
SCHOOL SAFETY

KEY ISSUES

The total number of reportable crimes in North Carolina was 10,347 in 2014-15. That total increased from 2013-14, but has slowly been decreasing over the last few years.

In 2013 a series of legislation was enacted in North Carolina to ensure our schools are safe for our students and teachers. The recent increased presence of school violence in national media has heightened a sense of urgency to make schools a safe place.

When faced with behavior problems in students, schools rely on discipline policies to restore order to classrooms. Suspensions, expulsions, and detentions are some of the discipline options schools use to discourage problem behavior, but minimizing behavior problems is an ongoing concern for schools.

The difference in suspension and expulsion rates among race and gender requires us to consider what factors are leading to these differences and what supports need to be provided to ensure that all students are able to stay in school and prepare for their careers and futures.

INTRODUCTION

Ensuring schools are safe places to learn is the responsibility of parents, administrators, teachers, and policymakers. School personnel regularly address behavior issues that disrupt classrooms and decide on how to discipline students to discourage the behavior and restore a focused learning environment. In recent years the numbers of expulsions and suspensions have decreased in North Carolina, but the effort to maintain positive school cultures with minimal behavior problems is an ongoing battle in schools. Increasing media accounts of acts of violent crime across the U.S. has heightened public fears of school violence. School violence and crime has been proven to have adverse effects on the health and well-being of students and educational goals.¹ Studies show that incidences of victimization at schools can increase teacher turnover rates, lead students to change schools, incentivize early retirement for teachers and principals, impede the learning process, and foster greater student fear of violence at school.²

QUICK FACTS ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE:

- During the 2013-14 school year, 65 percent of public schools across the U.S. recorded that one or more incidents of violence had taken place, amounting to an estimated 757,000 crimes.³
- In 2014, there were about 850,100 nonfatal victimizations at schools nationally. This includes 363,700 theft victimizations and 486,400 violent victimizations.⁴
- In North Carolina the number of reportable crimes in grades K-13 increased by 2.1% during the last year, from 10,132 acts in 2013-14 to 10,347 acts in 2014-15.⁵

¹ Fredland, N.M. (2008). "Nurturing Hostile Environments: The Problem of School Violence." *Family & Community Health*, 31 (1): S32-S41.

² Crews, K., Crews, J., and Turner, F. (2008). "School Violence Is Not Going Away So Proactive Steps Are Needed." *College Teaching Methods & Styles Journal*, 4 (1): 25-28

³ National Center for Education Statistics, Indicators of School Crime and Safety. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2015072>.

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, Indicators of School Crime and Safety.

⁵ NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15. Available at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/research/discipline/reports/>.

It is clear that school violence has severe effects on students, teachers, and the learning process. Improving school safety is necessary for ensuring optimum student performance and creating a safe and stable learning environment.

VIOLENCE IN NORTH CAROLINA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In North Carolina, there were 10,347 reported crimes in 2014-15. The table below shows the total acts of violence and rate for the last nine years.

Reporting Year	Total Acts	Acts Per 1000 Students
2014-15	10,347	6.9
2013-14	10,132	6.8
2012-13	10,630	7.2
2011-12	11,161	7.6
2010-11	11,657	8.0
2009-10	11,608	8.0
2008-09	11,116	7.6
2007-08	11,276	7.9
2006-07	11,013	7.8

Source: NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15

The table below shows the number of reportable crimes in 2013-14 and in 2014-15. North Carolina public schools are using a number of strategies to reduce crime, including surveillance and the presence of school resource officers.

Acts	Number of Acts 2013-14	Number of Acts 2014-15
Possession of a Controlled Substance in Violation of Law	4,478	4,672
Possession of a Weapon	2,812	3,052
Assault of School Personnel	1,333	1,272
Possession of Alcoholic Beverage	1,007	950
Sexual Assault not including Rape or Sexual Offense	179	105
Possession of a Firearm or Powerful Explosive	88	86
Bomb Threat	66	78
Assault Involving Use of a Weapon	47	49
Assault Resulting in Serious Injury	49	43
Sexual Offense	65	28
Burning of a School Building	5	8
Robbery with a Dangerous Weapon	3	1
Rape	0	1
Kidnapping	0	1
Taking Indecent Liberties with a Minor	0	1
Death by Other Than Natural Causes	0	0
TOTAL	10,132	10,347

Source: NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15

The number of reportable crimes by high school students increased by 6.8%, from 5,475 in 2013-14 to 5,847 in 2014-15. The rate of crimes reported increased to 13.19 acts per 1000 students in 2014-15 compared to 12.37 acts per 1000 students in 2013-14. The next table lists the number of reportable crimes for high school grades only during the 2014-15 school year.

**TOTAL NUMBER OF REPORTABLE CRIMES IN GRADES 9-13 BY
SCHOOL DISTRICT IN 2014-15**

School District	Reportable Crimes	ADM Grades 9-13	Reportable Crime Rate (per 1000 students)
Alamance-Burlington	79	6872	11.50
Alexander County	7	1563	4.48
Alleghany County	4	429	9.32
Anson County	18	1034	17.41
Ashe County	10	921	10.86
Avery County	8	644	12.42
Beaufort County	40	2139	18.70
Bertie County	2	772	2.59
Bladen County	13	1398	9.30
Brunswick County	87	3807	22.85
Buncombe County	167	7710	21.66
Asheville City	33	1339	24.65
Burke County	75	4073	18.41
Cabarrus County	61	9353	6.52
Kannapolis City	19	1431	13.28
Caldwell County	32	3852	8.31
Camden County	5	593	8.43
Carteret County	23	2635	8.73
Caswell County	9	775	11.61
Catawba County	95	5268	18.03
Hickory City	21	1229	17.09
Newton Conover City	11	1018	10.81
Chatham County	57	2434	23.42
Cherokee County	1	1058	0.95
Edenton/Chowan	10	641	15.60
Clay County	3	368	8.15
Cleveland County	91	4697	19.37
Columbus County	5	1932	2.59
Whiteville City	5	721	6.93
Craven County	36	4064	8.86
Cumberland County	249	15459	16.11
Currituck County	11	1208	9.11
Dare County	5	1410	3.55
Davidson County	89	6070	14.66
Lexington City	7	768	9.11
Thomasville City	12	673	17.83
Davie County	17	1916	8.87
Duplin County	37	2801	13.21
Durham Public	189	9966	18.96
Edgecombe County	9	1785	5.04
Forsyth County	188	16105	11.67
Franklin County	25	2522	9.91
Gaston County	84	9627	8.73
Gates County	2	515	3.88
Graham County	3	364	8.24

Granville County	49	2628	18.65
Greene County	24	1014	23.67
Guilford County	339	23036	14.76
Halifax County	13	764	17.02
Roanoke Rapids City	3	901	3.33
Weldon City	2	335	5.97
Harnett County	76	5839	13.02
Haywood County	37	2169	17.06
Henderson County	39	4106	9.50
Hertford County	12	843	14.23
Hoke County	37	2218	16.68
Hyde County	2	159	12.58
Iredell-Statesville	75	7014	10.69
Mooreville City	14	1764	7.94
Jackson County	11	1135	9.69
Johnston County	96	9890	9.71
Jones County	0	321	0.00
Lee County	62	2939	21.10
Lenoir County	39	2658	14.67
Lincoln County	63	3633	17.34
Macon County	13	1301	9.99
Madison County	8	807	9.91
Martin County	4	873	4.58
McDowell County	42	1879	22.35
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	624	40675	15.34
Mitchell County	3	629	4.77
Montgomery County	17	1147	14.82
Moore County	68	4046	16.81
Nash-Rocky Mount	45	4833	9.31
New Hanover County	92	7699	11.95
Northampton County	7	503	13.92
Onslow County	76	6925	10.97
Orange County	25	2435	10.27
Chapel Hill-Carrboro	60	3675	16.33
Pamlico County	2	472	4.24
Pasquotank County	7	1642	4.26
Pender County	25	2710	9.23
Perquimans County	13	517	25.15
Person County	25	1306	19.14
Pitt County	89	6948	12.81
Polk County	5	717	6.97
Randolph County	87	5456	15.95
Asheboro City	15	1283	11.69
Richmond County	19	2274	8.36
Robeson County	135	6820	19.79
Rockingham County	84	3960	21.21
Rowan-Salisbury	66	5960	11.07
Rutherford County	36	2561	14.06
Sampson County	15	2521	5.95
Clinton City	4	829	4.83

Scotland County	32	1787	17.91
Stanly County	49	2475	19.80
Stokes County	21	2136	9.83
Surry County	36	2647	13.60
Elkin City	0	390	0.00
Mount Airy City	3	523	5.74
Swain County	12	584	20.55
Transylvania County	37	1120	33.04
Tyrrell County	0	163	0.00
Union County	146	12552	11.63
Vance County	18	1977	9.10
Wake County	562	45134	12.45
Warren County	23	732	31.42
Washington County	0	448	0.00
Watauga County	15	1341	11.19
Wayne County	45	5511	8.17
Wilkes County	36	2984	12.06
Wilson County	48	3709	12.94
Yadkin County	43	1729	24.87

Source: NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15, Table C4

SUSPENSIONS IN NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In North Carolina, principals have discretion to use several different types of disciplinary measures that remove students from the classroom for varying periods of time:

1. **Short term in-school suspensions or short-term out-of-school suspensions:** suspension lasting up to 10 days for lesser offenses committed by students.
2. **Long-term out-of-school suspensions:** suspension for a serious offense lasting anywhere from 11 days to the remainder of the academic year. For a very serious offense, a student can be suspended for an entire calendar year (365-day suspension). School Superintendents and/or local schools boards often assist the principal in making decisions about long-term suspensions.
3. **Expulsion:** student is permanently removed from the school and cannot return to the home school or another school in the district.

Approximately one out of thirteen North Carolina students received at least one out-of-school short-term suspension in 2014-15. Short-term out-of-school suspensions and expulsions increased in 2014-15 compared with the previous year, while long-term suspensions decreased slightly from the previous year.⁶

School Suspensions and Expulsions, Trends 2013-14 to 2014-15

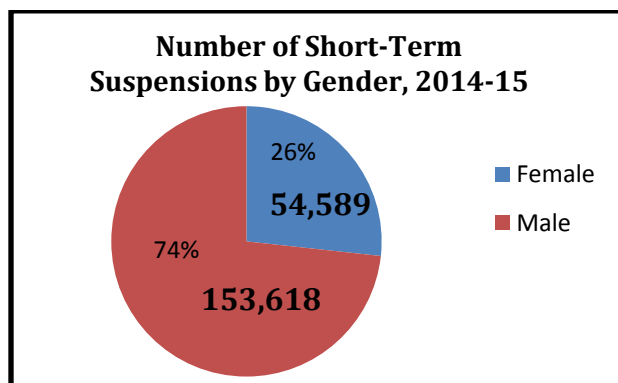
Category	2013-14	2014-15	Change
Short-term suspensions	198,254	208,650	Increased 5.2%
Long-term suspensions	1,088	1,085	Decreased 0.3%
Expulsions	37	42	Increased 13.5%

Source: NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15

⁶ NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15.

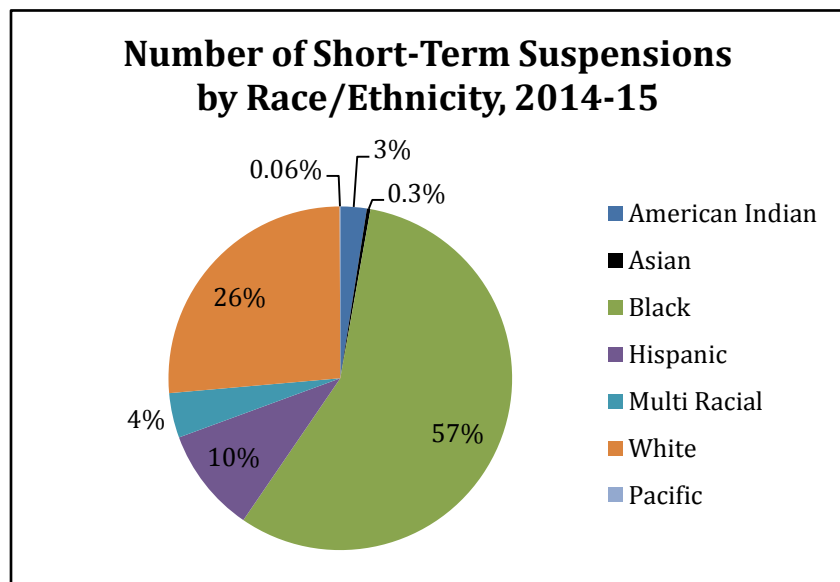
DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINE IN NORTH CAROLINA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In 2014-15, male students, black and American Indian students, ninth graders, and students receiving special education services were disproportionately represented among suspended students. For example, the number of short-term suspensions for male students in 2014-15 was 2.8 times higher than for females.⁷ The graphs below represent disproportionalities among suspended and expelled students in North Carolina.



Gender in North Carolina's schools is close to 50% male, 50% female. When it comes to suspensions and expulsions, 74% of disciplinary action is directed toward males.

Source: NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15



Race/Ethnicity	Number of Suspensions
American Indian	5,158
Asian	707
Black	118,105
Hispanic	20,532
Multi Racial	8,768
White	54,812
Pacific	123

Source: NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15

In 2014-15 the number of short-term suspensions increased for black, Hispanic, multiracial, and white students. The number of short-term suspensions decreased for American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students. As in previous years, black students had the highest rate of short-term suspension in 2014-15, followed by American Indian students.⁸

⁷ NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15.

⁸ NC DPI, Consolidated Data Report 2014-15.

NATIONAL EFFORTS TO COMBAT CRIME & VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

In the past decade, numerous school violence incidents have escalated national concern over school safety. As a result, the Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) was created after the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education in United States Department of Education to address school safety issues across the nation.

THE OFFICE OF SAFE AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS (OSHS)

The Office of Safe and Healthy Schools (OSHS) was developed as the successor program to the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (OSDFS) program, which was first authorized by Congress in 1986 due to increasing rates of alcohol and other drug use in schools. The OSHS administers, coordinates, and recommends policy for improving school safety by:

- Providing financial assistance for drug and violence prevention activities and school preparedness activities that improve learning conditions
- Developing policy and legislative proposals related to violence and drug prevention within the Department of Education
- Participating in committees, partnerships, research, and data collection for drug and violence preventions and school preparedness

The Office of Safe and Healthy Schools houses the following centers:

Safe and Supportive Schools Group

The Safe and Supportive Schools Group administers Title IV, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, and other programs related to the development and maintenance of safe and drug-free schools. Specifically, this Group manages the Safe and Supportive Schools grant programs and provides national leadership on school safety issues. The Safe and Supportive Schools Group is responsible for the following programs:

- Safe and Supportive Schools (Discretionary Grants)
- Governors' Grants (Formula Grants)
- Grants to States to Improve Management of Drug and Violence Prevention Programs (Discretionary Grants)
- Safe and Drug-Free Schools Native Hawaiian Program (Discretionary Grants)
- State Formula Grants for State Educational Agencies (Formula Grants)
- The Challenge Newsletter Grant Competition (Discretionary Grant)
- Partnerships in Character Education Program (Discretionary Grants)
- Civic Education
 - Civic Education - Improve Public Knowledge of and Support for Democracy
 - We The People
 - Cooperative Civic Education and Economic Education Exchange Program (Discretionary Grants)

Healthy Students Group

The Healthy Students Group administers programs regarding violence prevention, alcohol abuse prevention, and the health and well-being of students and families as outlined in Title IV and V of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. The group administers the Safe Schools/Health Students, Physical Education, Alcohol Abuse Prevention, Higher Education Alcohol Programs, Drug Testing, and School Counselors programs as well as other discretionary programs.

Center for School Preparedness

The Center for School Preparedness administers programs focused on preparing schools to respond to crisis and disasters. The Center is responsible for Project SERV (School Emergency Response to Violence), Readiness Emergency Management for Schools, Emergency Management for Higher Education, Homeland Security Activities, and Disaster Response Coordinated with FEMA and DHS. The Center for School Preparedness is also responsible for the following programs:

- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (Discretionary Grants)
- School Emergency Response to Violence (Project SERV) (Discretionary Grants)
- Educational Facilities Clearinghouse
- Emergency Management for Higher Education
- Emergency Planning

The OSHS also implements other provisions as amended in NCLB. These provisions included the Gun-Free Schools Act, Transfer for Disciplinary Records, Pro-Children Act, and Unsafe School Choice Option.

GUN-FREE SCHOOLS ACT

In order to reestablish the perception of schools as safe havens for learning, nearly all states have developed some sort of crime-free, weapon-free, or safe-school zone statute. Over the past decade, every state has adopted a “zero tolerance” law on weapons at school in compliance with the 1994 federal gun-free schools law. The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 required states to pass laws ordering school districts to expel for one year any student who brings a firearm to school. The law, however, does allow districts to modify the expulsions in individual cases.

UNSAFE SCHOOL CHOICE OPTION

NCLB also required all states to implement the Unsafe School Choice Option to ensure that all students that find themselves in dangerous or victimizing situations on public school grounds may be allowed to transfer to another local education agency, including a public charter school.

NORTH CAROLINA’S EFFORTS TO MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER

In North Carolina, two important school safety policies have been implemented in the state during the past few decades. These policies are the Safe Schools Act of 1993 and the School Violence Prevention Act of 2009.

SAFE SCHOOLS ACT OF 1993

In 1993, The North Carolina General Assembly passed the Safe Schools Act. The Act requires LEAs to report certain acts of crime and violence to the State Board of Education. The Act charges all school personnel to report all unsafe activities to their immediate supervisor and to assist in maintaining a safe, secure and orderly school environment. General Statute 115C-228(g) explains that it is the school principal’s responsibility to report certain violent acts to law enforcement.

To evaluate school safety in North Carolina, the State Board of Education must publish an annual report on acts of violence in public schools. The State Board defined 16 criminal acts to be included in its annual report. Nine out of the 16 acts are considered dangerous and violent.

The nine dangerous and violent acts are homicide, assault resulting in serious bodily injury, assault involving the use of a weapon, rape, sexual offense, sexual assault, kidnapping, robbery with a dangerous weapon, and taking indecent liberties with a minor.

The other seven acts included in the State Board of Education's report on acts of violence in public schools include assault on school personnel, bomb threat, burning of a school building, possession of alcoholic beverage, possession of controlled substance in violation of law, possession of a firearm or powerful explosive, and possession of a weapon.

Schools may be labeled "Persistently Dangerous Schools" if a school reports at least two violent criminal offenses and at least five or more of such offenses were committed per thousand students in two consecutive years.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACT OF 2009

Through a bipartisan effort to eliminate bullying and harassment in North Carolina's schools, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the School Violence and Prevention Act in 2009. The Act defines bullying and harassing behavior as any pattern of gestures or written, electronic, or verbal communications, or any physical act or any threatening communication, that takes place on school property at place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, or on a school bus, and that:

1. Places a student or school employee in actual and reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property; or
2. Creates or is certain to create a hostile environment by substantially interfering with or impairing a student's educational performance, opportunities, or benefits." For purposes of this section, "hostile environment" means that the victim subjectively views the conduct as bullying or harassing behavior and the conduct is objectively severe or pervasive enough that a reasonable person would agree that it is bullying or harassing behavior" (General Statute 115C-407.15a)

Also, the School Violence Prevention Act:

- Requires all schools to adopt policies that clearly define and prohibit bullying and harassment, and to create a clear system of reporting and responding to incidents
- Enumerates specific categories to identify and protect those children statistically shown to be most vulnerable to bullying and harassment
- Protects all students, teachers and staff from violence in schools, and does not assign special rights, special protection or preferred status to any groups or types of students

2013 LEGISLATION ON SCHOOL SAFETY IN NORTH CAROLINA

In 2013, North Carolina passed several pieces of legislation related to school safety. Below is a brief summary of each key piece of legislation.

- 1. School Psychologists, School Counselors, and School Social Workers:**
 - Directs school counselors to develop a school counseling program with at least 80% of their time dedicated to direct services to students.
- 2. Grants for School Resource Officers in Elementary and Middle Schools:**
 - Provides grants to local school administrative units, regional schools, and charter schools for hiring or training of resource officers.
 - For every \$1 of local funds dedicated, the state will provide \$2 to supplement funds for school resource officers.
- 3. Panic Alarm Systems:**
 - Requires local boards of education to adopt emergency response plans relating to incidents of school violence.

- Requires every school to have a panic alarm system that connects with the nearest local law enforcement agency by July 1, 2015.
 - For every \$1 of local funds dedicated for panic alarm systems in local school administrative units, regional schools, and charter schools, the state will provide \$1 of matching funds.
- 4. School Safety Exercises:**
- Encourages all local school administrative units to hold a system-wide school safety and school lockdown exercise every two years.
 - In addition, schools are encouraged to hold an independent school-wide lockdown exercise at least once a year.
- 5. Schematic Diagrams of School Facilities:**
- Requires each LEA to provide a schematic diagram of school facilities to local law enforcement agencies.
 - If an LEA does not have a schematic diagram, it is required to develop diagrams prior to the 2014-2015 school year to share with local law enforcement agencies.
- 6. Anonymous Tip Line:**
- Encourages local school administrative units to operate an anonymous tip line to relay information on risks to school facilities and school-related activities
- 7. School Safety Component of School Improvement Plans:**
- Restructures the statute governing school improvement plans to implement the following changes:
 - i. Deliberations on school safety components must be held in closed session.
 - ii. All other aspects of the school improvement plan besides safety provisions must be public record and published on school's website.
 - iii. Requires the superintendent to review and make recommendations on the safety components of the plan to the local board of education.
- 8. Crisis Kits:**
- Provides that NC DPI, in conjunction with the NC Department of Public Safety, may develop and adopt policies on the content and placement of crisis kits in schools.
 - Kits should contain first-aid supplies, communications devices, and other items recommended by the International Association of Chiefs of Police.
- 9. School Safety for Charter Schools and Regional Schools:**
- Encourages charter schools and regional schools to adopt emergency response plans in coordination with local law enforcement agencies.
 - Charter schools and regional schools are encouraged to provide schematic diagrams to local law enforcement agencies and hold school-wide safety and lockdown exercises annually.
- 10. Emergency and Crisis Training:**
- Encourages the Departments of Public Safety, Justice, and Public Instruction to develop school emergency and crisis training modules for school employees.
- 11. Volunteer School Safety Resource Officer Program:**
- Allows non-salaried special deputies to serve as volunteer school safety resource officers (volunteer SROs) with the power of arrest in public schools.
 - Volunteer SROS must:
 - i. Have at least 2 years of prior experience as a law enforcement officer.
 - ii. Be trained on the social and cognitive development of students.
 - iii. Work under the guidance of the sheriff or chief of police.
 - iv. Gain certification by NC Sheriff's Education and Training Standards Commission.
 - v. Pass a standard medical examination.