Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation in Maryland Public Schools

Ed. Art § 7-424(g)

A Report to the Maryland General Assembly on Incidents Reported Under the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005

Maryland
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Introduction

The Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005 became effective on July 1, 2005. Pursuant to Section 7-424 of the Education Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) required all county boards of education and the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners to report incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation against students in public schools within their jurisdiction to the Maryland General Assembly. Additionally, MSDE was required to submit an annual report to the Maryland General Assembly summarizing the information included on the bullying, harassment, or intimidation reporting forms filed with local boards during the previous school year.

To ensure effective implementation of the law according to the reporting requirements, MSDE has engaged with each local educational agency (LEA) to inform the appropriate collection and reporting of information. This report describes the process used by MSDE to carry out the mandates of the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005. The reporting period for the March 2024 report encompasses information from the 2022-2023 school year.

MSDE requires each LEA to provide data using the *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Incident Reporting Instrument*, which is in the form of a fillable spreadsheet. Data in this instrument includes the following information:
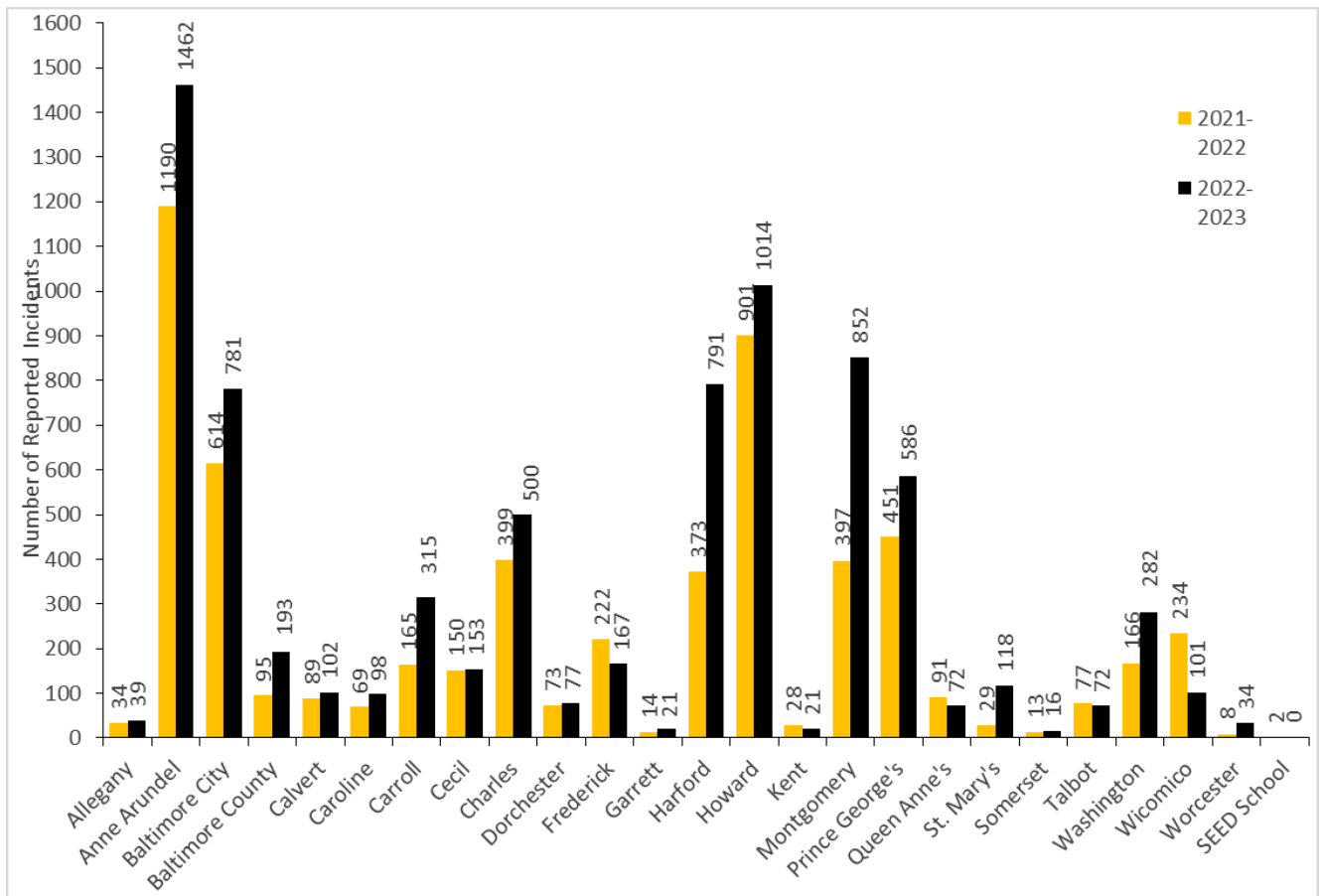
- Number of reported incidents by LEA.

- Incident rates per one thousand students.

- Location of incidents.

- Descriptions of incidents.

- Ages of targeted students.

- Ages of alleged offenders.

- Motives of alleged offenders.

- Students With Disabilities and Bullying Involvement.

- Investigative methods used.

- Interventions, Supports and Corrective actions taken by schools.

- Number of days missed by targeted students.

- Number of days missed by alleged offenders.

- The number of false allegations reported.

By The Numbers: A Look at Statewide Reported Bullying Data

The 24 LEAs and the SEED School of Maryland reported data for the 2022-2023 school year.

There were 7,867 reported incidents of bullying, harassment or intimidation during the 2022-2023 school year in Maryland public schools. During 2021-2022 there were 5,884 reported incidents. This represents a statewide increase of 25.2%. The number of reported incidents in each LEA is shown in Figure 1. Nineteen LEAs indicated an increase in the number of reported incidents. Five LEAs and the SEED School indicated a decrease in the number of reported incidents. The rate of reported bullying incidents in LEAs per 1,000 students enrolled during the 2022-2023 school year is shown in Table 1.

Figure 1: Number of Incidents

The rate of reported bullying incidents in LEAs per 1,000 students enrolled during the last two years is shown in Table 1. Statewide, the number of reported incidents increased by 25.2% in 2022-2023. Nineteen LEAs had an increase in the rates of reported incidents per 1,000 students above, while five LEAs had a decrease in reported rates of incidents.

Table 1: Number of Reported Incidents Per 1,000 Enrolled Students by Local Education Agency and School Year (2020-2021 to 2022–2023)

Number of Reported Incidents Per 1,000 Enrolled Students			
	School Year		
Local Education Agency	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Allegany	0.0	4.2	4.8
Anne Arundel	1.1	14.3	17.3
Baltimore City	0.1	7.9	10.3
Baltimore County	0.1	0.9	1.7
Calvert	0.3	5.8	6.6
Caroline	0.7	12.4	17.3
Carroll	0.6	6.6	12.2
Cecil	1.0	10.1	10.2
Charles	2.9	14.8	18.1
Dorchester	0.6	16.0	17.0
Frederick	0.3	4.9	3.6
Garrett	3.3	4.0	6.0
Harford	0.9	9.8	20.8
Howard	1.4	15.7	17.6

Kent	2.8	15.7	12.0
Montgomery	0.1	2.5	12.0
Prince George's	0.2	3.5	4.5
Queen Anne's	0.3	12.2	9.7
St. Mary's	0.1	1.7	6.7
Somerset	0.4	4.7	5.8
Talbot	1.1	17.0	15.9
Washington	1.9	7.5	12.6
Wicomico	1.0	16.0	6.8
Worcester	1.2	1.2	5.0

Locations of Reported Incidents

Figure 2 shows the statewide locations of reported incidents. Individuals completing the bullying, harassment, or intimidation reporting forms were asked to choose from a list of possible locations both on and off school property. Many of the submitted reports included multiple locations.

The most common location of reported incidents in 2022-2023 was in the classroom (32.4%). This was followed by the school hallways/stairs and transitions (17.7%), a digital device off school property (13.4%), the school playground or campus (12.2%) the school cafeteria (11.7%) and on a school bus (11.7%).

**Figure 2: Statewide Locations of Reported Incidents:**
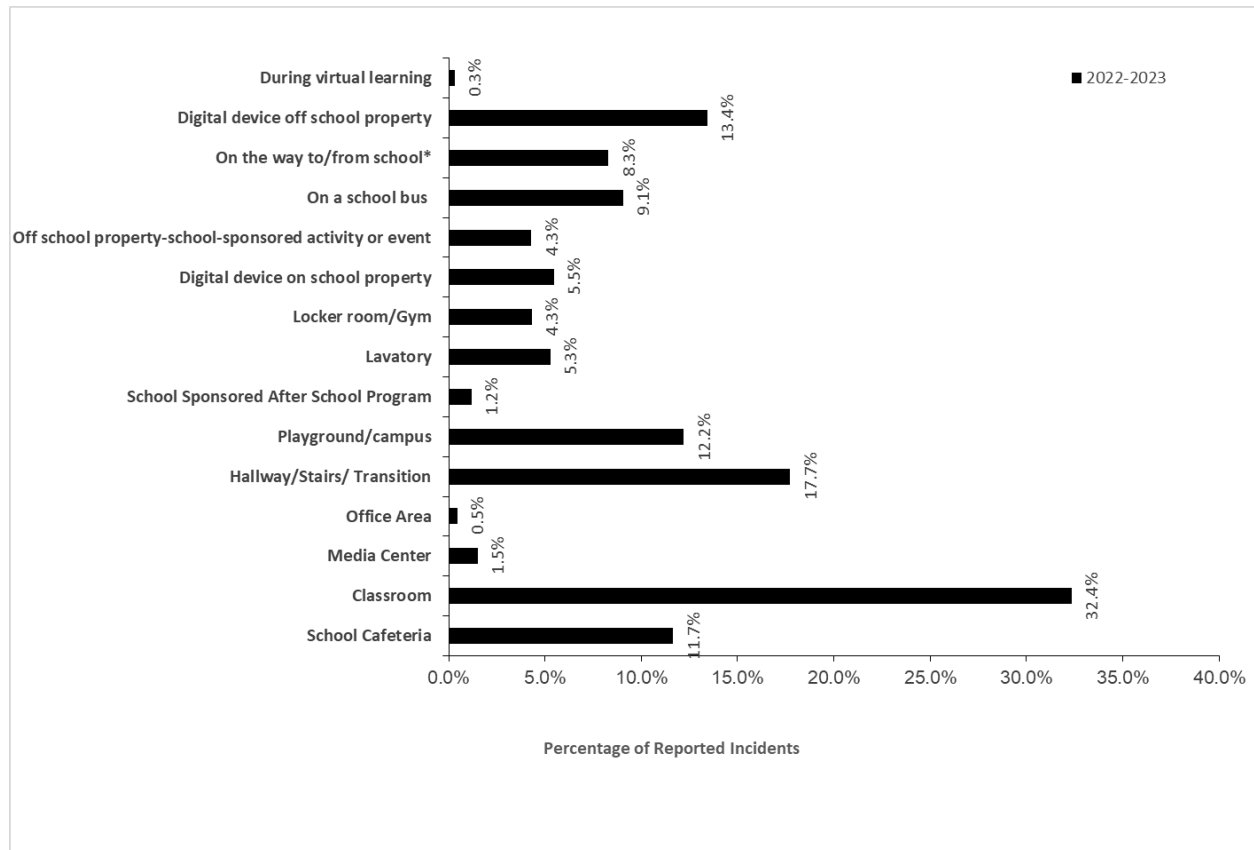
Descriptions of Reported Incidents

Individuals completing the reporting form were asked to choose from a list of descriptions to convey the alleged bullying behavior. The list was compiled from research of the most prevalent types of bullying (see Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form). As detailed in Figure 3, the three most common descriptions of reported incidents in 2022-2023 were:

• Teasing, name calling, making critical remarks, or threatening In person by other means (52.6%)

• Any bullying, harassment, or intimidation that involves physical aggression (46.7%)

• Demeaning behavior just to be mean (45.4%)

Figure 3: Statewide Descriptions of Reported Incidents
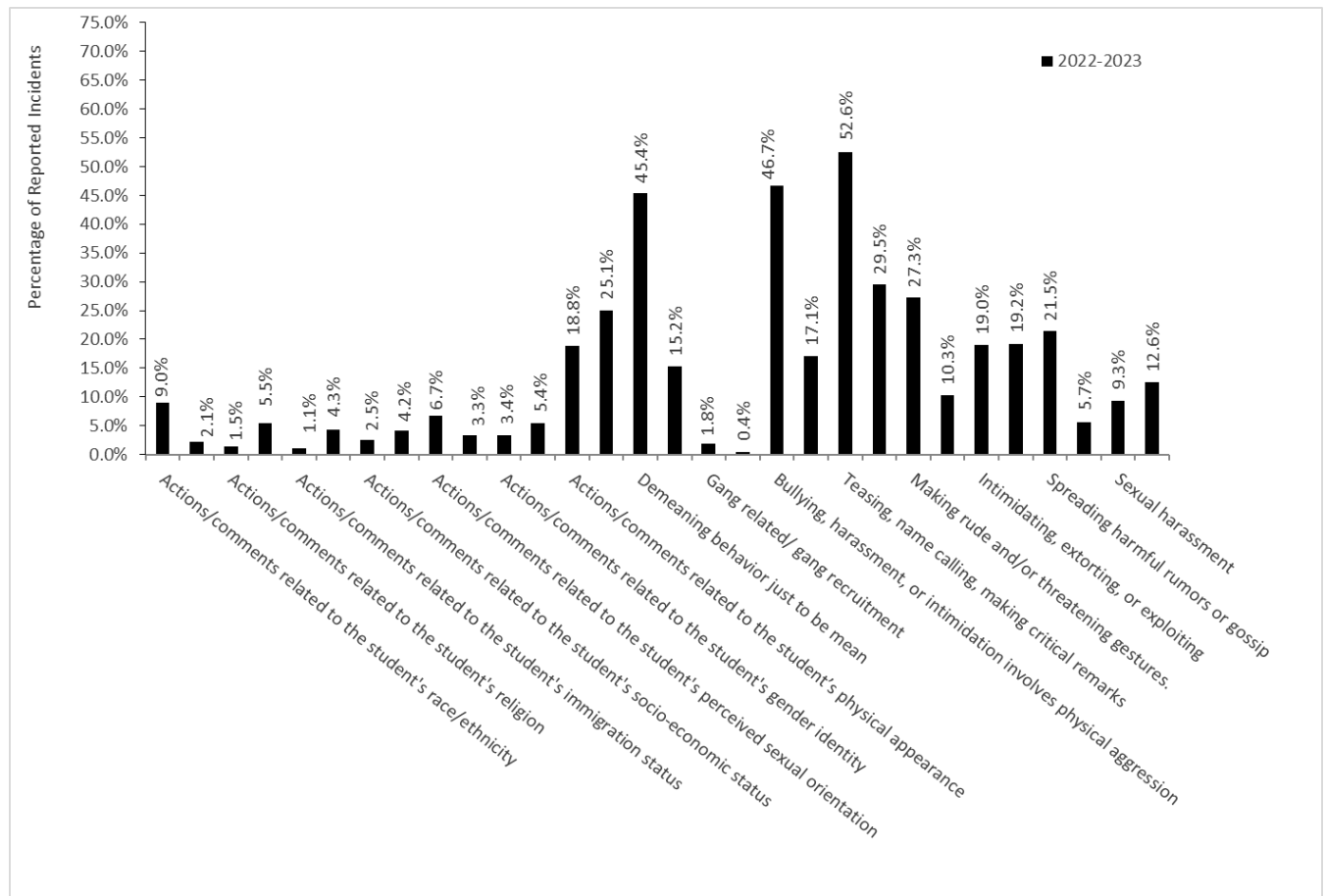
Age of Targeted Students

Figure 4 represents the age of targeted students reported in bullying, harassment, and/or intimidation incidents ranging from birth to four years of age, through to 19 years of age or older. In the 2022-2023 school year, the majority of targeted students were between 10 and 14 years of age, representing the middle school years.
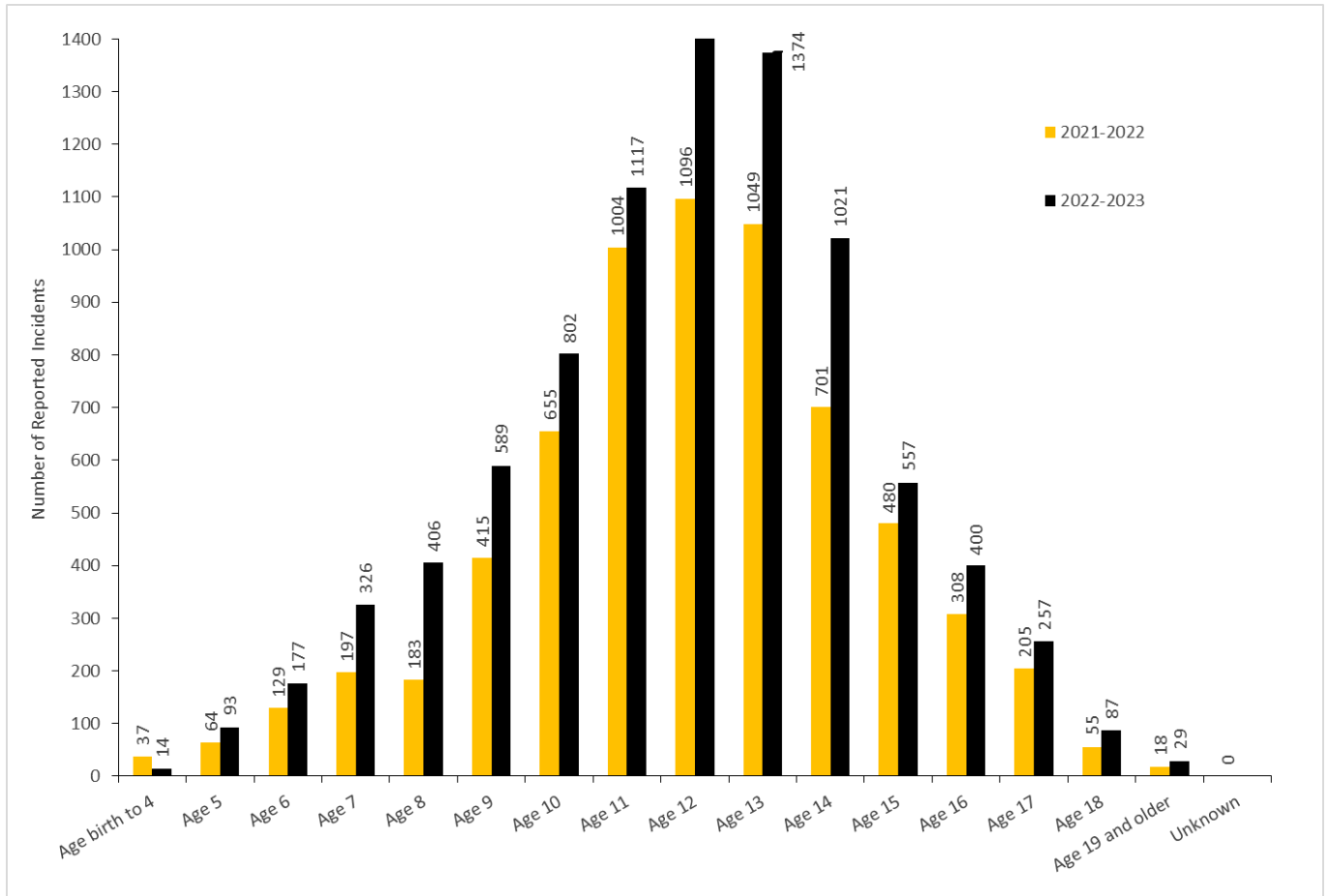
Figure 4: Statewide Ages of Targeted Students
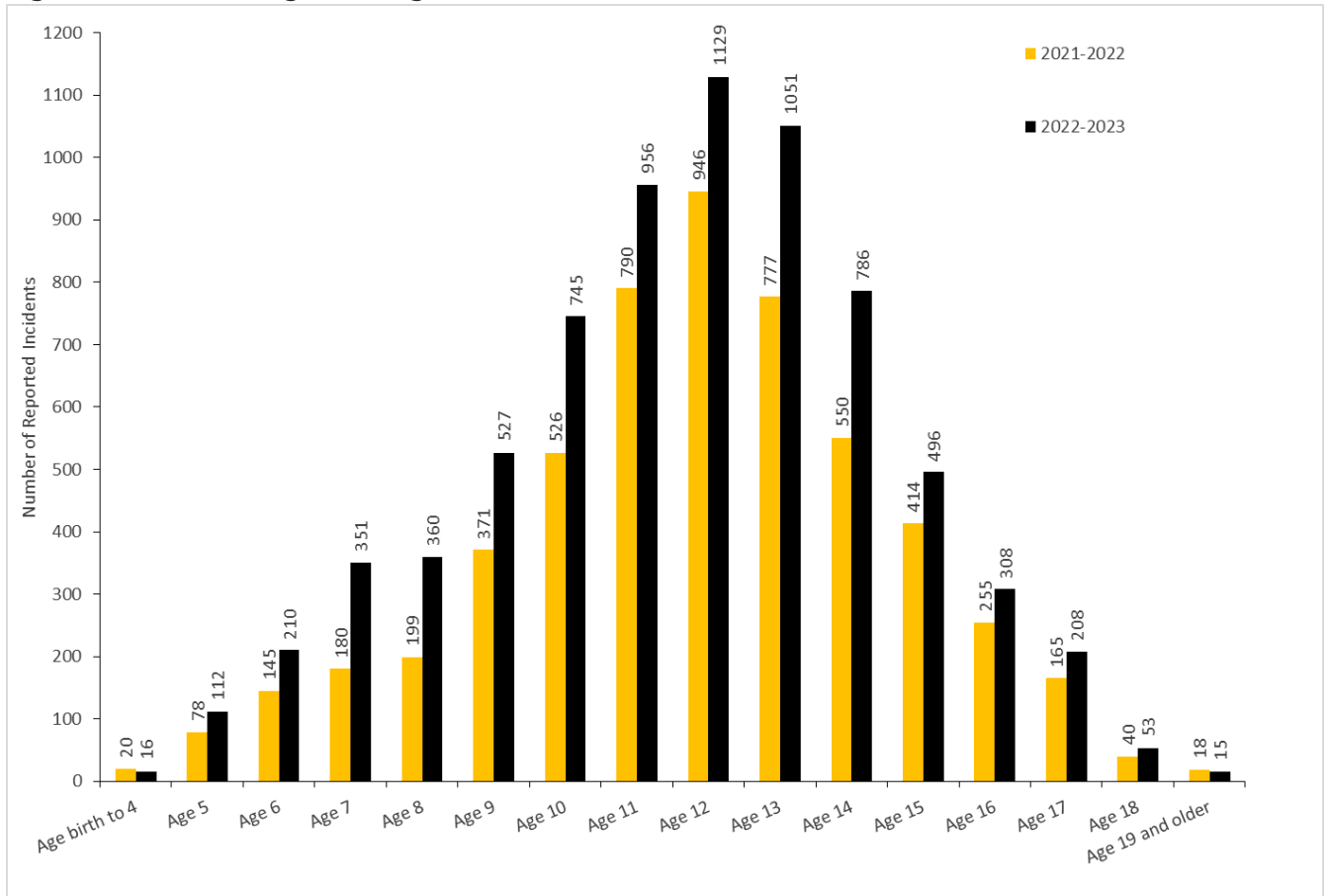
Age of Alleged Offenders

As detailed in Figure 5, the age of alleged offenders ranged from birth to four years of age, through 19 years of age or older, with the majority of alleged offenders between 10 and 14 years of age.

Figure 5: Statewide Ages of Alleged Offenders

# Students With Disabilities and Reported Bullying Involvement

For the 2022-2023 school year, MSDE began collecting data on the reported bullying involvement of students with disabilities as either the targeted student or the offender.

As detailed in Figure 6:

25.8% of the reported incidents involved targeted students identified as having a disability, (16.8% were students with IEPs and 9.0% were students with a 504 plan)

28% of the reported incidents involved an alleged offender identified as having a disability (19.6% were students with IEPs and 8.4% were students with a 504 plan)

Figure 6: Statewide Reported Data: Students with Disabilities and Bullying Involvement
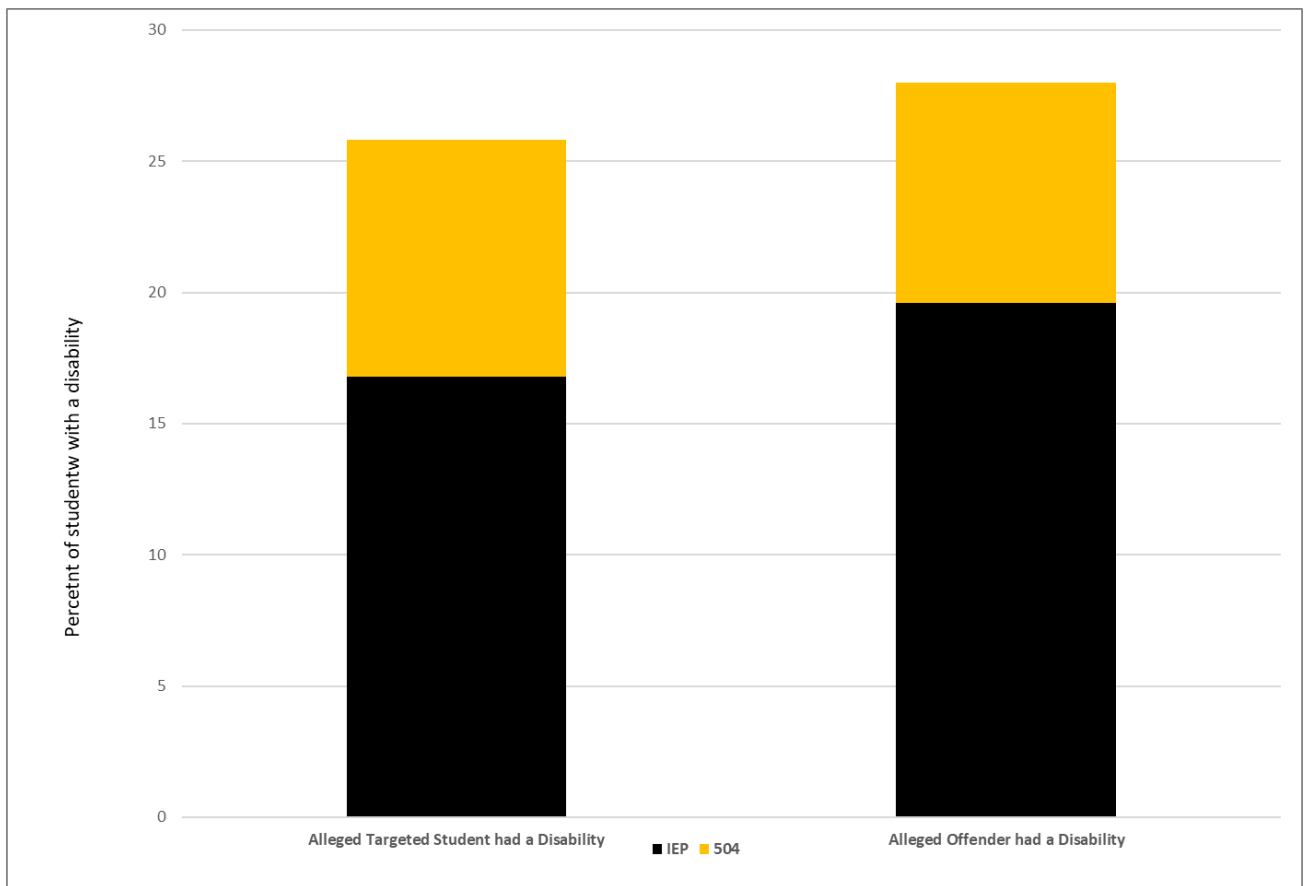
Alleged Offender's Motives

School administration when completing the bullying investigation form were asked to choose from a list to convey the possible alleged offender's motive. As detailed in Figure 7, the three most commonly identified offender's motive in 2022-2023 were:
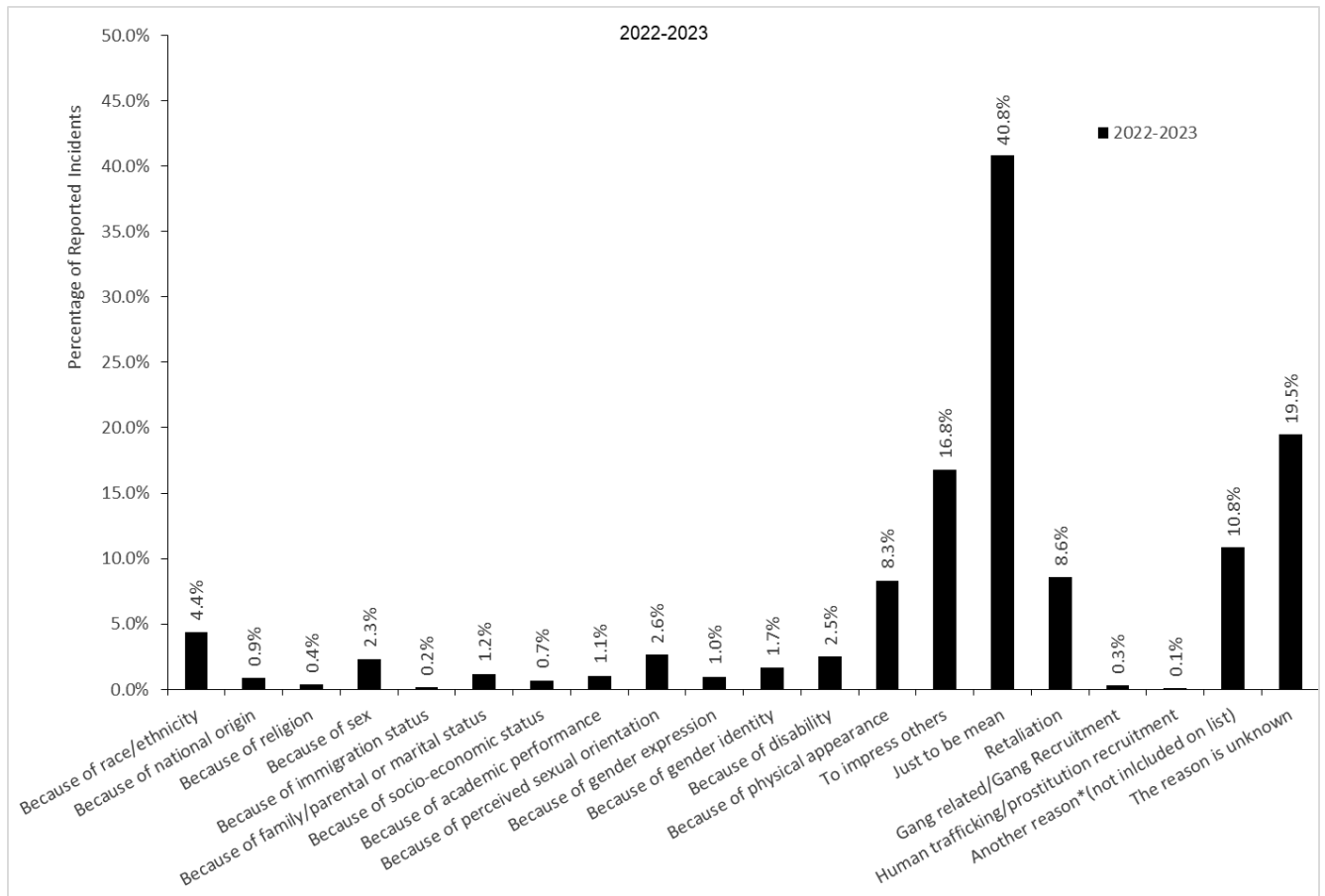
 "Just to be mean" (40.81% of incidents)

"To impress others" (16.8% of incidents)

"Retaliation" (8.6%)

 "Physical appearance" (8.3 % of incidents)

Figure 7: Statewide Description of Alleged Motives as Reported by School Investigation

Incident Investigations

After the submission of a *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form,* the investigative process begins for school administration. The investigation process typically includes interviews with students, families, and school staff, followed by the collection and review of relevant documentation. Once the investigative process has been completed, the outcome and determination are made by school administration.

As detailed in Figure 8, the most common investigative methods in 2022-2023 were:
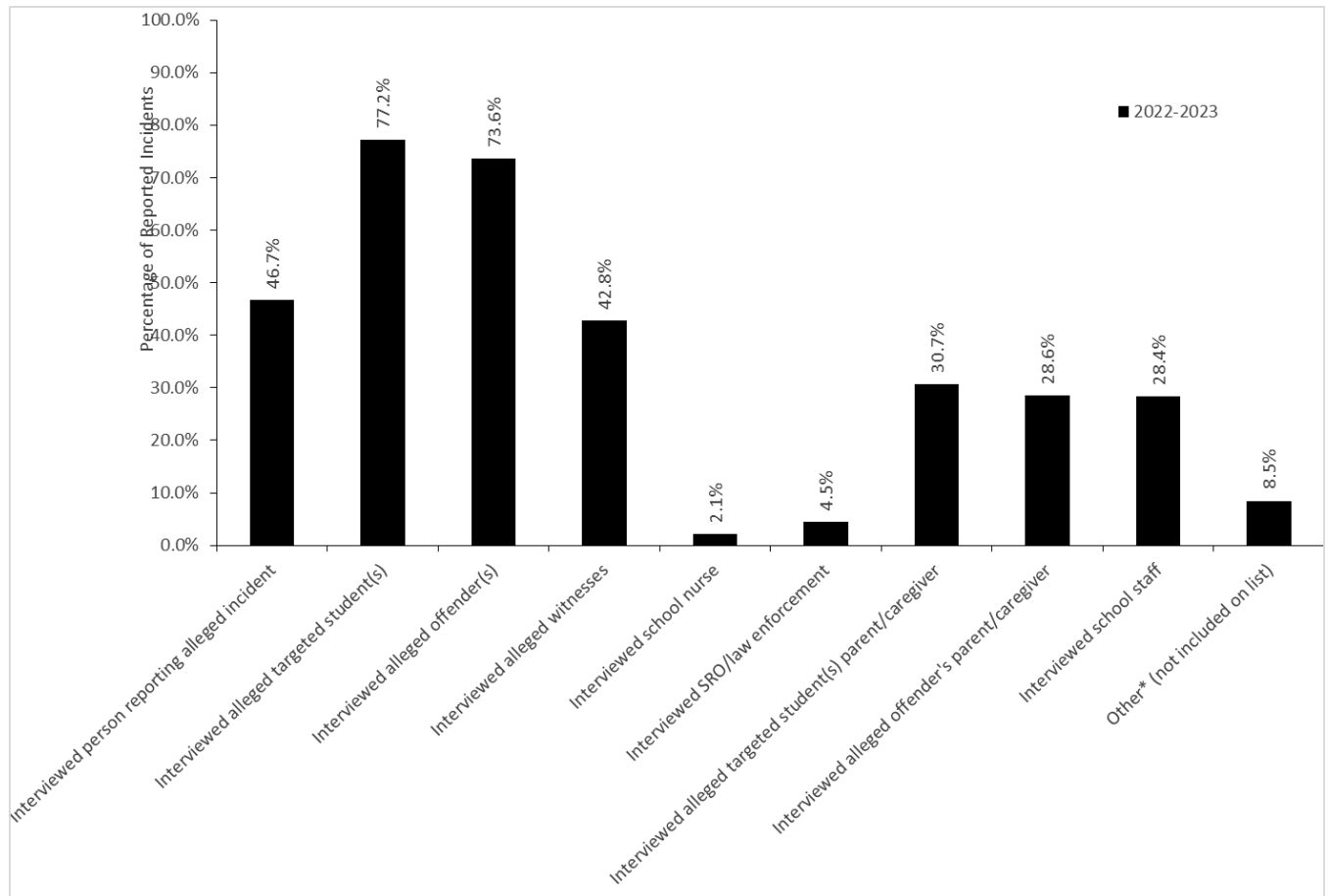
Interviewed alleged targeted student 77.2%

Interviewed alleged offender(s) 73.6%

Interviewed person reporting alleged incident 46.7%

Interviewed alleged witnesses 42.8%
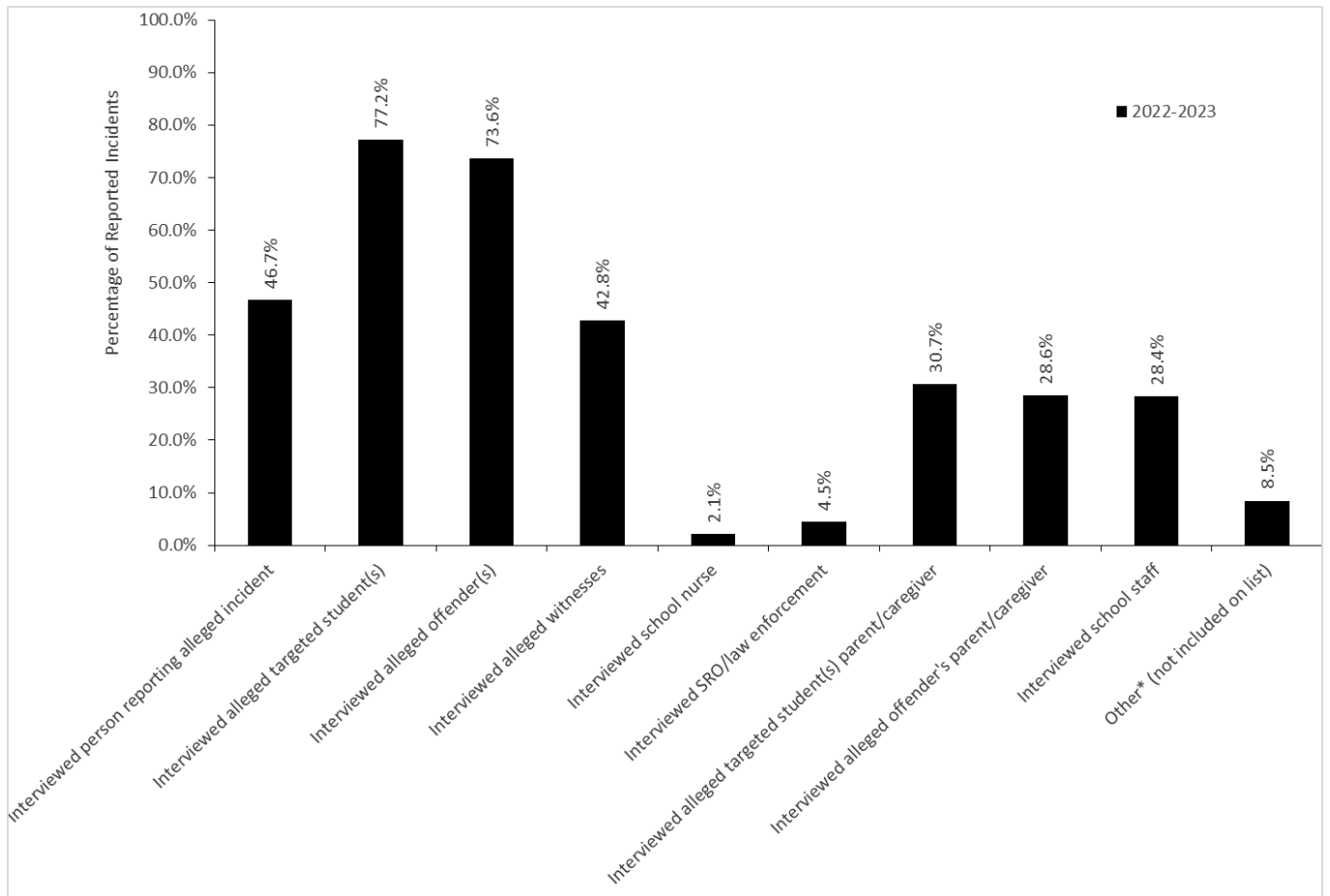
Figure 8: Investigative Actions

As detailed in Figure 9, the most common types of relevant documentation were

 Collecting witness statements 53.5

Reviewing video evidence 13.67

Conducting student record review 11.6

Figure 9: Relevant Documentation

Interventions, Supports, and Corrective Actions

For the 2022-2023 school year, LEAs reported the types and frequency of interventions, supports and corrective actions taken by school staff for the alleged offender and the interventions and supports provided for the targeted student.

As detailed in Figure 10, the most common interventions, supports and corrective actions for the alleged offender were:
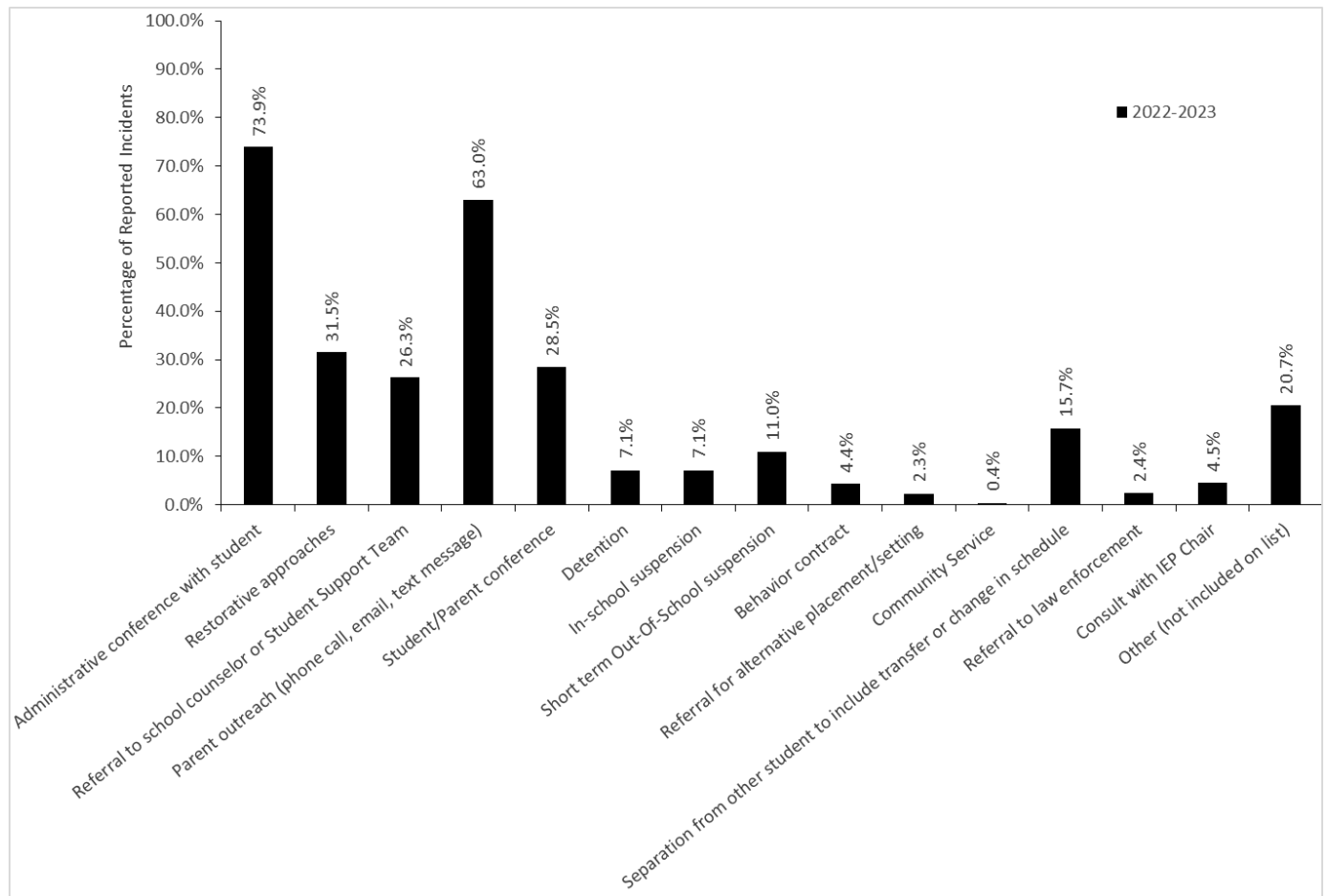
 Administrative conference (73.9%)

Parent outreach (63.0%)

A Restorative Approach (31.5%)

Student/Parent conference (28.5%)

**Figure 10: Interventions, Supports and Corrective Actions for Alleged Offenders**

As detailed in Figure 11, the most common interventions, supports, for the targeted student included parent outreach (56.2%), a plan of support to include a "go to" adult in the school (39.2%), and a student/parent conference (36.9%).

Figure 11: Interventions, Supports and Corrective Actions for Targeted Students
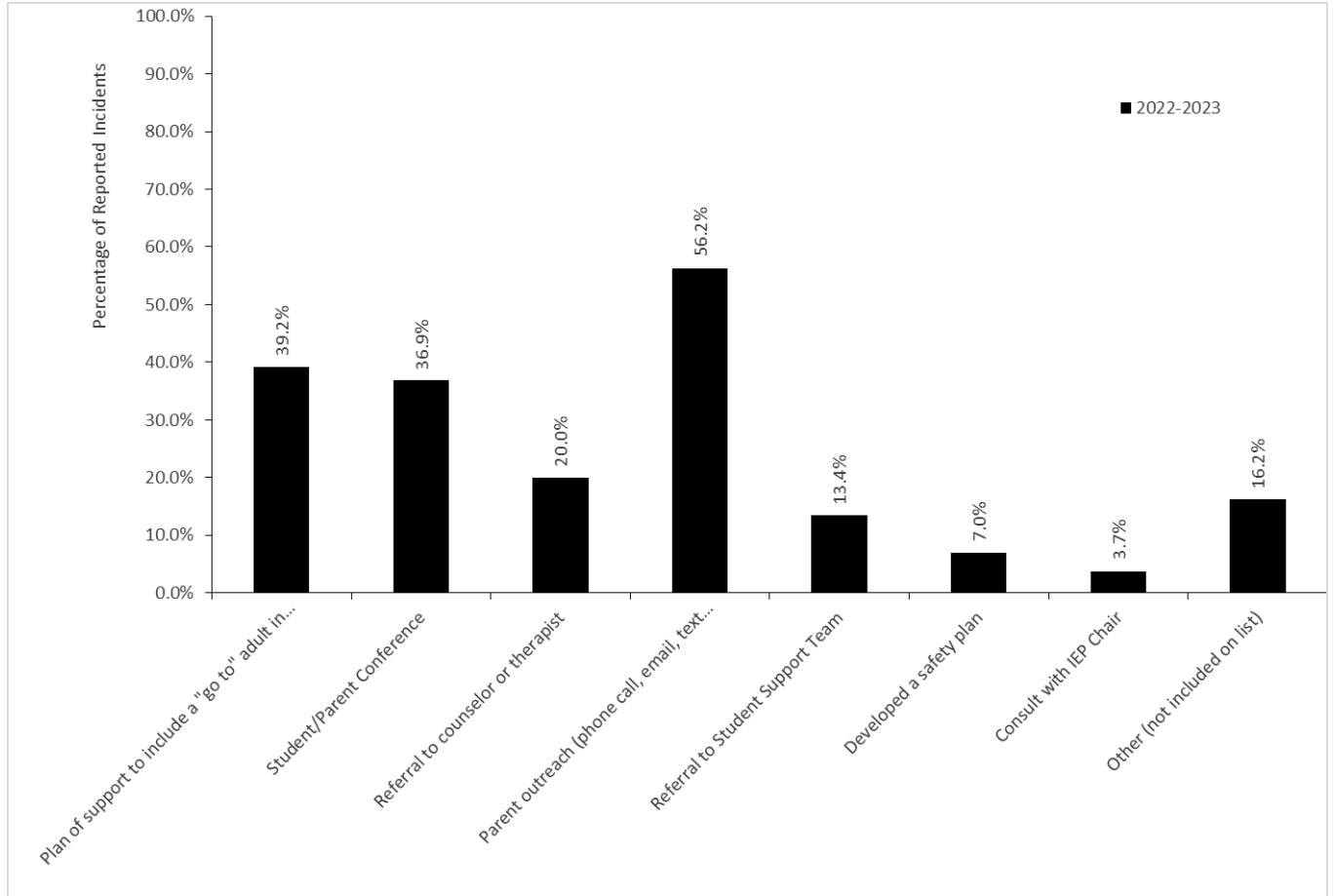
Number of Days Missed from School By Targeted Students

As detailed in Figure 12, 86.4% of targeted students did not miss any days of school in 2022-2023. That is a 1.2% decrease from 2021-2022. This rate, as well as the distribution of the number of days missed from school for the remaining targeted students, has remained largely unchanged over the 2021-2022 school year. It is unknown from the data provided whether targeted students missed school due to injury, fear of attending, or other reasons.

Figure 12: Statewide Absences as a Result of Incidents for Targeted Student
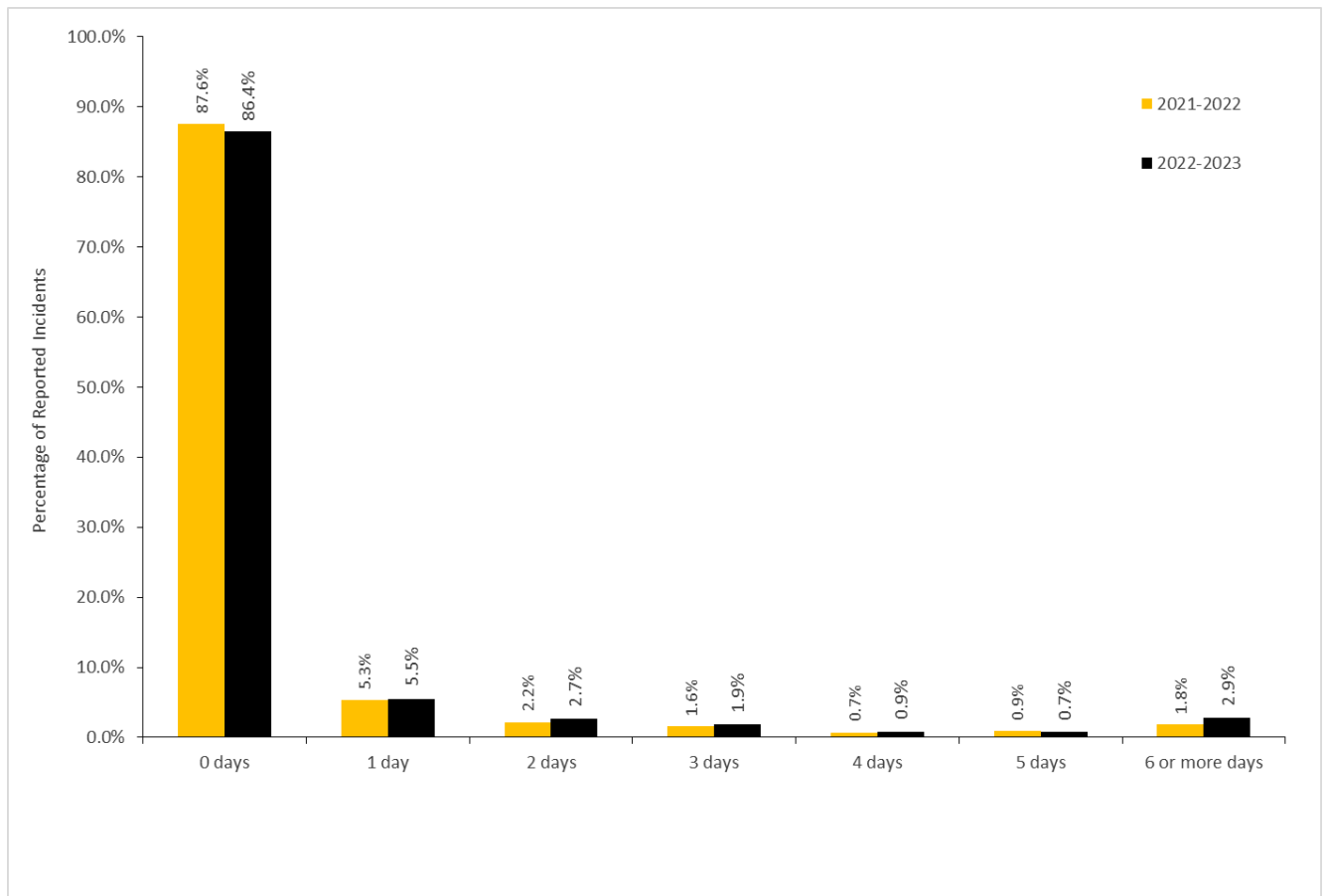
Number of Days Missed from School By Alleged Offenders

As detailed in Figure 13, 94.8% of alleged offenders did not miss any days of school in 2022-2023. That is a 3.8% increase from 2021-2022 It was reported that 3.3% of alleged offenders missed one day of school, 2.4% of alleged offenders missed two days of school, 3.5% of alleged offenders missed three to five days of school, and 2. 2% of alleged offenders missed six or more days of school. It is unknown from the data whether the offenders missed school due to suspensions, injury, or other reasons.

Figure 13: Statewide Absences as a Result of Incidents for Alleged Offenders
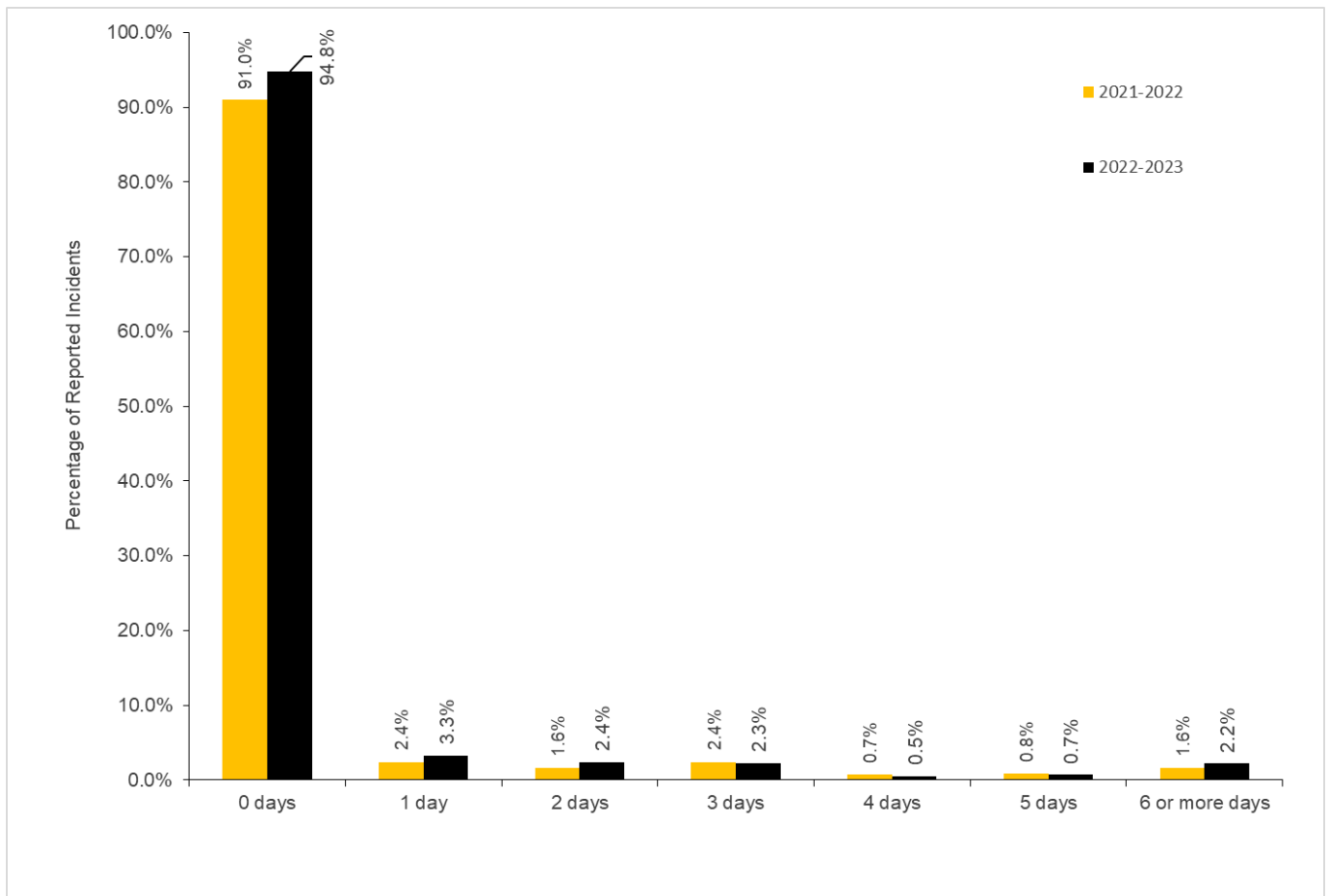
Number of False Allegations Reported

A false allegation is an unfounded accusation of bullying, harassment, and/or intimidation. In 2022-2023 263 of the 7,867 reported incidents were determined to be false allegations as an outcome of the school investigation.

Statewide, false allegations represented 3.34% of all reported Incidents in 2022-2023, a slight increase from 3.5% % in 2021-2022

Summary and Considerations

MSDE is submitting this report to provide the Maryland General Assembly with the information requested by Education Article §7-424, Annotated Code of Maryland. During the 2021-2022 school year, incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation were reported in Maryland's public schools using the reporting system mandated by the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005.

When comparing data from the 2022-2023 school year with the data from the 2021-2022 school year, there was a 25.2% increase in total reported incidents. and an increase in the rate of incidents per student population for the 2021-2022 school year.

The overall analysis of reported data remains consistent with information contained in previous reports. Most targeted and alleged offenders were of middle school age. Many of the targeted students reported being teased, called names, or threatened, while others reported incidents of physical aggression or demeaning behavior. The primary locations of the incidents were the school classroom, the school hallways or on a digital device off school property.

It is also important to note that for the first time since the enactment of the Safe Schools Act of 2005, LEAs reported to the State the reported numbers of bullying involvement and students with disabilities. The data from 2022-2023 shows students with either a 504 plan or an (IEP)Individualized Educational Program were identified as the targeted students in 25.8% of the reported incidents while students with disabilities accounted for 28% of the offenders according to the data submitted for the 2022-2023 school year.

The following actions have been taken as a means of improving the prevention of, and the response to, bullying, harassment, or intimidation in Maryland schools:

- The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has a new course available, ***An Introduction to Bullying Prevention for Maryland Educators.*** This is an online, asynchronous course designed to help Maryland educators gain a better understanding of school-based bullying and will offer strategies that can immediately be used by school staff to provide a safer learning environment for all students.

- **Maryland's Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation** guides LEAs in their bullying prevention and response efforts. Maryland's Model Policy, required by the General Assembly, mandates that each LEA develop their own policies and regulations requiring professional development for staff, student lessons, increased support for students, and information and awareness for families about the bullying reporting process. Additionally, Maryland's Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation encourages schools to adopt a restorative approach that focuses on relationships, equity, healing, and opportunities for students to develop the social and emotional competencies needed to help all school staff contribute to a positive school climate and their own social and emotional development.

- MSDE continues to engage with each LEA with monthly meetings, one-on-one check-ins, data sharing, targeted technical assistance, and guidance as a means of increasing awareness and increasing the efficacy of school staff to address situations of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in Maryland schools.

It is essential that each LEA continue to educate staff, students, and families about bullying, harassment, or intimidation, provide resources for bullying prevention, encourage targeted students to report incidents when they occur, notify families immediately when incidents occur, follow up with prompt and effective investigations, and take the steps necessary to reduce the number of bullying situations in their schools. MSDE will continue to ensure appropriate time, attention, and resources are allocated toward this initiative.