



Dangerous Weapons and Disciplinary Incidents

Report to the Legislature

As required by Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.06, subdivision 3

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As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$6,500 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

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Legislative Charge

Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.06, subdivision 3, requires the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to annually report on disciplinary incidents and incidents involving dangerous weapons that occur in Minnesota public schools. The current report covers the 2018-19 through 2020-21 school years. Data for this report was obtained from MDE's Disciplinary Incident Reporting System (DIRS).

Minnesota Statutes, Section 121A.06, Reports of Dangerous Weapon Incidents in School Zones

Subdivision 1. **Definitions.** As used in this section:

- (1) "dangerous weapon" has the meaning given it in [section 609.02, subdivision 6](#);
- (2) "school" has the meaning given it in [section 102A. 22, subdivision 4](#); and
- (3) "school zone" has the meaning given it in [section 152.01, subdivision 14a](#), clauses (1) and (3).

Subdivision 2. **Reports; content.** School districts must electronically report to the commissioner of education incidents involving the use or possession of a dangerous weapon in school zones. The form must include the following information:

- (1) a description of each incident, including a description of the dangerous weapon involved in the incident;
- (2) where, at what time, and under what circumstances the incident occurred;
- (3) information about the Student disciplined, other than the Student disciplined name, including the Student disciplined age; whether the Student disciplined was a student and, if so, where the Student disciplined attended school; and whether the Student disciplined was under school expulsion or suspension at the time of the incident;
- (4) information about the victim other than the victim's name, if any, including the victim's age; whether the victim was a student and, if so, where the victim attended school; and if the victim was not a student, whether the victim was employed at the school;
- (5) the cost of the incident to the school and to the victim; and
- (6) the action taken by the school administration to respond to the incident.

The commissioner shall provide an electronic reporting format that allows school districts to provide aggregate data.

Subdivision 3. **Reports; filing requirements.** By July 31 of each year, each public school shall report incidents involving the use or possession of a dangerous weapon in school zones to the commissioner. The reports must be submitted using the electronic reporting system developed by the commissioner under subdivision 2. The commissioner shall compile the information it receives from the schools and report it annually to the commissioner of public safety and the legislature.

Introduction

Each year, Minnesota local educational agencies (LEAs), including public school districts and charter schools, are required to report specific behavior and student disciplinary incidents to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) via the Disciplinary Incident Reporting System (DIRS). DIRS, a web-based reporting system, allows MDE and LEAs to comply with multiple state and federal reporting requirements, including the school climate and safety measures on the [Minnesota Report Card](#), student discipline, special education, physical assault of a district employee by a student, and dangerous weapons.

DIRS has evolved since it was launched in the 2004-05 school year to collect data for programs across the agency. MDE continuously updates the system to make the process more user-friendly, improve data integrity, and accommodate changing reporting obligations. Over time, system improvements have streamlined the process and improved data quality. However, some changes, such as new reporting requirements and data elements, entail revising guidance, reference materials, and increased outreach to LEAs.

This report includes data from the 2018-19 through 2020-21 school years. During this time, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted aspects of life in significant ways, which compounded to create a particular set of challenges in education. The sudden shift to online learning altered the nature of student engagement and the means by which educators were able to meet students' social, emotional, and academic needs. The specific impacts to discipline practices and how the data in this report captures them are further described in the beginning of the Analysis section.

LEAs report a variety of information about disciplinary incidents, including: student activity leading to disciplinary action; time and location of incident; whether a weapon was involved; number of victims; estimated cost to school property; estimated cost to victim; student demographic data, including gender, race/ethnicity, grade, school status, special education status, and disability status of the student disciplined; disciplinary action taken and the number of days the student was removed from the classroom. While there are some additional data elements collected in DIRS for federal reporting requirements, the items described above are those included in this report.

The following sections begin by providing background information needed to understand the data and describe the broader discipline environment before an analysis. First, the Data Overview section explains how the data is collected and identifies limitations when interpreting the data. Next, the Analysis starts with general discipline outcomes and trends before presenting data for different student demographic groups. Finally, the report concludes with data specific to incidents involving dangerous weapons.

Data Overview

Data is critical to understanding and improving student experiences, but must be used in context to drive meaningful change. Incidents represented by data in this report are nuanced and influenced by local policies, practices, and capacity, as well as state and federal guidance. The data represents what occurred but, without further investigation, does not provide information about a school or district's approach to discipline.

Terms and Definitions

The following terms are frequently used in this report to describe the data presented. Although some terms sound similar and interchangeable, each has a distinct meaning. Other, less frequently used, terms will be defined as they are discussed in later sections.

- **Enrollment** – enrollment counts include all students in kindergarten through grade 12 enrolled on October 1. Students are identified only once in the October 1 enrollment count, regardless of any changes to demographic status during the school year.
- **Disciplinary incident** – the entire event that was reported in DIRS (more detail provided in the Data Structure section below), which may entail multiple students, activities, or disciplinary outcomes.
- **Disciplinary outcome** – refers to all types of disciplinary outcomes available in DIRS when reporting an incident, ranging from “No school response” to expulsion. Abbreviated labels for each of the disciplinary outcomes are included in report tables. Appendix B: DIRS Disciplinary Outcome Definitions lists all outcome types, full names as provided in DIRS, and their definitions.
- **Disciplinary action** – the subset of DIRS disciplinary outcomes that entails school or district action, or a student-initiated transfer or withdrawal, as a result from an incident that occurred on school grounds, during a school-related activity, or on school transportation.
- **Incident type** – the type of activity a student was engaged in during the reported incident. Only the incident types available in DIRS are included (see Appendix C: DIRS Incident Type Definitions and Severity Rankings for more information).
- **Persons harmed** – refers to people who were reported in DIRS as having been negatively impacted by an incident, sometimes referred to as “victims.” There are multiple types of harm that someone may have experienced, including emotional, financial, property damage, or physical harm.
- **Weapon type** – the list below includes all weapon types LEAs can select, including any additional details that may be required.
 - Arson – select one of the options below:
 - With Accelerant (combustible/flammable liquid)
 - Without Accelerant
 - Bomb
 - Weapon – identify the number of each type of weapon involved
 - Long Gun – answer all questions for each gun:
 - Was the gun loaded?
 - Was the gun cased?
 - Was the gun in the trunk of a vehicle?
 - Hand Gun – answer all questions for each gun:
 - Was the gun loaded?
 - Was the gun cased?
 - Was the gun in the trunk of a vehicle?
 - Pellet/BB/Air Gun
 - Paintball Gun
 - Replica/Toy Gun
 - Knife
 - Pocketknife, less than 2 1/2 inches
 - Pocketknife, 2 1/2 inches or greater
 - Blunt Object (ex: nunchuck or nunchaku, chains)
 - Sharp Object – not a knife or pocketknife (ex: razor blade, Chinese star)
 - Mace/Noxious Substance
 - Stun Guns/Taser Gun

Data Structure

When a disciplinary incident occurs, school or district staff assess the situation and determine their response, within the parameters of their discipline policies, as well as state and federal regulations. Following the incident, staff are responsible for completing internal processes and ensuring all necessary data elements are submitted in DIRS for reportable incidents (see Appendix A: 2018-19 through 2020-21 DIRS Reporting Requirements for a list of reporting requirements).

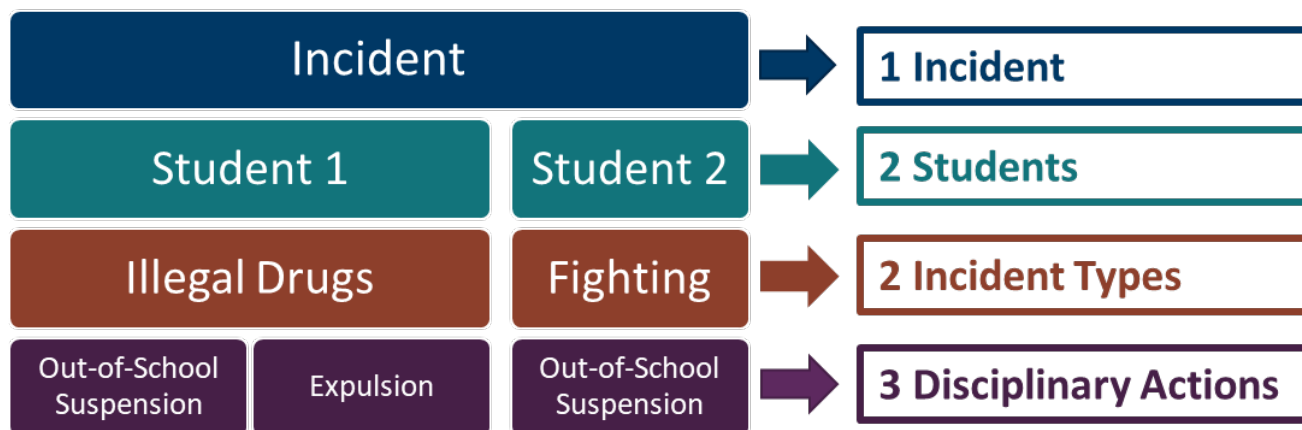
DIRS data structure allows it to be disaggregated in multiple ways, with each contributing a different piece of information to the full context. The most commonly reported measures include the number of disciplinary incidents, students disciplined, and disciplinary outcomes. Each incident reported in DIRS can involve multiple students, disciplinary actions, or other persons impacted during the incident. Therefore, the number of reported disciplinary incidents, number of students disciplined (and their demographic characteristics), number of disciplinary actions, and number of persons harmed may be different.

Other factors that may increase variance across these counts include student demographics and the number of disciplinary actions they receive for a single incident. Student demographics are based on the date of the incident and can change throughout the school year. For example, a student may have been receiving special education services on one day they were disciplined, but not another. A student may receive more than one disciplinary action for a single incident. This most often occurs in cases when a student is suspended pending an investigation and is ultimately expelled or excluded, transfers, or withdraws.

LEAs must report the activity each involved student was engaged in, also referred to as the “incident type” or “offender activity” in DIRS. Each of the 29 possible incident types in DIRS is assigned a severity ranking, with 1 being the highest and 29 the lowest (see Appendix C: DIRS Incident Type Definitions and Severity Rankings for the severity rankings and definitions). Although each student involved in an incident may have engaged in multiple activities, LEAs report only one activity per student per incident, and are instructed to report the incident type with the highest severity ranking.

To illustrate, if one incident involved a fight between two students and one of the students also possessed illegal drugs, the LEA should report illegal drugs (severity ranking 8) for the student who possessed the drugs and fighting (severity ranking 12) for the student who did not have drugs. The student who possessed illegal drugs may have been suspended and later expelled, while the other student only received an out-of-school suspension.

Figure 1. DIRS Data Structure – Example Incident



Data Limitations

All data are confined by limitations in their ability to describe the complexities and nuances of real life. Such constraints do not render the data useless, rather they set the parameters for appropriate use. With respect to DIRS data, there are four main concerns:

1. **Limited validation processes** – data in this report comes directly from DIRS as entered by the LEAs. LEAs are expected to review and verify all data for the school year prior to final certification. However, MDE does not have a mechanism to compare LEA records with those submitted in DIRS and has limited capacity to verify the data beyond validation processes built into DIRS. Over time, MDE has dedicated additional resources to DIRS to improve data integrity, including system updates to improve validations and prevent errors.
2. **Shifting student demographics** – demographic data in DIRS is based on the current MARSS information in the student’s record for the date the incident occurred. Therefore, incidents occurring on different days of the school year may result in different demographic information for a single student because some student information can change throughout the course of the school year (e.g., special education status).
3. **Complex requirements and varying definitions** – reporting requirements for DIRS come from federal and state regulations and vary depending on whether a student is receiving special education services. In some cases, federal and state regulations provide clear definitions and reporting values for data elements. In other cases, districts or schools have discretion to create their own definitions. Misaligned definitions and reporting criteria introduce potential for inconsistent reporting within and across LEAs. Definitions and references for reporting requirements, disciplinary actions, and incident types included in DIRS can be found in the appendices, starting on Page 23.
4. **Not full scope of student discipline** – data represents only what is submitted in DIRS. In addition to incidents reported in DIRS, schools and districts may employ a range of disciplinary actions beyond the scope of reporting requirements that are not included in this report, such as office referrals and detentions. More importantly, the data does not tell the story of schools and districts that are implementing alternatives to discipline or restorative practices. In fact, some of these approaches may fall under the broad definition of in-school suspension.

Finally, it is important to note that the data presented in this report will not match the public reports available on the [Discipline Data](#) page in MDE’s [Data Reports and Analytics](#). Currently, MDE public reports include only out-of-school suspensions of one day or more, expulsions, and exclusions. None of the other disciplinary action types included in this report are included in the public discipline reports.

Analysis

Each of the three years of discipline data this report encompasses are influenced by distinct external factors. New reporting requirements expanded discipline data collection in the 2018-19 school year and COVID-19 brought unprecedented circumstances, which affected the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years differently. Each change requires careful consideration because, although they may not have directly altered discipline practices, they change what is in the data and how it can be used.

In 2018-19, LEAs began reporting in-school suspensions for general education students and school-related arrests for all students. Prior to 2018-19, LEAs were required to report only in-school suspensions for students receiving special education services and referrals to law enforcement. Although the new requirements are for specific actions, they impact other measures in the report, including total reported disciplinary incidents, actions, and students disciplined.

The unprecedented circumstances created by COVID-19 and required public health mitigation efforts changed the experiences of students, families and educators during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. Schools moved to distance learning from March 18, 2020, through the end of the 2019-20 school year.¹ During the 2020-21 school year, public health guidance changed as COVID-19 rates rose and fell at different times and locations across the state. Some schools and districts maintained only online learning throughout the year, while others chose to maintain in-person learning as much as community COVID-19 rates allowed. Total statewide October 1 enrollment for students in kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) declined from 864,838 in the 2018-19 school year to 850,765 in the 2020-21 school year.

The most significant impact to discipline practices was the change in learning environment from in-person to online instruction. The concept of student engagement shifted and educators' perspectives on student behavior and appropriate responses shifted. All students were in the same education setting during the 2019-20 school year, but setting varied across the state and student demographic groups during 2020-21. Adaptations to constant fluctuations created new barriers to data collection and reporting, including resources needed to update technology, capacity to train staff on new processes and procedures, and families' access to and understanding of technology.

Taken together, reporting changes and extenuating circumstances prevent meaningful comparisons of disciplinary rates across time and limit interpretations. To facilitate caution when interpreting this data, trends are not depicted visually, though tables are included to sufficiently describe all aspects of weapons incidents reported from 2018-19 through 2020-21.

Total Incidents

As expected during the COVID-19 pandemic, the total number of reported disciplinary incidents and actions decreased each year from 2018-19 through 2020-21, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Weapons incidents

¹ Per Executive Order 20-02 schools closed from March 18, 2020, through the end of the 2019-20 school year, permitting only in-person learning except for students whose parents were essential employees, or for students with individual education plans (IEP) that required in-person services.

accounted for less than 2.0% of all incidents and disciplinary actions reported during the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, and just under 3.0% in 2020-21. During that time, the total number of reported incidents decreased by 80.2 % and the total number of weapons incidents decreased by 33.1% during that time. The difference in the rate of change may be influenced by changes to discipline approaches to less severe incident types, yet maintaining discipline requirements for weapon incidents.

Table 1. Total Reported Disciplinary Incidents by Weapon Involvement, 2018-19 through 2020-21

	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No weapon	68,628	98.3%	50,923	98.4%	13,567	97.1%
Weapon	1,224	1.8%	818	1.6%	400	2.9%
Total	69,844	100%	51,733	100%	13,967	100%

Table 2. Total Reported Disciplinary Actions by Weapon Involvement, 2018-19 through 2020-21

	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No weapon	74,415	98.3%	56,165	98.5%	14,520	97.1%
Weapon	1,303	1.7%	860	1.5%	432	2.9%
Total	75,718	100%	57,025	100%	14,952	100%

Disciplinary Incident Type

Table 3 lists all the DIRS incident types with the reported number and percent of disciplinary actions for each one. Reviewing all incident types reported from 2018-19 through 2019-20 helps describe the school climate each year and how it changed during this time. Disruptive/Disorderly Conduct/Insubordination and Fighting are the most frequently reported incident types and together accounted for half of all disciplinary actions (50.0 percent) in 2018-19 and more than half (53.1 percent) in 2019-20, while just under half (46.8 percent) in 2020-21.

There were several slight changes to the percentage of incident types leading to disciplinary actions in the 2020-21 school year, likely due to changes to the learning environment previously described. With most students participating in off-campus, online learning settings, the potential for different types of incidents decreased, particularly those related to social interactions. For example, the percentage of disciplinary actions resulting from Fighting, Assault, and Threat or Intimidation decreased.

Table 3. Reported Disciplinary Actions by Incident Type, 2018-19 through 2020-21

	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Disruptive/Disorderly Conduct/Insubordination	23,517	31.1%	18,509	32.5%	4,453	29.8%
Fighting	15,041	19.9%	11,773	20.6%	2,536	17.0%
Tobacco	6,076	8.0%	3,091	5.4%	1,441	9.6%
Assault	5,468	7.2%	4,036	7.1%	990	6.6%
Threat/Intimidation	4,589	6.1%	3,255	5.7%	749	5.0%
Other	3,440	4.5%	2,770	4.9%	885	5.9%
Illegal drugs	3,291	4.3%	2,278	4.0%	594	4.0%
Attendance	3,137	4.1%	2,382	4.2%	619	4.1%
Verbal abuse	2,458	3.2%	2,020	3.5%	446	3.0%
Harassment	1,923	2.5%	1,556	2.7%	535	3.6%
Weapon	1,237	1.6%	795	1.4%	421	2.8%
Theft	1,150	1.5%	907	1.6%	169	1.1%
Vandalism/Property related	1,057	1.4%	964	1.7%	302	2.0%
Bullying (all forms except cyber bullying)	955	1.3%	755	1.3%	265	1.8%
Alcohol	676	0.9%	509	0.9%	79	0.5%
Controlled substances (prescription)	405	0.5%	242	0.4%	54	0.4%
Computer	370	0.5%	358	0.6%	181	1.2%
Terroristic threats	359	0.5%	384	0.7%	71	0.5%
Cyber bullying	322	0.4%	214	0.4%	120	0.8%
Arson	65	0.1%	65	0.1%	11	0.1%
Pyrotechnics	60	0.1%	37	0.1%	17	0.1%
Over-the-counter medication against school policy	50	0.1%	40	0.1%	4	0.0%
Gang activity	24	0.0%	32	0.1%	2	0.0%
Bomb threat	21	0.0%	27	0.0%	5	0.0%
Hazing	16	0.0%	17	0.0%	2	0.0%
Robbery (using force)	5	0.0%	9	0.0%	-	-
Extortion	4	0.0%	-	-	1	0.0%
Bomb	1	0.0%	-	-	-	-
Total	75,718	100%	57,025	100%	14,952	100%

Disciplinary Outcomes

For each incident reported in DIRS, LEAs must select one of 12 disciplinary outcomes listed in Table 4, including “No school response.” In most cases, an incident is submitted because there was a reportable disciplinary action taken by administrators, but there are some exceptions (see Appendix A: 2018-19 through 2020-21 DIRS Reporting Requirements). “No school response” may be selected when a student was involved in an incident but administrators decided not to take disciplinary action or the student was referred to law enforcement in lieu of disciplinary action. As shown below, the vast majority of disciplinary outcomes reported in all three school years were out-of-school and in-school suspensions, respectively, for weapons and non-weapons incidents.

Table 4. Reported Disciplinary Outcome Types by Weapon Involvement, 2018-19 through 2020-21

Outcome		2018-19			2019-20			2020-21		
		Count	% Action	% Year	Count	% Action	% Year	Count	% Action	% Year
Administrative transfer	No weapon	63	88.7%	0.1%	41	80.4%	0.1%	3	100%	0.0%
	Weapon	8	11.3%	0.0%	10	19.6%	0.0%	-	0.0%	0.0%
	Total	71	100%	0.1%	51	100%	0.1%	3	100%	0.0%
Expulsion or exclusion	No weapon	88	88.0%	0.1%	66	86.8%	0.1%	9	64.3%	0.1%
	Weapon	12	12.0%	0.0%	10	13.2%	0.0%	5	35.7%	0.0%
	Total	100	100%	0.1%	76	100%	0.1%	14	100%	0.1%
In-school Suspension	No weapon	24,769	99.3%	32.4%	18,064	99.4%	31.5%	5,607	98.6%	36.8%
	Weapon	168	0.7%	0.2%	110	0.6%	0.2%	77	1.4%	0.5%
	Total	24,937	100%	32.6%	18,174	100%	31.7%	5,684	100%	37.3%
No school response	No weapon	842	97.7%	1.1%	253	100%	0.4%	293	99.0%	1.9%
	Weapon	20	2.3%	0.0%	-	0.0%	0.0%	3	1.0%	0.0%
	Total	862	100%	1.1%	253	100%	0.4%	296	100%	1.9%
Other	No weapon	-	-	-	961	98.7%	1.7%	754	98.6%	4.9%
	Weapon	-	-	-	13	1.3%	0.0%	11	1.4%	0.1%
	Total	-	-	-	974	100%	1.7%	765	100%	5.0%
Other response to assault	No weapon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Weapon	1	100%	0.0%	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	1	100%	0.0%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Out-of-school suspension	No weapon	49,300	97.8%	64.4%	36,921	98.1%	64.5%	8,131	96.1%	53.3%
	Weapon	1,090	2.2%	1.4%	706	1.9%	1.2%	333	3.9%	2.2%
	Total	50,390	100%	65.8%	37,627	100%	65.7%	8,464	100%	55.5%
Removal by hearing officer	No weapon	8	100%	0.0%	1	100%	0.0%	-	-	-
	Weapon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	8	100%	0.0%	1	100%	0.0%	-	-	-
Student requested transfer	No weapon	50	86.2%	0.1%	32	94.1%	0.1%	9	81.8%	0.1%
	Weapon	8	13.8%	0.0%	2	5.9%	0.0%	2	18.2%	0.0%
	Total	58	100%	0.1%	34	100%	0.1%	11	100%	0.1%
Student withdrew	No weapon	85	85.0%	0.1%	69	90.8%	0.1%	5	71.4%	0.0%
	Weapon	15	15.0%	0.0%	7	9.2%	0.0%	2	28.6%	0.0%
	Total	100	100%	0.1%	76	100%	0.1%	7	100%	0.0%
Unilateral removal	No weapon	2	66.7%	0.0%	10	83.3%	0.0%	2	50.0%	0.0%
	Weapon	1	33.3%	0.0%	2	16.7%	0.0%	2	50.0%	0.0%
	Total	3	100%	0.0%	12	100%	0.0%	4	100%	0.0%
Total	Total	76,530	100%	100%	57,278	100%	100%	15,248	100%	100%

Under Suspension/Expulsion at the Time

For each student involved in a reported incident, LEAs must indicate whether they were under another suspension or expulsion at the time the incident occurred. As shown in Table 5, only a small percentage of incidents each year, less than 1.0%, involve students who were under another suspension or expulsion at the time of the incident, regardless of whether a weapon was involved. During all three years, weapons incidents accounted for 1.5-4.9% of incidents in which a student was under current suspension or expulsion, with the highest percent being in the 2020-21 school year.

Table 5. Student Suspension or Expulsion Status at the Time of Reported Disciplinary Incidents by Weapon Involvement, 2018-19 through 2020-21

		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Not under current suspension/expulsion	Not Weapon	68,030	98.3%	50,504	98.4%	13,431	97.2%
	Weapon	1,215	1.8%	806	1.6%	393	2.8%
	Total	69,237	100%	51,302	100%	13,824	100%
Under current expulsion/suspension	Not Weapon	594	98.5%	452	97.4%	136	95.1%
	Weapon	9	1.5%	12	2.6%	7	4.9%
	Total	603	100%	464	100%	143	100%

Law Enforcement Involvement

Administrators have the option to refer a student to law enforcement regardless of whether they take disciplinary action. After referring a student to law enforcement, law enforcement officer(s) can choose to respond in a variety of ways. Some actions are formal, such as taking the student into custody and referring them to the county attorney, giving the student a formal referral to juvenile court, or referring the student to a community program (e.g., youth services bureau for counseling and community service). Other responses are less formal. For example, the officer may meet with the student and their family, the student and school staff, or with the student alone. The officer may agree to mentor the student, develop an informal agreement with the student, or facilitate a restorative justice conference with all the people affected by identified harm. Reporting guidance states that LEAs must report all referrals to law enforcement and school-related arrests for incidents that occur on school grounds or during a school-related activity. Although the decision to arrest a student is made by a law enforcement officer, rather than school officials, they are still a part of the student experience.

From 2018-19 through 2020-21, approximately 10.0% of students reported in disciplinary incidents were referred to law enforcement (see Table 6). During that period, 4.7-7.0% of referrals to law enforcement were related to incidents involving a weapon. Of the students who were referred to law enforcement, approximately 3.0% are subsequently arrested (see Table 7). Weapons incidents accounted for just 4.4-7.3% of all school-related arrests reported from 2018-19 through 2020-21.

Table 6. Referrals to Law Enforcement by Weapon Involvement, 2018-19 through 2020-21

		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Not referred to law enforcement	Not weapon	67,133	98.7%	50,684	98.8%	13,012	97.7%
	Weapon	900	1.3%	607	1.2%	302	2.3%
	Total	68,033	100%	51,291	100%	13,314	100%
Referred to law enforcement	Not weapon	6,626	94.8%	4,634	95.3%	1,535	93.0%
	Weapon	363	5.2%	229	4.7%	115	7.0%
	Total	6,989	100%	4,863	100%	1,650	100%
Total		75,022	100%	56,154	100%	14,964	100%

Table 7. School-Related Arrests Following a Referral to Law Enforcement by Weapon Involvement, 2018-19 through 2020-21

		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Not arrested	Not weapon	6,279	94.8%	4,498	95.3%	1,492	93.0%
	Weapon	341	5.2%	220	4.7%	113	7.0%
	Total	6,620	100%	4,718	100%	1,605	100%
Arrested	Not weapon	278	92.7%	135	93.8%	43	95.6%
	Weapon	22	7.3%	9	6.3%	2	4.4%
	Total	300	100%	144	100%	45	100%
Total		6,989	100%	4,863	100%	1,650	100%

**Note: Due to a technical error, arrest data is missing for 69 referrals to law enforcement.*

Time and Location

When reporting an incident in DIRS, the options for when an incident occurred are “during school hours” or “outside of school hours.” To report incident location, LEAs can select all applicable options from a list of 10 location categories, which are included in Table 9. The location type “Online” was introduced for the first time in the 2020-21 school year, following the shift to online learning during COVID-19. It is important to note that, during COVID-19, the idea of “classroom” took on a different meaning, and may have been interpreted differently at different schools. For example, some LEAs may have interpreted “classroom” to mean any online forum in which students received instruction, while others may have reserved the term for in-person learning settings only.

The vast majority of reported weapon incidents occurred “during school hours” (92.5-95.3% throughout 2018-19 to 2020-21). The three most common locations for incidents are the classroom, hallway, or other indoor area, respectively.

Table 8. Reported Weapon Incidents by Time of Incident, 2018-19 through 2020-21

	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
During School Hours	1,156	94.4%	757	92.5%	381	95.3%
Outside of School Hours	68	5.6%	61	7.5%	19	4.8%
Total	1,224	100%	818	100%	400	100%

Table 9. Reported Weapons Incidents by Location of Incident, 2018-19 through 2020-21

	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Classroom	489	40.0%	284	34.7%	164	41.0%
Hallway	184	15.0%	136	16.6%	54	13.5%
Other indoor area	173	14.1%	116	14.2%	49	12.3%
Locker	108	8.8%	64	7.8%	26	6.5%
School Bus	106	8.7%	87	10.6%	37	9.3%
Other outdoor area (on campus)	75	6.1%	61	7.5%	32	8.0%
Restroom	57	4.7%	59	7.2%	21	5.3%
Parking lot	39	3.2%	19	2.3%	16	4.0%
Off campus	23	1.9%	12	1.5%	3	0.8%
Online	N/A	0.0%	N/A	0.0%	7	1.8%
Total	1,224	100%	818	100%	400	100%

Weapon Types

Below, Table 10 shows that the two most frequently reported weapon types in all three years are a pocketknife less than 2 ½ inches and knife. Each year, less than 2.5% of reported weapons were firearms or explosive devices, including hand guns, long guns, and bombs.

Table 10. Reported Number of Weapons by Weapon Type, 2018-19 through 2020-21

Weapon	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Pocketknife, less than 2 1/2 inches	322	23.3%	204	22.8%	132	29.5%
Knife	322	23.3%	220	24.6%	117	26.1%
Sharp Object (e.g. razor blade)	206	14.9%	105	11.7%	55	12.3%
Pocketknife, 2 1/2 inches or greater	210	15.2%	100	11.2%	54	12.1%
Replica/toy gun	40	2.9%	36	4.0%	24	5.4%
Stun guns/taser gun	45	3.3%	23	2.6%	16	3.6%
Pellet/BB/air gun	62	4.5%	63	7.0%	15	3.3%
Arson	65	4.7%	62	6.9%	11	2.5%
Blunt object (e.g., chains)	50	3.6%	39	4.4%	7	1.6%
Long gun	12	0.9%	4	0.4%	7	1.6%
Mace/noxious substance	36	2.6%	21	2.3%	6	1.3%
Hand gun	10	0.7%	18	2.0%	4	0.9%
Paintball gun	-	0.0%	1	0.1%	-	0.0%
Bomb	1	0.1%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%
Total	1,381	100%	896	100%	448	100%

School Property Costs

For all incidents reported in DIRS, LEAs must report the estimated the cost of damage to school. Estimated costs for school property damage are reported in one of three categories in DIRS: \$0, \$1 - \$500, or over \$500.

From the 2018-19 through the 2020-21 school years, LEAs reported that less than 2% of all weapons incidents resulted in costs to the school due to property damage. During that time, weapons incidents accounted for 1.9-3.8% of all incidents that incurred costs due to school property damage.

Table 11. Weapon Incidents Resulting in Reported School Property Damage Costs, 2018-19 through 2020-21

Cost	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
\$0	1,202	98.2%	809	98.9%	393	98.3%
\$1 - \$500	15	1.2%	8	1.0%	5	1.3%
Over \$500	7	0.6%	1	0.1%	2	0.5%
Total	1,224	100.0%	818	100.0%	400	100.0%

Persons Harmed

LEAs are required to report whether a person was harmed during incidents involving assault, all forms of bullying, harassment, hazing, robbery, and homicide. If LEAs report someone being harmed during an incident, they must indicate whether they were able to identify the persons harmed and, if so, select from one of five types of victims, including: Student (MARSS information known), Teacher, District Employee, Student (MARSS information unknown), and Multiple (e.g., bus, class, schoolwide).² In addition, they must report any incurred medical expenses.

For all other incident types, reporting information about persons who were harmed introduces potential for inconsistent reporting. Some LEAs may choose to indicate whether someone was harmed, while others may only report what is required. Although all weapons incidents must be reported, LEAs are not required to indicate whether a person was harmed. Consequently, data related to harmed persons is more likely to be absent from weapons incidents than the six incident types listed above. Therefore, the data in this section are limited to weapons incidents and it may not capture instances in which people may have been harmed.

In all three years, fewer than 9.0% of reported weapons incidents entailed harm. Of those, the most frequently reported type of person harmed, 5.3% or less each year, are enrolled students whose identities are known. Teachers and district employees were reported as harmed in less than 1.5% of weapons incidents during 2018-19 through 2020-21.

Table 12. Reported Weapons Incidents by Type of Person Harmed, 2018-19 through 2020-21

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Student (MARSS information known)	65	36	14
Student (MARSS information unknown)	23	20	8
District Employee	16	5	3
Teacher	2	6	1
Multiple (i.e., bus, class, schoolwide)	1	N/A	N/A
None	1117	751	374
Total	1224	818	400

Table 13 and Table 14 provide the reported level of injury and costs incurred if someone was harmed during a weapon incident. A single incident may involve multiple harmed people and, due to the nature of the data, it is impossible to know which or how many of them may have experienced an injury or incurred medical costs. Therefore, data in the tables below are only estimates of the number of injuries and incurred costs. In the 2020-21 school year, no weapons incidents involving harm resulted in injury and fewer than 6.0% of weapons incidents involving harm resulted in injury in the two prior years. No serious injuries were reported for weapons incidents from 2018-19 through 2020-21, and only one incident in 2018-19 incurred medical costs.

² "Multiple (e.g., bus, class, schoolwide)" was removed as an option after the 2018-19 school year.

Table 13. Count of Weapons Incidents Involving Harmed Persons by Reported Level of Injury, 2018-19 through 2020-21

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
No Injury	102	62	25
Injury - Not Serious	1	4	-
Injury - Serious	-	-	-
Total	103	66	25

Table 14. Weapons Incidents Resulting in Reported Medical Costs to Persons Harmed by Weapon Involvement, 2018-19 through 2020-21

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
\$0	102	66	25
\$1 - \$500	-	-	-
Over \$500	1	-	-
Total	103	66	25

Note: Due to a technical error, the medical costs for the person(s) harmed were not recorded for one non-weapon incident.

Student Grade Level

When incidents are entered in DIRS, specific demographic and academic characteristics of all students are automatically recorded based on the date the incident occurred (see the Data Overview section for more details about student demographics).

Table 15 shows the count and percentage of disciplinary actions for weapons incidents by student grade level for each school year. From 2018-19 through 2020-21, elementary school students (grades kindergarten through five) received 23.7-29.2% of all disciplinary actions for weapons incidents, with the highest rate for this group in the 2020-21 school year. During the same time, middle school students (grades six through eight) received 37.9-41.2% of disciplinary actions for weapons incidents, also with the highest rate in the 2020-21 school year. Finally, high school students (grades nine through 12) received 29.6-38.4% of all disciplinary actions, with their highest rate (39.9%) in the 2019-20 school year, followed by a drop of 10.3 percentage points in the 2020-21 school year.

Table 15. Reported Disciplinary Actions for Weapons Incidents by Student Grade Level, 2018-19 through 2020-21

Grade	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
K	16	1.2%	4	0.5%	4	0.9%
1	27	2.1%	17	2.0%	6	1.4%
2	49	3.8%	22	2.6%	15	3.5%
3	64	4.9%	34	4.0%	22	5.1%
4	71	5.4%	44	5.1%	35	8.1%
5	82	6.3%	68	7.9%	44	10.2%
6	138	10.6%	92	10.7%	54	12.5%
7	193	14.8%	98	11.4%	61	14.1%
8	163	12.5%	138	16.0%	63	14.6%
9	152	11.7%	110	12.8%	31	7.2%
10	142	10.9%	97	11.3%	38	8.8%
11	118	9.1%	75	8.7%	33	7.6%
12	88	6.8%	61	7.1%	26	6.0%
Total	1,303	100%	860	100%	432	100%

Conclusion

Regulations and reporting requirements regarding the use of discipline in Minnesota public districts and schools have changed over time and continue to evolve. Although regulations and reporting requirements did not change during the school years covered in this report, COVID-19 changed the education environment and implementation of discipline practices during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years in ways never seen before. Discipline data submitted during this time provides critical insight for understanding the experiences of students and educators. Rather than illustrating changes to school climate and discipline practices under normal circumstances, they show how such events impact students' and educators' experiences.

Data presented in this report show that, from 2018-19 through 2020-21, as the number of reported disciplinary incidents and actions sharply declined, general patterns in the data remain consistent. Although students and educators engaged in very different ways during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, most aspects of reported incidents remained largely constant. For example, the frequency and rate of incident and weapon type, outcome, law enforcement involvement, location, time, costs, and resulting harm fluctuated very little.

Appendix A: 2018-19 Through 2020-21 DIRS Reporting Requirements

The majority of student discipline reporting requirements are based on the outcome of an incident, whether or not there was a disciplinary action or law enforcement involvement, while two requirements are based on the type of incident.

- Incidents resulting in one of the *outcomes* below must be reported, regardless of the incident type.
- Incidents involving the *incident types* below must be reported, regardless of the outcome.

The table below outlines all DIRS reporting requirements. See the proceeding appendices for definition of the disciplinary action and incident types available in DIRS.

Table 16. DIRS Reporting Requirements

Outcome	Incident Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School disciplinary actions involving a student, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In-school suspension <i>Effective for the 2018-19 school year, in-school suspensions are reported for all students, regardless of special education status.</i> ○ Out-of-school suspension ○ Expulsion ○ Exclusion ○ Administrative transfer ○ Student requested transfer ○ Student withdrew ○ Unilateral removal to alternative setting ○ Removal by hearing officer • Law enforcement involvement in school-related incident: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Referral to law enforcement ○ School-related arrest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical assault of a district employee by a student • Possession or use of a dangerous weapon in a school zone

Appendix B: DIRS Disciplinary Outcome Definitions

Below, Table 17 lists all of the types of disciplinary outcomes in DIRS that are available for LEAs to select when reporting an incident.

Table 17. DIRS Disciplinary Outcome Types and Definitions

DIRS Disciplinary Outcome	Definition
Administrative transfer	Applicable when a district chooses to transfer an enrolled student to another school within the district in lieu of or in conjunction with another type of disciplinary action.
Exclusion from the school setting	“Exclusion” means an action taken by the school board to prevent enrollment or reenrollment of a pupil for a period that shall not extend beyond the school year. Minn. Stat. § 121A.41, subd. 4
Expulsion from the school setting	“Expulsion” means a school board action to prohibit an enrolled pupil from further attendance for up to 12 months from the date the student is expelled. Minn. Stat. § 121A.41, subd. 5
In-school suspension	Is an instance in which a child is temporarily removed from his or her regular classroom(s) for at least half a day for disciplinary purposes, but remains under the direct supervision of school personnel. Direct supervision means school personnel are physically in the same location as students under their supervision. Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)
No school response	Option for instances in which a student was involved in an incident but administrators determined no disciplinary action was warranted, or the student was referred to law enforcement in lieu of disciplinary action.
Student requested to transfer to another district	Applicable when an enrolled student requests a transfer to another district in lieu of or in conjunction with another type of disciplinary action.
Student requested to transfer within district	Applicable when an enrolled student requests a transfer to another school within the school district in lieu of or in conjunction with another type of disciplinary action.
Student withdrew from school	Reported when an enrolled student withdraws from school in lieu of or in conjunction with another type of disciplinary action.
Other	Option for instances in which a student was involved in an incident but the response taken by administrators did not meet the criteria for any other disciplinary action type, or the student was referred to law enforcement in lieu of disciplinary action.

DIRS Disciplinary Outcome	Definition
Out-of-school suspension	<p>An action by the school administration, under rules promulgated by the school board, prohibiting a pupil from attending school for a period of no more than ten school days. If a suspension is longer than five days, the suspending administrator must provide the superintendent with a reason for the longer suspension. This definition does not apply to dismissal from school for one school day or less, except as provided in federal law for a student with a disability. Each suspension action may include a readmission plan. The readmission plan shall include, where appropriate, a provision for implementing alternative educational services upon readmission and may not be used to extend the current suspension. Consistent with section 125A.091, subdivision 5, the readmission plan must not obligate a parent to provide a sympathomimetic medication for the parent's child as a condition of readmission. The school administration may not impose consecutive suspensions against the same pupil for the same course of conduct, or incident of misconduct, except where the pupil will create an immediate and substantial danger to self or to surrounding persons or property, or where the district is in the process of initiating an expulsion, in which case the school administration may extend the suspension to a total of 15 school days.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Minn. Stat. § 121A.43, subd. 10</p> <p><i>Note: Out-of-school suspension reporting guidance during the years covered in this report directed districts to report removals of special education students “for more than a half day up to one school day should be reported as a full day of removal.”</i></p>
Removal by hearing officer on determination of likely injury	<p>Only applicable to students in special education when a hearing officer removes a special education student from the student’s educational placement due to the likelihood of injury.</p>
Unilateral removal to an alternative educational setting	<p>Only applicable to students receiving special education services. School personnel may remove a student to an interim alternative educational setting for up to 45 school days in three circumstances:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Student carries a weapon to or possesses a weapon at school, on school premises, or to or at a school function under the jurisdiction of an SEA or an LEA; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Weapon refers to a dangerous weapon as defined by 18 U.S.C. 930(g)(2). 6. Knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs, or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance, while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of an SEA or an LEA; or <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Controlled substance means a drug or other substance identified under schedules I, II, III, IV, or V in section 202(c) of the Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. § 812 (c). 7. Has inflicted serious bodily injury upon another person while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of an SEA or an LEA. 34 C.F.R. 300.530(i)(1)-(4). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Serious bodily injury is defined in 18 U.S.C. 1365(h)(3).

Appendix C: DIRS Incident Type Definitions and Severity Rankings

All 29 of the DIRS incident types are defined below, along with the severity ranking assigned to the incident type in DIRS.

Severity		
Rank	Incident Type	Definition
20	Alcohol	As defined by district policies.
4	Arson	As defined by district policies.
5	Assault	As defined by district policies.
28	Attendance	Report this activity when a student may be subject to disciplinary action for an unexcused absence according to the district's discipline policy. This may include a student's failure to attend detention due to attendance issues. In addition, consider statutory exemptions under Minnesota Statutes, section 120A.22, subdivision 12.
3	Bomb	As defined by district policies.
10	Bomb Threat	As defined by district policies.
13	Bullying (all forms except cyber bullying)	<p>Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.031, subdivision 2:</p> <p>(e) "Bullying" means intimidating, threatening, abusive, or harming conduct that is objectively offensive and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) there is an actual or perceived imbalance of power between the student engaging in prohibited conduct and the target of the behavior and the conduct is repeated or forms a pattern; or (2) materially and substantially interferes with a student's educational opportunities or performance or ability to participate in school functions or activities or receive school benefits, services, or privileges.
27	Computer	As defined by district policies.
9	Controlled Substances (prescription)	<p>Use this activity when a student possesses medication that is prescribed to the student, but the possession is against school policy. School district/charter school policy must also be consistent with state law:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.221 addresses when it is appropriate for a student to possess and use asthma inhalers at school. • Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.2205 addresses when it is appropriate for a student to possess and use non-syringe injectors of epinephrine at school.

Controlled substances are identified under Schedules I, II, III, IV or V of the Controlled Substance Act. The United States Code and Minnesota statutes define controlled substances. Under Minnesota law, the term does not include distilled spirits, wine, malt beverages, intoxicating liquors or tobacco. Relevant state and federal laws are listed below:

- [Minnesota Statutes § 152.01, subd. 4](#) – defines controlled substance
- [Minnesota Statutes § 152.02](#) – defines the five schedules of controlled substances
- [21 U.S.C. § 812 \(c\)](#) – establishes the five controlled substance schedules and the classes of substances in each schedule

14	Cyber Bullying	Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.031, subdivision 2: (f) "Cyberbullying" means bullying using technology or other electronic communication, including but not limited to a transfer of a sign, signal, writing, image, sound, or data, including a post on a social network Internet website or forum, transmitted through a computer, cell phone, or other electronic device.
19	Disruptive/Disorderly Conduct/Insubordination	As defined by district policies.
17	Extortion	As defined by district policies.
12	Fighting	Use for student conduct that meets the district’s disciplinary definition of fighting and it does not rise to the level of the district’s definition of physical assault.
25	Gang Activity	As defined by district policies.
15	Harassment	As defined by district policies.
6	Hazing	As defined by district policies.
1	Homicide	As defined by district policies.
8	Illegal Drugs	Report this activity when a student possesses or is involved in the sale of a controlled substance, as identified by Minnesota Statutes, section 152.02 , that he or she does not have a prescription for. This activity does not include alcohol or tobacco.
29	Other	As defined by district policies.
22	Over-the-Counter Medications against school policy	Report this activity when a student possesses or uses over-the-counter medication, and the possession or use is against school policy. School policy must also be consistent with state law. Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.222 provides information regarding when secondary students may have possession of or use nonprescription pain relievers.
26	Pyrotechnics	As defined by district policies.
7	Robbery (using force)	As defined by district policies.

11	Terroristic Threats	As defined by district policies.
23	Theft	As defined by district policies.
18	Threat/Intimidation	As defined by district policies.
21	Tobacco	As defined by district policies.
24	Vandalism/Property Related	As defined by district policies.
16	Verbal Abuse	As defined by district policies.
2	Weapon	<p>Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.06, subdivision 1(1), mandates dangerous weapon reporting. Incidents involving weapons that meet Minnesota’s definition of a dangerous weapon must be reported, even if there is no corresponding student or disciplinary action. For example, a weapon may be found on school property but possession is not tied to a particular student. When reporting an incident involving a weapon, DIRS will present a list of options defined in state and federal law. Links to the laws are included in DIRS and listed below for your reference:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minnesota Statutes, section 609.02, subdivision 6 "Dangerous weapon" means any firearm, whether loaded or unloaded, or any device designed as a weapon and capable of producing death or great bodily harm, any combustible or flammable liquid or other device or instrumentality that, in the manner it is used or intended to be used, is calculated or likely to produce death or great bodily harm, or any fire that is used to produce death or great bodily harm. As used in this subdivision, "flammable liquid" means any liquid having a flash point below 100 degrees Fahrenheit and having a vapor pressure not exceeding 40 pounds per square inch (absolute) at 100 degrees Fahrenheit but does not include intoxicating liquor as defined in section 340A.101. As used in this subdivision, "combustible liquid" is a liquid having a flash point at or above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. • United States Code, title 18, section 930(g)(2) “The term ‘dangerous weapon’ means a weapon, device, instrument, material, or substance, animate or inanimate, that is used for, or is readily capable of, causing death or serious bodily injury, except that such term does not include a pocket knife with a blade of less than 2 ½ inches in length.” • United States Code, title 18, section 921(a)(3) “The term ‘firearm’ means (A) any weapon (including a starter gun) which will or is designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive; (B) the

frame or receiver of any such weapon; (C) any firearm muffler or firearm silencer; or (D) any destructive device. Such term does not include an antique firearm.”

- [United States Code, title 18, section 921\(a\)\(3\)\(4\)](#)
any explosive, incendiary, or poison gas— (i) bomb, (ii) grenade, (iii) rocket having a propellant charge of more than four ounces, (iv) missile having an explosive or incendiary charge of more than one-quarter ounce, (v) mine, or (vi) device similar to any of the devices described in the preceding clauses;
any type of weapon (other than a shotgun or a shotgun shell which the Attorney General finds is generally recognized as particularly suitable for sporting purposes) by whatever name known which will, or which may be readily converted to, expel a projectile by the action of an explosive or other propellant, and which has any barrel with a bore of more than one-half inch in diameter; and
any combination of parts either designed or intended for use in converting any device into any destructive device described in subparagraph (A) or (B) and from which a destructive device may be readily assembled.
The term “destructive device” shall not include any device which is neither designed nor redesigned for use as a weapon; any device, although originally designed for use as a weapon, which is redesigned for use as a signaling, pyrotechnic, line throwing, safety, or similar device; surplus ordnance sold, loaned, or given by the Secretary of the Army pursuant to the provisions of section 4684 (2), 4685, or 4686 of title 10; or any other device which the Attorney General finds is not likely to be used as a weapon, is an antique, or is a rifle which the owner intends to use solely for sporting, recreational or cultural purposes.
 - Items outside of the definition of firearm include BB guns, air guns, paint guns, replica/toy guns and cap guns. These items do not fit the federal definition of a firearm because they do not expel a projectile by the action of an explosive. Accordingly, a school district/charter school is not mandated under [Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.44](#) to expel a student for having one of the weapons named above. A school district may include those guns under its definition of a weapon as delineated in its disciplinary policy.
-