summer of 2018 the Department launched the School Safety Specialist Academy to provide training to the designated school safety specialist in every school district, as required by state statute. In addition, the state's Fiscal Year 2019 budget increased school-security funding with an additional \$87.4 million in school security aid, allowing districts the flexibility to support school safety initiatives that fit the needs of their schools. The state budget also earmarked \$75 per student in school security funding for nonpublic schools.