

RECEIVED

OCT 22 1998

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE LIBRARY
STATE OFFICE BUILDING
ST. PAUL, MN 55155

**DANGEROUS
WEAPONS
INCIDENTS
IN
MINNESOTA
SCHOOLS**

**1995-1996
1996-1997
SCHOOL
YEARS**

**For information or a copy of this report, contact:
Thomas J. Lombard, PhD
Division of Monitoring and Compliance
528 Capitol Square Building
550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, MN 55101
Internet address: <http://cfl.state.mn.us/dmc>**

August 1998

DANGEROUS WEAPONS INCIDENTS IN MINNESOTA SCHOOLS 1995-96 AND 1996-97 SCHOOL YEARS

Purpose of the Report

School districts are required to submit individual reports of each dangerous weapons incident involving a student (see Minn. Stat. §121.207). These incidents are submitted to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning (CFL) and used as the basis for an annual summary of findings. This document summarizes findings from the third and fourth years that information on dangerous weapons has been reported by Minnesota public schools. Due to rising public concern over shootings on school grounds, the primary focus will be on firearm incidents.

Limitations of the Data

The data summarized below are based on confirmed incidents reported by local school districts. For example, it is accurate to say that reported firearm incidents increased from 189 in 1994-95 to 326 the following year. Since it is unknown how many incidents went unreported, it would not be safe to generalize that there was a 72% increase statewide in one year.

Caution is required in making inferences from the findings here because there have been reporting problems which limit the generalizability of the data:

- Though response rates are improving, some school districts partially report incidents and others do not report at all.
- Submitted reports often have missing data.
- There is some confusion at the local level over dangerous weapons and other discipline reporting requirements.
- School districts vary in what they consider a dangerous weapon.

General Findings

School districts are asked to select from the following categories of weapons when reporting an incident:

Firearm
Knife/Cutting Instrument
Fire/Explosive
Blunt Object
Other Weapon

CFL received local reports of 1161 confirmed incidents involving dangerous weapons for the 1995-96 school year, followed by reports of 992 incidents for the 1996-97 school year. Table 1 shows a comparison of annual totals over the four years since CFL started receiving reports.

Table 1. Dangerous Weapons Incidents Reported Annually in Minnesota, 1993-94 to 1996-97			
1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
872	1224	1161	1119

At a minimum, the number of incidents reported each year as shown in Table 1 are confirmed. What remains uncertain is how many incidents have gone unreported. In 1994-95, only 41% of the state's school districts notified CFL of at least one dangerous weapons incident. The response rates improved to 61% and 65% the following two years, helped by CFL's development of electronic reporting options. Still, one-third of the state's districts have not indicated whether they had zero or more incidents during 1995-96 and 1996-97.

A comparison of the four major categories of dangerous weapons appears in Table 2. This comparison reveals:

- Possession or use of a knife or cutting instrument continues to make up the majority of cases, as it has for four consecutive years.
- The number of incidents involving fire or explosives (usually fireworks) and blunt instruments (many variations) have been consistent for the two years that data are available.
- The reported possession of firearms went up noticeably from 189 in 1994-95 to 326 in 1995-96, but decreased to 152 in 1996-97.

Table 2. Comparison of Types* of Dangerous Weapons Incidents, 1993-94 to 1996-97				
	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Firearm	172	189	326	152
Knife/Cutting	459	666	665	680
Fire/Explosive	(see "other")	(see "other")	51	50
Blunt Object	(see "other")	(see "other")	119	110
Other Weapon	241	369	(undetermined)	127
TOTALS	872	1224	1161	1119

*Categories include look-alikes, replicas and toys.

Firearm Incidents

One of the most prominent concerns in the general public about violence in schools has to do with firearm incidents, especially handguns. Nationally, the frequency of fatal shootings in schools has followed an erratic pattern with an increase last year after a declining trend (see Table 3).

Table 3. School Shooting Deaths in the United States					
1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98
55	51	20	35	25	40

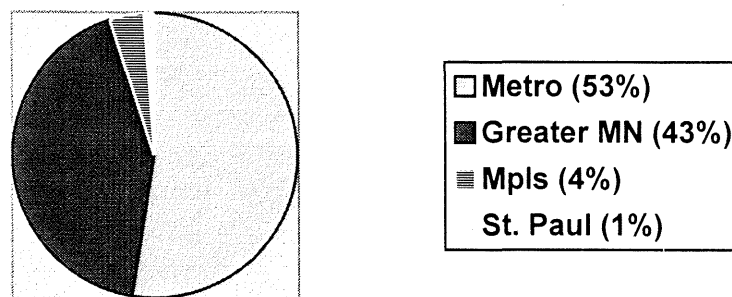
Source: Justice Policy Institute

CFL staff are not aware of any fatalities on Minnesota school grounds due to a firearm incident by an enrolled student. Many factors contribute to this good fortune so far, but the findings here suggest some possible reasons. Firearm incidents typically involve possession without discharging the weapon. In addition, only one-fourth of the firearm incidents involve handguns, which amounted to 83 incidents in 1995-96 and 40 in 1996-97 (see Table 4). One-Half to two-thirds of the firearm incidents involve potentially less lethal weapons like BB guns, toys and replicas.

Table 4. Type of Firearms in Reported Incidents, 1995-96 and 1996-97				
Type of Firearm	Number of Incidents		Percent of Firearm Incidents	
	1995-96	1996-97	1995-96	1996-97
BB Gun	121	16	37%	11%
Handgun	83	40	26%	26%
Replica/Toy	63	87	19%	57%
Other Firearm	27	(undetermined)	8%	---
Shotgun/Rifle	32	9	10%	6%
TOTALS	326	152	100%	100%

The location of reported firearm incidents may also be of interest to policymakers. In 1995-96, the seven-county metro area schools submitted 57% of the firearm incidents, greater Minnesota had the remaining 43% reported incidents. Figure 1 displays a breakdown comparing these geographic zones, while also sorting out the state's two largest school districts.

**Figure 1. Location of Firearm Incidents
in Minnesota, 1995-96.**



Another factor in firearm incidents is the age and gender of the offender. In 1995-96, approximately 5% of these incidents involved students who were 10 years of age and younger; about one-half of all reports involve students in the range from 14 to 17 years of age. Male offenders outnumber females four to one.

Comments

Electronic reporting is expected to replace the use of paper forms statewide, an improvement that could further increase the rate of reporting by local schools. Other efforts are under way to improve data collection. Commissioner Robert Wedl has directed CFL staff to contact all school superintendents to clarify local reporting requirements; this will occur in the fall of the upcoming school year. Another planned improvement is to have superintendents verify when there are no dangerous weapons incidents for the year, an important step needed to clear up questions about unreported incidents in 1997-98 before that year's summary is published.

Further, CFL will continue its leadership efforts to reduce school violence. A major emphasis of this leadership is to have schools teach and practice pro-social skills like conflict resolution, anger management and empathy. Another emphasis is on the use of restorative measures such as victim-offender dialogue and family-group conferencing. A "Make the Peace" media campaign is currently under way. Another source of information that will provide valuable insight into school safety is the Minnesota Student Survey conducted by CFL's Office of Community Services; the next survey results will be available in October or November 1998.