

**REPORT OF THE REAGAN HIGH SCHOOL  
SAFETY REVIEW TEAM**

**RESPONSE TO CHARGE  
NUMBER ONE**

**Sara Hardner Leon  
Ken Oden  
Rafael Quintanilla  
Leonard Woods**

**AUGUST 4, 2003**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses Charge Number One as given to the Reagan High School Safety Review Team on April 21, 2003: “Review the policies, procedures, and practices at Reagan High School to determine whether the incidence of violence at the campus is beyond what exists at similarly situated campuses both locally and nationally, and identify measures that could or should be implemented at Reagan (and by implication, at other campuses if not already there) to establish and maintain a learning environment that is safe, conducive to learning, and free from disruption.”

The team engaged in an extensive process of obtaining and evaluating information regarding Reagan High School. The Team conducted three public meetings at the school. We created and distributed student and teacher written surveys, and mailed written parent questionnaires to the family of every registered student. We conducted scores of personal interviews with parents, students, staff and community members, law enforcement personnel, and contacted hundreds of parents directly. We evaluated and compared student discipline records for the campus, district and state. We also reviewed available research-based literature addressing school safety to inform ourselves on our task.

We make the following observations:

- 📁 The level of criminally violent conduct at Reagan High School is comparable to that found at other urban high schools in this state and nation.
- 📁 District disciplinary reports reflect that Reagan reported well above District average for what may be characterized as “aggressive” conduct under the District’s reporting system (student aggression and assault).
- 📁 For the same type of disciplinary referrals, Reagan High School’s three feeder schools (Pearce, Dobie and Webb) also reported three of the four highest levels of aggressive misconduct in the District.
- 📁 However, Reagan High School does not report high levels of seriously violent conduct, such as criminal assault, sexual assault, etc. This distinction between seriously violent conduct and conduct which may be better characterized as disruptive to the learning environment is a distinction to be considered in assessing school safety data.
- 📁 We found no pattern of gang violence, drug-related violence, or interracial violence that posed a safety risk to Reagan High School students.
- 📁 A majority of students and staff feel safe at Reagan High School.
- 📁 Students and staff report that disciplinary rules are inconsistently enforced.
- 📁 Reagan High School uses out of school suspensions at levels above state average.
- 📁 Reagan High School is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic urban school with a student population of 53% Hispanic, 43% African American and 3.5% Anglo population.
- 📁 We noted a limited degree of positive school spirit or attachment among students, parents, and staff throughout our investigation.

We conclude the Report with recommendations which are the heart of this report, and which include:

- Focus should be placed on risk assessment and prevention in addition to crisis response.
- Reagan High School should direct resources and implement initiatives to increase parental involvement in school programs.
- Require district violence data to be uniformly reported, centrally maintained and evaluated, and periodically reported to the Board.
- All criminal activities by students should be reported to law enforcement authorities.
- Selectively utilize security cameras, increase hall monitoring and evaluate other security devices.
- Implement a continuum of consistent disciplinary sanctions, and provide training to staff.
- Assure that available funds are fully spent in a manner calculated to address existing challenges at Reagan High School.
- The District should provide support for Reagan High School in the form of highly experienced staff and mentoring for new staff.
- Implement initiatives to improve cultural sensitivity within the Reagan High School community.
- Focus should be placed on improving morale.

To place those observations and recommendations in context, the Report should be read in its entirety.

## Table of Contents

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1    ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
SECTION TWO: QUANTITATIVE COMPARISON OF REAGAN HIGH SCHOOL TO OTHER CAMPUSES IN THE DISTRICT, STATE AND NATION	3
2.1    METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS	5
2.1.1    USE OF PEIMS INFORMATION	6
2.2    COMPARISON OF REAGAN HIGH SCHOOL TO OTHER CAMPUSES	10
2.2.1    SERIOUSLY VIOLENT CONDUCT	10
2.2.2    STUDENT AGGRESSIVE CONDUCT	12
2.2.3    AGGRESSIVE CONDUCT AT DISTRICT MIDDLE SCHOOL CAMPUSES	15
2.2.4    DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT	16
2.2.5    DRUG AND ALCOHOL OFFENSES	18
2.2.6    STUDENT CONDUCT RESULTING IN LAW ENFORCEMENT REFERRALS	21
2.2.7    WEAPONS OFFENSES	25
2.3    DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS	28
2.3.1    STUDENT LEVEL COMPARISONS	31
SECTION THREE: REAGAN COMMUNITY OPINIONS	35
3.1    QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES	35
3.1.1    STUDENT SURVEYS	35
3.1.2    STAFF SURVEYS	41
3.1.3    PARENT SURVEYS	47
3.2    PERSONAL INTERVIEWS	47

3.2.1	STUDENT INTERVIEWS	48
3.2.2	ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS	50
3.2.3	PARENT INTERVIEWS	51
3.2.3	TEACHER INTERVIEWS	52
SECTION FOUR:	RESEARCH BASED STANDARDS FOR SAFE SCHOOLS	54
4.1	TARGETED SCHOOL VIOLENCE: PREVENTION AND ASSESSMENT	54
4.2	PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	57
4.3	GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	58
4.4	SPECIFIC STEPS TOWARD INCREASING FAMILY INVOLVEMENT	59
4.4.1.	OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO FAMILY INVOLVEMENT	59
4.4.2.	OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO FULL TEACHER PARTICIPATION	60
SECTION FIVE:	LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF SAFE SCHOOLS RESEARCH	61
5.1	FUNDS FOR PREVENTION AND ASSESSMENT	61
5.2	FUNDS FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	62
5.3	DISTRICT/REAGAN PLANS	63
5.3.1	DISTRICT/REAGAN FUNDING FOR THE PLAN	65
SECTION SIX:	OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	66
6.1	OBSERVATIONS	66
6.2	RECOMMENDATIONS	69
SECTION SEVEN:	RESOURCES	73

## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

On March 28, 2003, Ortralla Mosley, a student at Reagan High School, was stabbed to death by a fellow student on the Reagan campus. The entire Austin community, including parents, fellow students, staff, the Austin ISD administration and school board, as well as community leaders, want to take all reasonable measures to maintain the safest possible school environment. Toward that end, the Austin ISD Board of Trustees voted on April 21, 2003 to create the Reagan High School Safety Review Team (the “team”). The Board’s charges to the team were as follows:

1. Review the policies, procedures, and practices at Reagan High School to determine whether the incidence of violence at the campus is beyond what exists at similarly situated campuses both locally and nationally, and identify measures that could or should be implemented at Reagan (and by implication, at other campuses if not already there) to establish and maintain a learning environment that is safe, conducive to learning, and free from disruption.
2. Ascertain and advise the Board whether the death of Ortralla Mosley was reasonably foreseeable; and further ascertain and advise the Board whether the Austin ISD Central Administration and the Reagan High School Administration acted with reasonable prudence as to the events preceding the death of Ortralla Mosley.

The board appointed four attorneys to comprise the team. They are Sara Hardner Leon, Ken Oden, Rafael Quintanilla, and Leonard Woods. The team was instructed to proceed only with the first charge.

Charge number one was to be completed and a report made to the Board of Trustees within sixty days. Given the scope of the investigation, the team requested, and was granted, a thirty day extension of time to complete its work.

The team set out to perform its work through a variety of strategies. We reviewed authoritative, research-based literature to inform ourselves on our task. We also collaborated with the Texas School Safety Center of Southwest Texas State University, in order to identify those practices which might help make Reagan and other Austin ISD campuses safer. The team also requested and reviewed student discipline data reflecting the incidence of violence at Reagan High School as well as schools throughout Austin ISD, the State of Texas, and other major school districts throughout the nation. We reviewed this data for a data-based measurement of the incidence of violence at Reagan in order to determine whether it is beyond what exists at similarly situated campuses.

The team also engaged in an extensive process of public hearings, discussion groups, and personal interviews with Reagan students, parents, administrators and staff. Business owners near Reagan High School were interviewed as well as interested community leaders and law enforcement personnel. We created and administered written questionnaires to obtain the

opinions of staff, students and parents. We established a confidential, toll-free hot line for the purpose of collecting information from individuals in a secure and confidential environment. There were two public hearings held at Reagan High School as well as a third meeting in which parents participated in personal interviews in a less formal setting. In addition, approximately sixty Reagan students were personally interviewed. The team made its best effort to learn directly from members of the Reagan community whether they considered the campus safe, and what improvements might be made toward that end.

Finally, the team has individually and collectively evaluated and weighed extensive data and evidence to formulate the findings and recommendations contained herein.

### **1.1. Acknowledgements**

Without the cooperation of many people, our task would have been impossible. The team wishes to express its appreciation to the Board of Trustees of the Austin Independent School District for allowing us open access to all records, facilities, and reports that we requested. Throughout this process, the team received the cooperation of the Reagan High School administration and staff, students, parents, and the central administration of Austin ISD. We have made our best effort to deliver a meaningful report, and we have not been hampered in our efforts.

We extend our thanks to Mr. Nolan Correa and the administration at Reagan High School for graciously allowing us access to facilities, students, and records at a time when our requests were inconvenient. General Counsel Mel Waxler, central administration staff members Marianne Hill, Melissa Sabatino, Chief Pat Fuller, Dr. Julie Lyons, and Dr. Andri Lyons, as well as many other members of the administration made every effort to secure records, provide information, open facilities, and otherwise facilitate our work. Brian Vossekeil, Director of the National Violence Prevention and Study Center and William Modzeleski, Director of the Safe and Drug Free Schools Program at the United States Department of Education, were generous with their thoughts and assistance in the development of this project, and to both individuals the team owes its thanks.

The cooperation and assistance of the Texas School Safety Center of Southwest Texas State University and the Safe Schools Division of the Texas Education Agency and Director Billy Jacobs is gratefully acknowledged. The careful analytical assistance of TEA staff member Bryce Templeton was vital to our review, and the state-level data he extracted for us is reflected throughout our report. We would also like to acknowledge Phil Sanders of the Greater Austin Crime Commission for his assistance, and Officer Oakman of the Austin Police Department for his insights into the issues facing the greater Reagan community. Community leaders Dr. Sterling Lands and the Reverend Joe Parker and various members of the NAACP were generous with their insights.

Finally, the team's work would not have been possible without the diligent work of Adrienne Tarpley, Jessica Montalvo and Carnegie Mims, to whom the team extends its heartfelt appreciation.

## SECTION TWO: QUANTITATIVE COMPARISON OF REAGAN HIGH SCHOOL TO OTHER CAMPUSES IN THE DISTRICT, STATE AND NATION

In order to assess the incidence of student violence on the local, statewide, and national levels, the team reviewed various data sources for the purpose of ascertaining the frequency and prevalence of certain violent behaviors. The team recognizes that discipline data alone cannot be used as a reliable indicator or predictor of school violence, and that student involvement in discipline is just one of a number of factors which may play a part in school violence.<sup>1</sup> However, there is significant detailed data available on student disciplinary and law enforcement referrals, and patterns and trends should, at a minimum, be reviewed and understood. Clearly, high levels of disciplinary activity on any campus, at a minimum, indicate a level of disruption that is inconsistent with a positive learning environment.

We do not attempt to conduct a statistically scientific study, but rather report information reviewed in our investigation. Our review of campus, district, and state-level student disciplinary data as well as national statistics yielded the following observations:

- Reagan High School experiences incidents of seriously violent student behavior at a level comparable to that experienced in public urban high schools nationwide.<sup>2</sup> Nationally, the United States Department of Education reported that in the year 2000, public school students aged 12 through 18 were victims of serious, non-fatal violent crimes at school at a rate of 5 per 1,000 students, and in urban cities, students fell victim to non-fatal serious violent incidents at school at an average rate of 7 per 1,000 students (as compared with 15 per 1,000 students outside of school)<sup>3</sup>. At Reagan High School, when the incidence of similar conduct is compared, the number of students who were disciplined for seriously violent behaviors was approximately 7 per 1,000 students for the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. Morrison, et al. (2001) (noting that student involvement in discipline is only one of a cluster of factors which may place a student at risk for committing violence at school).

<sup>2</sup> DeVoe, et al. 6-10.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> DeVoe, et al. define “seriously violent” behaviors as rape, sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault, and exclude simple assault. Seriously violent behaviors against adults are not included in the study. For purposes of our comparison, we used PEIMS data codes for aggravated assault/student, assault/adult, aggravated assault/adult, robbery/theft/stealing, sexual assault/adult, sexual assault/student, murder and kidnapping. Data for seriously violent behavior at Austin ISD is recorded by the number of students *disciplined* for such behavior. The national data compiled by DeVoe and colleagues reflects students who were *victims* of such behaviors. We assumed, for the purpose of our comparison, that there is relative proportionality between the number of students engaging in the seriously dangerous behavior, and the number of victims of such behavior. This number is slightly different than that noted in the discussion of seriously violent later in this report below because while “robbery” is a factor used in the national study, we excluded it from our detailed study because the PEIMS code includes lesser, non-violent offenses (such as petty theft) which were deemed to be inapplicable.



- Reagan High School experienced levels of non-fatal serious violent criminal activity during the past two school years at levels at or above average for all high schools in the Austin Independent School District.
- The incidence of “aggressive” student conduct as reflected in the discipline referral information suggests that Reagan High School students use aggression at school at levels exceeding that experienced at most other high schools in the Austin Independent School District. “Aggressive” is distinguished from “seriously violent” conduct and conduct which may be better characterized as disruptive to the learning environment. These distinctions should be understood in assessing school safety data.
- The incidence of aggressive student conduct in middle schools within Austin ISD reflect that Reagan High School feeder schools have among the highest levels of aggressive conduct in the district.
- While campus level comparisons for aggressive conduct statewide were not possible, campus level comparisons for disruptive behavior suggest that Reagan High School’s experience as to the levels of student disruptive behavior was better than average for campuses serving students of similar economic backgrounds.
- Other indicators reviewed by the team included the prevalence of weapons at school. Reagan High School students possessed illegal weapons at school at a rate of less than 1 per 1,000 students for the 2001-2002 school year, and 5 per 1,000 students for the 2002-2003 school year,<sup>5</sup> while statewide, high school students possessed weapons at school at rates of 7 per 1,000 students on average for the 2001-2002 school year.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, for the period of 1993 through 2001, survey responses indicate that between 7 and 9 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 reported having been threatened or injured with a weapon at school during the preceding twelve month period.<sup>7</sup>
- Between the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years, Austin ISD has seen a general increase in discipline levels across the school district, as well as an increase in conduct resulting in referral to the district’s police department.
- Reagan High School experiences levels of student expulsion and student disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) placement at levels that approximate the state

---

<sup>5</sup> Population figures were taken from the AISD Fall Snapshot Enrollment, as figures from the TEA Academic Excellence Indicator System were not available for the 2002-2003 year as of the writing of this report, and Austin ISD 2002-2003 figures were near final only.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Texas Education Agency, *Annual DEAP Evaluation and Discipline Data Reports* (2003), available at <http://pease.tea.state.tx.us/safeschoolsnew/reports/summary/summary1.asp> Population figures for public high school enrollment were taken from Texas Education Agency, *2001-2002 Academic Excellence Indicator System* (2003), <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2002/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> DeVoe, et al. (2003) 11. “Weapon” was not defined in the survey. For purposes of weapon reporting in Texas schools, Texas Penal Code definitions apply. DeVoe, et al. relied upon self-reported conduct from students nationwide. Our information regarding weapons reflects the number of students who are disciplined for such conduct.

average for such removals. Reagan High School experiences levels of student out of school suspensions at levels well above average for the state.

## **2.1. Methodology and Definitions**

Any inquiry into campus-level violence must first begin with a working definition of “violence.” As school districts and state educational agencies begin developing guidelines for compliance with the federal safe schools requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act<sup>8</sup> (requiring states to identify pervasively unsafe schools), the definitional challenges posed by such terms as “safe schools” and “school violence” are currently being addressed by state-level policymakers nationally.

The manner in which “violence” is defined meaningfully impacts the results of any study of student behavior. For example, it is axiomatic that aggressive conduct resulting in death is “violent.” The incidence of such conduct nationwide is relatively low. During the 2001-2002 school year, there were four school-associated violent deaths in the United States. During the 2002-2003 school year, there were five incidents of school-related violent fatalities in the United States (including the murder of Ortralla Mosely at Reagan High School). During the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years, Ortralla Mosely was the only person in Texas to die as the result of school-related violence.<sup>9</sup> Comparisons using the incidence of violence resulting in death may, therefore, yield insufficient useful information for our purposes.

In order to compare Reagan High School to other schools in the District, state and nation, the challenge in defining “violence” was further exacerbated by the differing manners in which schools maintain such information, making precise comparisons elusive.

We decline, in this report, to adopt a final definition of “violence” for the purpose of these comparisons. Rather, we used a number of comparisons, all of which relate to a school’s learning environment and safety, but some of which might fairly be stated to go beyond truly “violent” behavior.

Recognizing that students with frequent disciplinary referrals are at heightened risk for violent and delinquent conduct both in the community and school settings,<sup>10</sup> and that campuses with fewer disciplinary problems in general also reported fewer incidents of serious crime,<sup>11</sup> we include observations regarding the campus climate and atmosphere as a whole. We also discuss aggressive and disruptive conduct, which includes a range of conduct which falls short of serious

---

<sup>8</sup> Public Law 107-110, 115 STAT. 1752 (2002).

<sup>9</sup> Stephens, R.D. (2003). A school-associated violent death is defined by the National School Safety Center as any homicide, suicide or weapons-related violent death in which the fatal injury occurred on school property, on the way to school or a school function, or as an obvious result of school incidents, activities or functions, regardless of where the fatality occurred.

<sup>10</sup> Sprague, et al. (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Skiba, et al. (2002) 5.

violence, but which may be helpful in assessing conditions conducive to violence in the school setting.

There is currently no standardized national discipline data reporting standard applicable to public schools, and national school safety information does not exist for campus level comparisons. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, the United States Department of Education and state education agencies will work to develop national reporting standards, and as a result, national comparisons will be significantly easier to track in the future as such standards are implemented.

In an effort to compare conditions in similarly situated campuses nationally, we selected certain census data criteria (total population, racial diversity, average household income and average years of education of the adult population) and sorted city census data by these criteria to identify cities which most closely resemble Austin for the census criteria selected. From that comparison, we identified twelve cities as most closely resembling Austin for the census information selected, and then made data requests to the public school systems within those cities. The target school systems identified for a national comparison were Albuquerque Public Schools, Atlanta Public Schools, Boston Public Schools, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (North Carolina), Clark County School District (Las Vegas, Nevada), Cleveland Municipal School District, Denver Public Schools, Kansas City Public Schools (Missouri), Long Beach Unified School District, Miami-Dade County School District, New Orleans Public Schools, and Tucson Unified School District. Of those school districts providing the requested information (several provided little or no information at all), the quality and detail was variable. Meaningful comparisons to Reagan High School were ultimately not feasible for our purposes from the information we received.

Most of the information regarding national student behavior used in this report, therefore, comes from survey information collected by the National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics. These surveys reflect self-reported behaviors, and do not reflect disciplinary data comparable to the data upon which we rely for our state and district comparisons.

### **2.1.1. Use of PEIMS Information**

Of the data available to us, the most detailed and consistent information was obtained from the Texas Public Education Information Management System (“PEIMS”) system. Austin ISD maintains detailed information regarding student misconduct, as is required under Chapter 39 of the Texas Education Code and 19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 129 through the PEIMS system, which records a variety of information regarding students in attendance in Texas public schools.<sup>12</sup> The Texas Education Agency requires that each public school district record, at a minimum, certain disciplinary actions taken by the school district as well as the nature of the conduct resulting in the disciplinary consequences.<sup>13</sup> This information has been collected

---

<sup>12</sup> Austin ISD data for the 2002-2003 school year was preliminary data only, and subject to changes prior to finalization.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/peims/standards/0203/appe.doc>

statewide since the 1999-2000 school year. In general, the state requires public school districts to maintain information regarding disciplinary actions that closely track student misconduct as described in Chapter 37, Texas Education Code. Because PEIMS closely mirrors Texas Education Code Chapter 37, PEIMS data codes reflect in some instances rather specific descriptions of student misconduct (such as in the case of alcohol<sup>14</sup> and firearms<sup>15</sup> violations), while other data codes describe broader categories of misconduct (such as “unclassified” conduct, and “other felony offenses”). Although PEIMS is a comprehensive source of discipline information, it was not developed as a tool for measuring the incidence of violence. Limitations on the use of PEIMS information as an indicator of violence must, therefore, be acknowledged.

In some instances, there are no PEIMS data codes assigned for certain types of student misconduct which may result in disciplinary action and which are not expressly referenced in the Texas Education Code. For example, physical fighting that does not result in the filing of criminal assault charges is not expressly referenced in Texas Education Code Chapter 37, nor was it assigned a corresponding PEIMS data code for the 2002-2003 and preceding school years.<sup>16</sup> Bullying, a recognized risk factor for targeted school violence,<sup>17</sup> is not recorded under either the PEIMS or AISD disciplinary data codes. While school districts are free to maintain discipline action data that is more specific than that required under PEIMS, they must record information that is at least as detailed as PEIMS in order to avoid accreditation sanctions.

Austin ISD maintains data that is more detailed than PEIMS requires, so it is possible to compare student misconduct reporting among campuses within AISD on comparable terms; however, not all campuses statewide record data in the identical fashion. Initially, the team sought information through Texas Public Information Act requests from those districts statewide most closely resembling AISD in terms of student population, economic and ethnic characteristics. This method of gathering comprehensive student discipline information yielded responses of varying characteristics and quality from which we found it difficult to make meaningful comparisons. Ultimately, all Texas public school districts use the PEIMS system, which proved to be the most reliable and consistent information source available to us.<sup>18</sup> PEIMS data submitted to the Texas Education Agency forms the basis for the statewide comparisons.

---

<sup>14</sup> PEIMS Action Reason Code 05 applies to a student who sells, gives, or delivers to another person an alcoholic beverage, as defined by Section 1.04, Alcoholic Beverage Code, commits a serious act or offense while under the influence of alcohol, or possesses, uses, or is under the influence of an alcoholic beverage; *see also* TEX. EDUC. CODE §37.006(a)(2)(D) (requiring mandatory DAEP placement for student misconduct of this nature).

<sup>15</sup> PEIMS Action Reason Code 11 applies to a student who uses, exhibits, or possesses a firearm as defined by Section 46.01(3), Penal Code; *see also* TEX. EDUC. CODE §37.0007(e) (mandating expulsion for student misconduct of this nature).

<sup>16</sup> A data code will be assigned for such conduct for the 2003-2004 school year.

<sup>17</sup> See Dwyer, K., et al. (1998) 9 (noting both children who are victims of bullying as well as those demonstrating bullying behavior are at heightened risk for engaging in violent conduct) and Nansel, et al. (2001) (observing deleterious effects of bullying on both perpetrators and victims in the school setting).

<sup>18</sup> We used the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years, as the first year of data collection statewide is generally acknowledged to be less reliable due to implementation of a new system, and 2002-2003 was not yet available. The TEA data we reviewed is attached to the electronic version of this report at **Appendix A**.

Throughout this report, we use the term “incident” to refer to occurrences of student disciplinary actions. For all Texas data reflected in this report, an “incident” means each time a student received a disciplinary action resulting in a student’s removal from the regular classroom for a period of at least one school day. This method of reporting student disciplinary consequences yields certain results that should be clearly understood by the reader:

- An incident of student misconduct that results in a Saturday or after-school detention will not appear as a disciplinary incident in our report, because such consequences are not reflected in PEIMS.
- A disciplinary action that results in a partial day suspension or in-school suspension (“ISS”) will not be reflected as an incident, as partial day placements were not recorded in PEIMS for the time periods reviewed (in future school years, reporting of partial day placements will be required).
- In many cases, there may be more than one “incident” resulting from a single event of student misconduct. For example, a student involved in an on-campus fight resulting in injury might receive a disciplinary consequence of suspension from school pending a due process removal hearing. This will appear on the PEIMS data as one incident of assault. After a hearing, the student might then be assigned to the District’s disciplinary alternative education program (“DAEP”) consistent with the Code of Conduct. This placement will be reflected again in PEIMS as an incident of assault, resulting in two “incidents” of assault arising from a single fight.

Because the disciplinary actions assigned for student misbehavior are largely consistent across the District (the Student Code of Conduct applies to all campuses), and measures are in place to assure that information is recorded consistently across the District, the use of the term “incident” is thought to be meaningful, even though the resulting number of “incidents” reported will exceed the true number of events. The reader should be aware, however, that the possible duplication of reported disciplinary actions in PEIMS may create an escalating affect as the number of actions increases. (A campus having one fight as described above may record two incidents, while a campus having three fights may record six incidents, etc.). Statewide PEIMS data yields a similar outcome.

Although the number of occurrences noted in this report may exceed the number of actual events of student misconduct, we deem the use of PEIMS information to be meaningful, in that there is expected consistency statewide as to the disciplinary actions which flow from student misconduct under Texas Education Code Chapter 37, and the duplication effect for multiple disciplinary actions is present for all school districts reporting through PEIMS.

As attorneys and agents of the District, we were able to review discipline data for disciplinary consequences occurring less than five times on individual campuses, as well as student-level discipline data. Were the team not in an attorney-client relationship with the Board, this information would not have been available to us pursuant to federal privacy laws

protecting student records.<sup>19</sup> In responding to our requests for statewide PEIMS information, TEA was required to mask any result where less than five occurrences were recorded in order to protect individual student privacy rights. As discussed below, this limitation made statewide campus-level comparisons difficult for seriously violent student misconduct, weapons offenses and expulsion rates, as those occurred on a campus level in numbers less than five in a larger number of the total campuses studied.

For campus-level comparisons statewide, we selected thirty high schools that were most comparable to Reagan High School in terms of the percentage of students eligible to receive free and reduced price lunches<sup>20</sup>. We also excluded campuses with a population of less than 900 total students to avoid excessive numbers of masked data.

National comparisons were attempted from published national studies, as well as from information obtained from individual school districts selected for their similarity to Austin ISD in terms of total population, ethnic diversity and average years of education possessed by community residents. Data obtained from these sources was inconsistent, and comparisons were unfeasible for our purposes. Generally, the absence of a consistent system of incident reporting nationwide, and local variations in the manner in which such information is maintained remains a significant obstacle to any national comparison.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that differences in reported discipline actions may reflect individual campus administrative styles, which may yield variations across the District and state. It is anticipated that the variations would most likely be found at the lowest levels of the spectrum of violent or dangerous behavior, where individual administrators have greater discretion and flexibility in assessing disciplinary sanctions. For example, a campus administrator has extremely limited discretion in the manner in which certain disciplinary outcomes are handled (such as those serious offenses for which expulsion is mandated by state or federal law), while much broader latitude is available on a campus level for handling misconduct of a less serious nature. Individual campuses adopting a “zero tolerance” attitude towards certain student misconduct may appear, therefore, to have higher levels of violent or aggressive behavior than other campuses using alternative disciplinary methodologies. However, student misconduct

---

<sup>19</sup> The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99, prohibits the public release of personally identifiable student information. Where student discipline data reflect five or fewer incidents of disciplinary action at a campus or district, the information is deemed confidential and the number of incidents was not released to us.

<sup>20</sup> The focus campuses most closely resembling Reagan High School in terms of economic criteria are: Eisenhower High School in Aldine ISD, Palo Duro High School in Amarillo ISD, Bay City High School in Bay City ISD, Ozen High School in Beaumont ISD, Miller High School and Moody High School in Corpus Christi ISD, A. Maceo Smith, H. Grady Spruce, Justin F. Kimball, South Oak Cliff, Sunset and W.W. Samuel High Schools in the Dallas Independent School District, Del Valle High School in Del Valle ISD, Everman High School in Everman ISD, Carter-Riverside High School in Fort Worth ISD, Harlingen High School in Harlingen CISD, Scarborough, Waltrip, Westbury and Worthing High Schools in Houston ISD, Irving High School in Irving ISD, McAllen Memorial High School in McAllen ISD, Lee High School in North East ISD, Smiley High School in North Forest ISD, Jay High School in Northside ISD, Pasadena High School in Pasadena ISD, Americas High School in Socorro ISD, John B. Alexander and United High School in United ISD and Waco High School, Waco ISD.

<sup>21</sup> See Kingery et al. (2001) for a discussion of the obstacles to making meaningful comparisons and conclusions from school disciplinary surveillance records.

as reflected in the rate of student expulsions will be a stronger indicator of truly violent and dangerous conduct, as well as reflecting consistent behaviors; as such placements are largely described as criminal offenses under state law. As discussed below, the team also attempted to determine whether such campus-level discrepancies in reported student misconduct might be reflected in the District's data. Our observation is that while some variances on a campus level will naturally exist, the evidence we reviewed does not suggest that the administrative style at Reagan High School is sufficiently different from that of other area high schools to significantly skew the PEIMS data or the comparisons generated therefrom.

## **2.2. Comparison of Reagan High School to Other Campuses**

The team compared Reagan High School to other campuses in the District, state, and nation, where comparable data was available.

### **2.2.1. Seriously Violent Conduct**

Reagan High School students were disciplined for conduct constituting seriously violent conduct at levels close to average Austin public high schools in the 2001-2002 school year, and levels above average for Austin public high schools for the 2002-2003 school year. In defining "seriously violent conduct," we aggregated PEIMS discipline codes for the following conduct: Assault/Student, Aggravated Assault/Student; Assault/Adult; Sexual Assault/Adult; Sexual Assault/Student; Kidnapping; and Murder. The total number of incidents of seriously violent conduct was then adjusted for campus total enrollment<sup>22</sup> to yield a number reflecting the total number of student disciplinary referrals for seriously violent conduct as a percentage of total school population.

Figure 2-A depicts the number of students (rather than the number of "incidents") who received discipline consequences for seriously violent student conduct for Austin ISD high schools for the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years as a percentage of student population.

---

<sup>22</sup> Student enrollment figures were obtained from the Texas Education Agency's AEIS reports, and differ in many cases from enrollment figures contained in the Safe Schools Division year end enrollment numbers recorded by TEA due to changes in campus population over the school year. Where TEA student enrollment figures were unavailable—such as for the 2002-2003 school year—we used student enrollment information recorded by the District as of November 11, 2002.

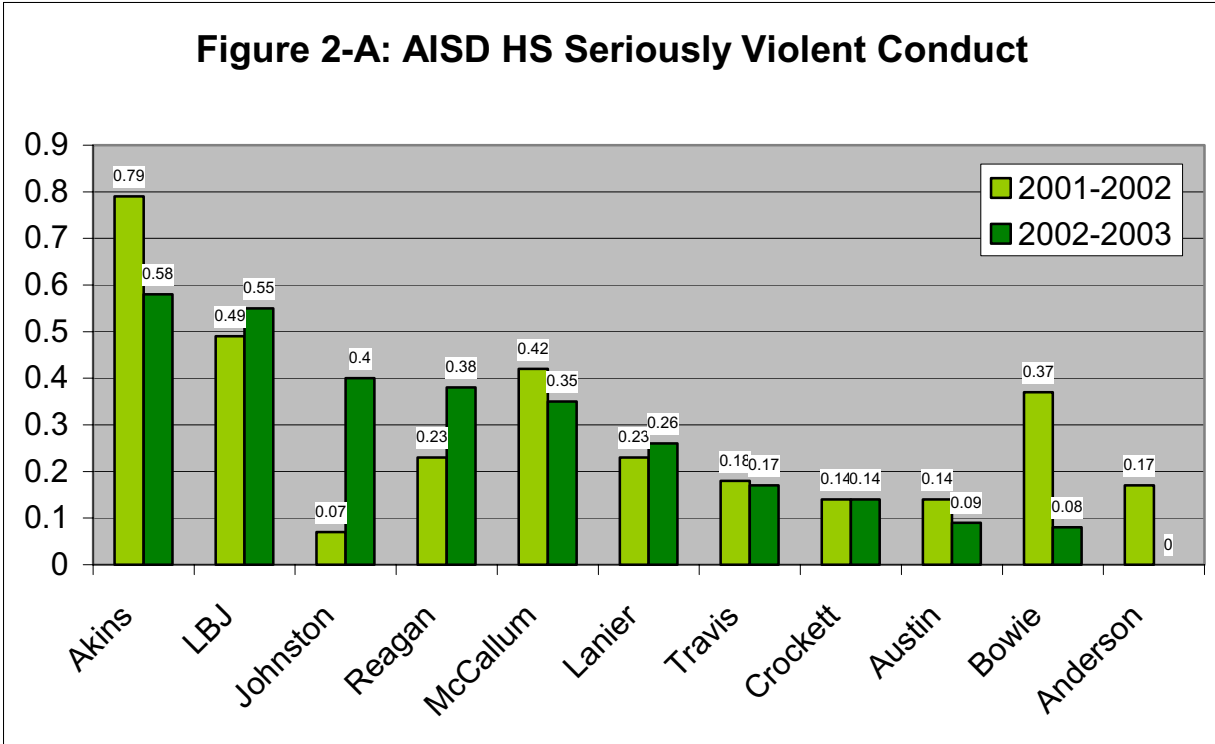


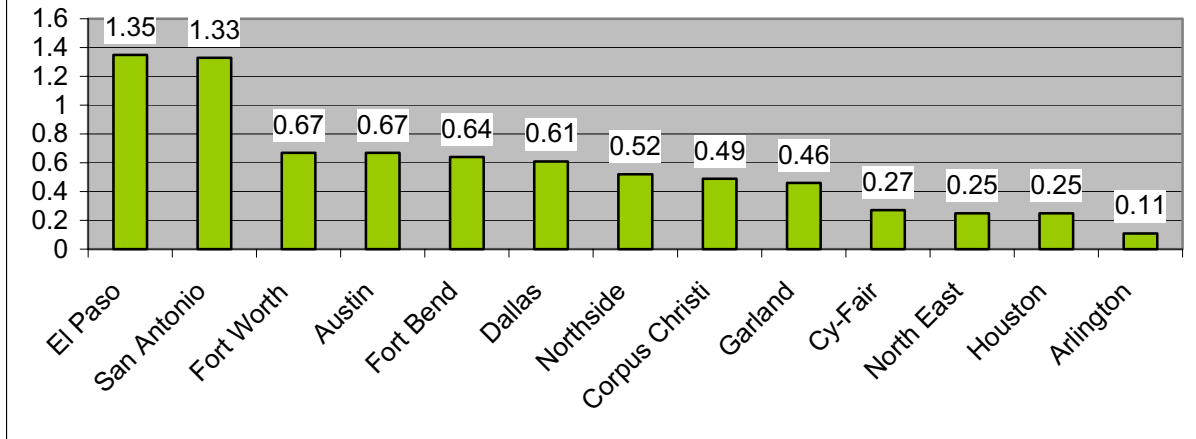
Figure 2-A depicts the total number of students who received disciplinary actions resulting in removal from the regular school setting, (ISS, suspension, AEP, or expulsion) for violent conduct (Assault/Student; Aggravated Assault/Student; Assault/Adult; Aggravated Assault/Adult; Sexual Assault/Adult; Sexual Assault/Student; Kidnapping; and Murder) as a percentage of student enrollment for the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years.

Reagan High School was one of four campuses in the District experiencing an increase in such activity from the 2001-2002 to the 2002-2003 school year.

A campus-level comparison to other high schools statewide was not feasible as there were excessive numbers of masked information in the campus-level data. Figure 2-A(1) reflects the incidence of violence in urban districts statewide.



**Figure 2-A(1): Texas District Seriously Violent Incidents, 2001-2002**



This figure depicts the number of times students in Texas urban districts received disciplinary actions for the following reasons: Retaliation against school employee; Murder, Capital Murder; Criminal attempt to commit murder or capital murder; Aggravated kidnapping; Assault against a school district employee or volunteer; Assault against someone other than a school district employee or volunteer; Aggravated assault against a school district employee or volunteer; Aggravated assault against anyone other than a school district employee or volunteer; Sexual assault or aggravated sexual assault against a school district employee or volunteer; Sexual assault or aggravated sexual assault against anyone other than a school district employee or volunteer; and School related gang violence as a percentage of total school enrollment for each district for the 2001-2002 school year.

### **2.2.2. Student Aggressive Conduct**

We reviewed conduct that reflected student use of physical aggression at school, reasoning that a campus' experience as to student behavior of an aggressive nature is likely to impact student safety, and that physical aggression might reasonably be considered as constituting "violent" conduct in many cases. In defining "aggressive behavior," PEIMS discipline codes for the following misconduct were aggregated: Physical Aggression/Student, Physical Aggression/Adult, Assault/Student, Assault/Adult, Aggravated Assault/Student and Aggravated Assault/Adult.

Figure 2-B represents the total number of Austin Independent School District high school incidents of student aggressive misconduct for the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years.

**Figure 2-B: AISD High School Aggressive Incidents**

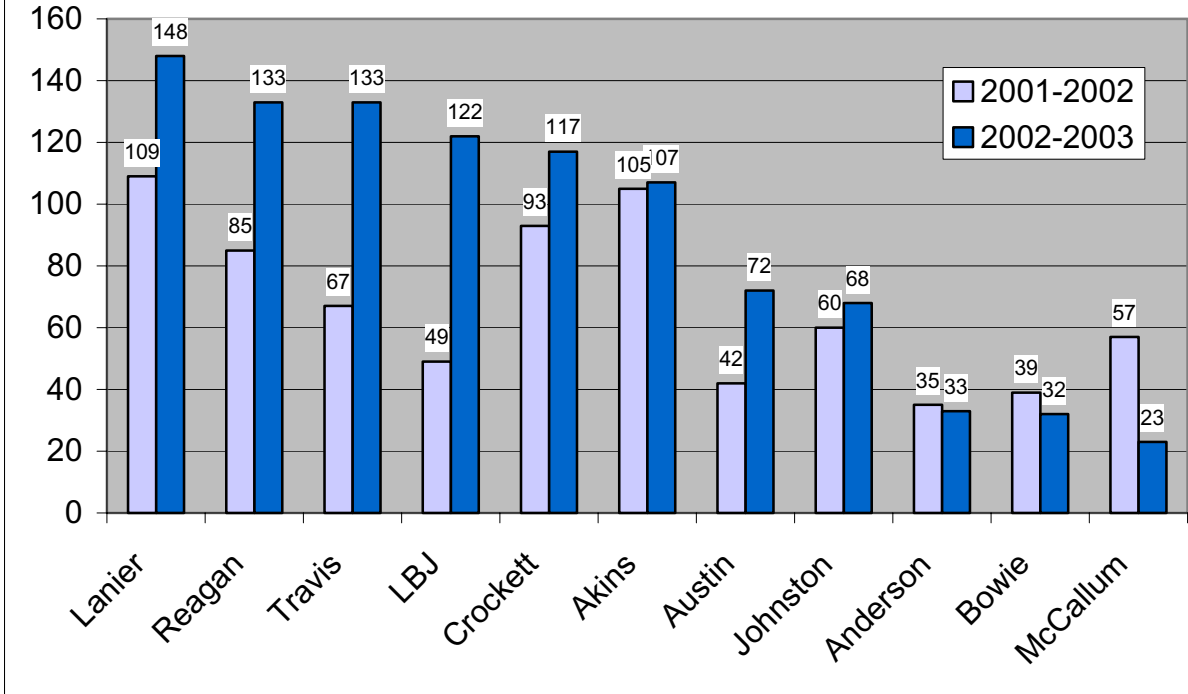


Figure 2-B depicts the total number of students who received disciplinary actions resulting in removal from the regular school setting (ISS, out of school suspension, AEP placement, and expulsion) was recorded during the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years for the following conduct: Physical Aggression/Student; Physical Aggression/Adult; Assault/Student; Assault/Adult; Aggravated Assault Student; and Aggravated Assault/Adult.

Across the District, we observed an increase in the incidents of aggressive conduct between the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years.

Figure 2-C depicts the level of student aggressive conduct in Austin ISD high schools as a percentage of total student population. After adjusting for the differing student populations at different campuses in the District, the Reagan campus experienced among the highest levels of student aggressive conduct in the District for both the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years. Again, most high schools in the District recorded an escalation in disciplinary referrals as a result of aggressive behavior from the 2001-2002 to 2002-2003 school years.

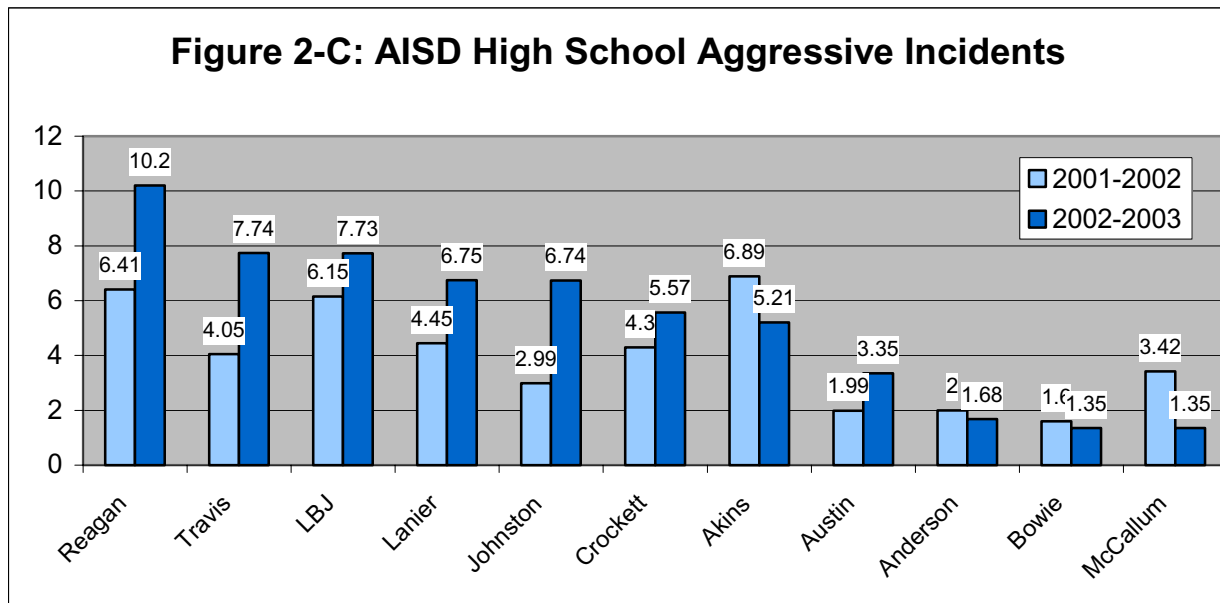


Figure 2-C depicts the number of students, as a percentage of total student population, who received disciplinary actions as a percentage of student enrollment resulting in removal from the regular school setting (ISS, out of school suspension, AEP placement, expulsion) during the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school year for the following conduct: Physical Aggression/Student; Physical Aggression/Adult; Assault/Student; Assault/Adult; Aggravated Assault/Student; and Aggravated Assault/Adult.

Because the Texas Education Agency does not require public schools to record information regarding physical aggression or fighting, a meaningful comparison between Reagan High School and other campuses statewide for “aggressive conduct” was not possible.

If it is assumed that a majority of the aggressive conduct reported at District high schools results from physical fighting, a qualitative comparison to some national statistics is possible. For example, the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice report that nationally, 33% of students in grades 9 through 12 reported that they had been in a physical fight somewhere during 2001, and 13% reported that they had been in a physical fight on school property. These numbers reflect a national trend of overall decline in student fighting at school since 1993.<sup>23</sup> In comparison, between 5% and 10% of students at Reagan High School were disciplined for aggressive conduct in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, respectively. The national data is collected

<sup>23</sup> DeVoe, et al. (2002) 13.

through individual student survey responses, and reflects self-reported behavior by students. The number of students who received disciplinary consequences as a result of such fighting is not available, and for the specific school systems we studied, such information was in many cases not recorded.

### 2.2.3. Aggressive Conduct at District Middle School Campuses

In response to the suggestion of interested community members expressed in the public meetings conducted at Reagan and in private interviews, the team also reviewed the levels of disciplinary referrals for aggressive conduct in the District’s middle school campuses.

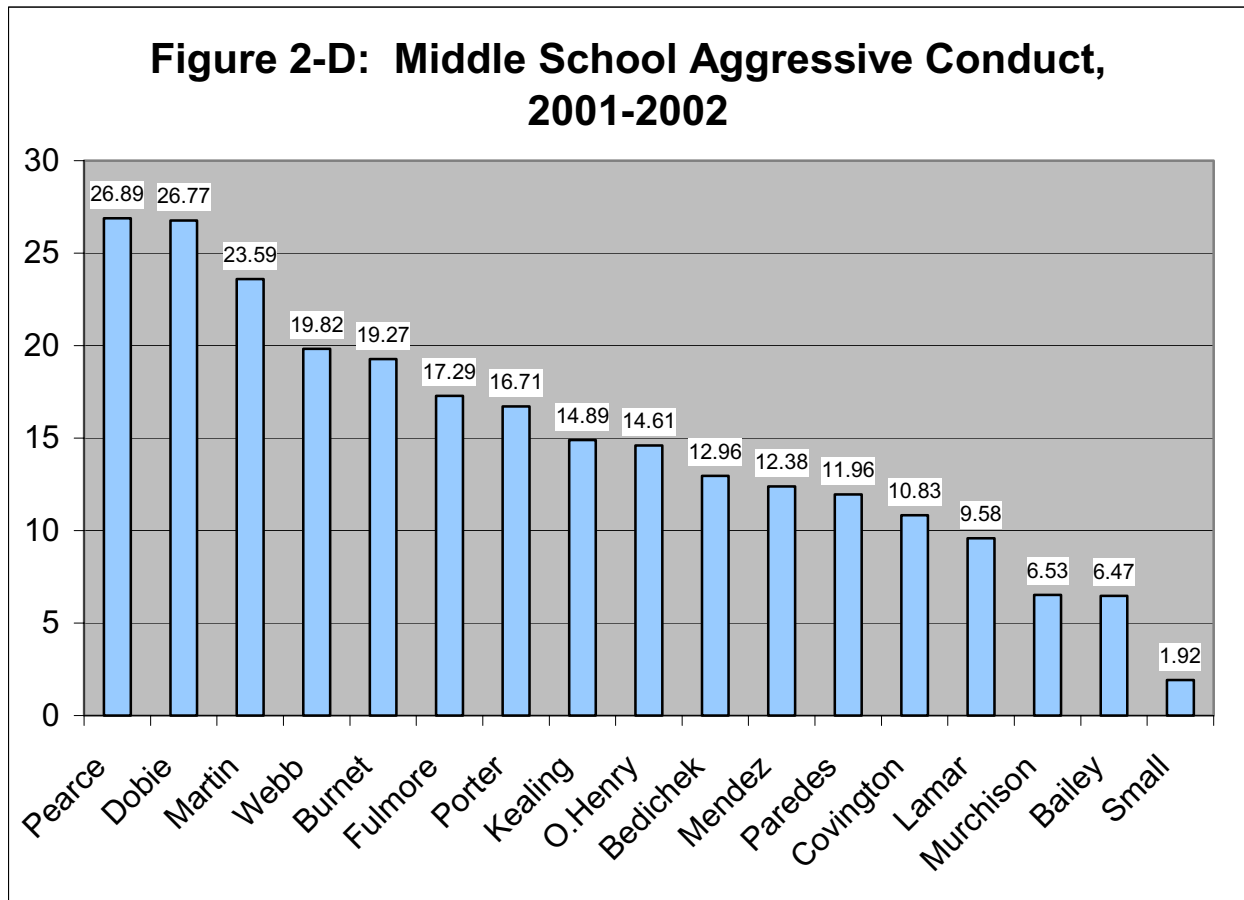


Figure 2-D depicts the number of incidents of disciplinary actions as a percentage of student enrollment resulting in removal from the regular school setting (ISS, out of school suspension, AEP placement, expulsion) during the 2001-2002 school year for the following conduct: Physical Aggression/Student; Physical Aggression/Adult; Assault/Student; Assault/Adult; Aggravated Assault/Student; and Aggravated Assault/Adult.

Pearce, Dobie and Webb Middle Schools, each feeder schools for Reagan High School, had the first, second, and fourth highest levels of disciplinary referrals among middle school

campuses in the District for the 2001-2002 school year, suggesting that the student population served at Reagan High School experiences similarly escalated levels of aggressive behavior at the middle school level, and that the administrative style at Reagan High School (*e.g.* a “zero tolerance” approach) alone does not account for the higher number of incidents reported at Reagan. The data reflected in Figure 2-D also suggests that any policy efforts to reduce student aggressive behavior at the high school level must also address behavior patterns that develop during the earlier grades.

#### **2.2.4. Disruptive Conduct**

The team’s effort to compare overall levels of aggressive conduct at Reagan High School with other campuses and school districts statewide was hampered by the lack of corresponding data in the Texas PEIMS system. While “fighting” will be assigned a data code in future school years, this information is not available statewide at this time for prior school years. The team then selected data codes for data that is maintained by the Texas Education Agency in order to compare “disruptive” conduct resulting in disciplinary removals within the Austin Independent School District as compared to other school districts statewide.<sup>24</sup> The team requested and received data from the Texas Education Agency reflecting levels of “disruptive conduct” in Austin ISD as compared to similarly situated urban districts in Texas for the 2001-2002 school year. However, the data we received did not correspond to other data reviewed, and we believe that the district-level information as provided contains definitional errors. District level comparisons, therefore, have not been made. (Figure 2-E omitted).

Figure 2-F depicts the levels of disruptive conduct at Reagan High School as compared to similarly situated campuses statewide. As discussed above, for statewide comparison purposes, “similarly situated” campuses were defined as those thirty campuses which most closely resemble Reagan High School in terms of the percentage of the student enrollment eligible to receive free and reduced price lunch. Additionally, it should be noted that campuses with less than 900 total student enrollment were not included in our review.

With only approximately 21% of students disciplined for disruptive behavior in 2001-2002, Reagan High School compared favorably to the majority of high school campuses serving a comparable student body in terms of economic factors.

---

<sup>24</sup> Any public school district with a total student population of less than 1,000 students was excluded to avoid excessive numbers of masked responses for data sets of less than 5. Campus-level comparisons exclude campuses with a total student population of 800 students for the same reason.

**Figure2-F: Texas Campus Disruptive Incidents,  
2001-2002**

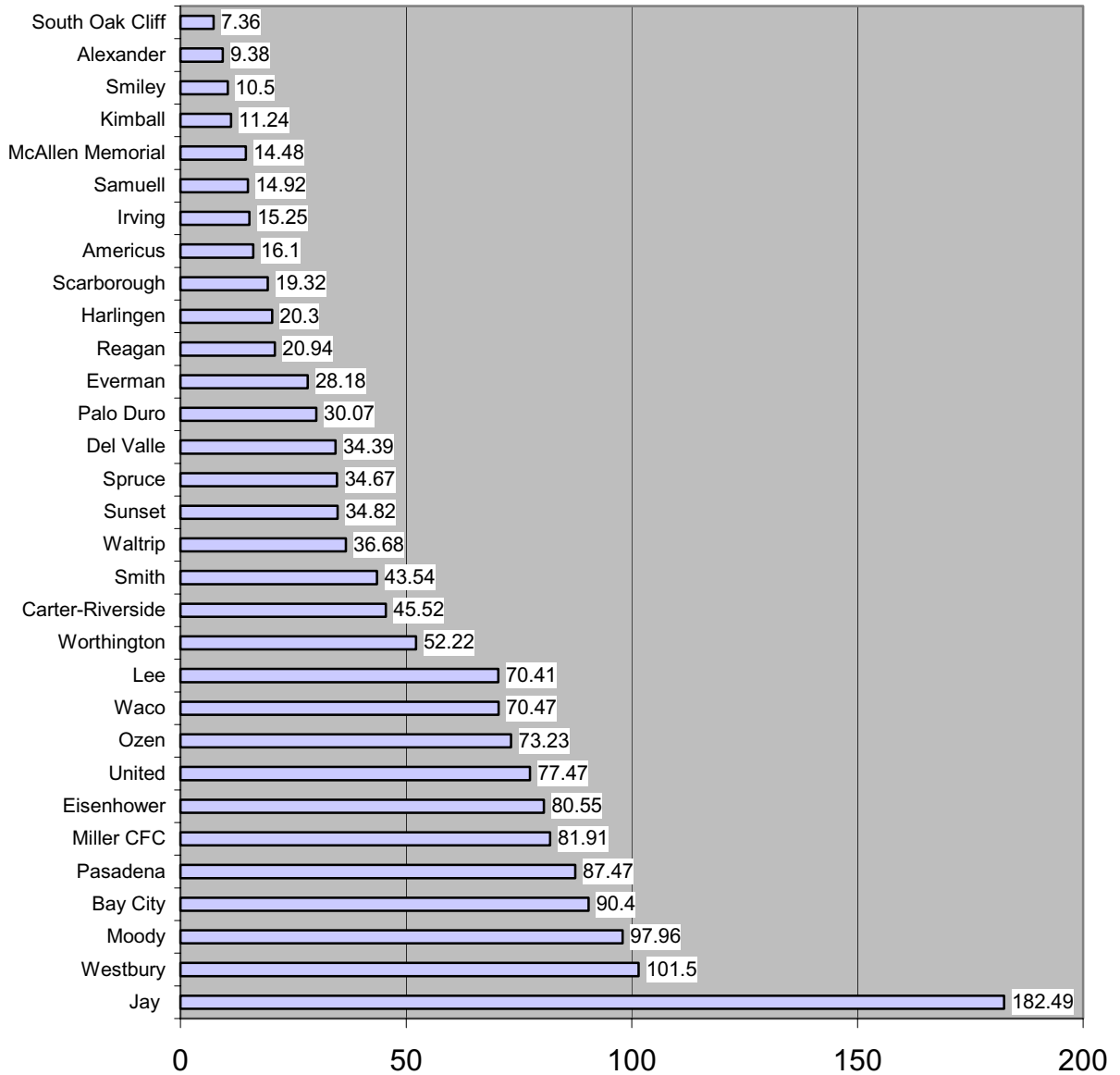


Figure 2-F reflects the total number of high school disciplinary removals for each of the represented high school campuses in 2001-2002, as a percentage of total student enrollment, for the following reasons: Arson; Indecency with a Child; Serious/Persistent Misconduct while placed in a disciplinary AEP; Violation of student code of conduct not included under Chapter 37; Criminal Mischief; Emergency Placement/Expulsion; Terroristic Threat; and False Alarm/False Report.

### 2.2.5. Drug and Alcohol Offenses

As discussed elsewhere in this report, the team did not find that drug-related violence is a significant problem at Reagan High School. However, the presence of drugs and alcohol on any campus must be viewed as disruptive to the learning environment. Within the Austin Independent School District, the prevalence of drug and alcohol related disciplinary referrals is reflected in Figure 2-G.

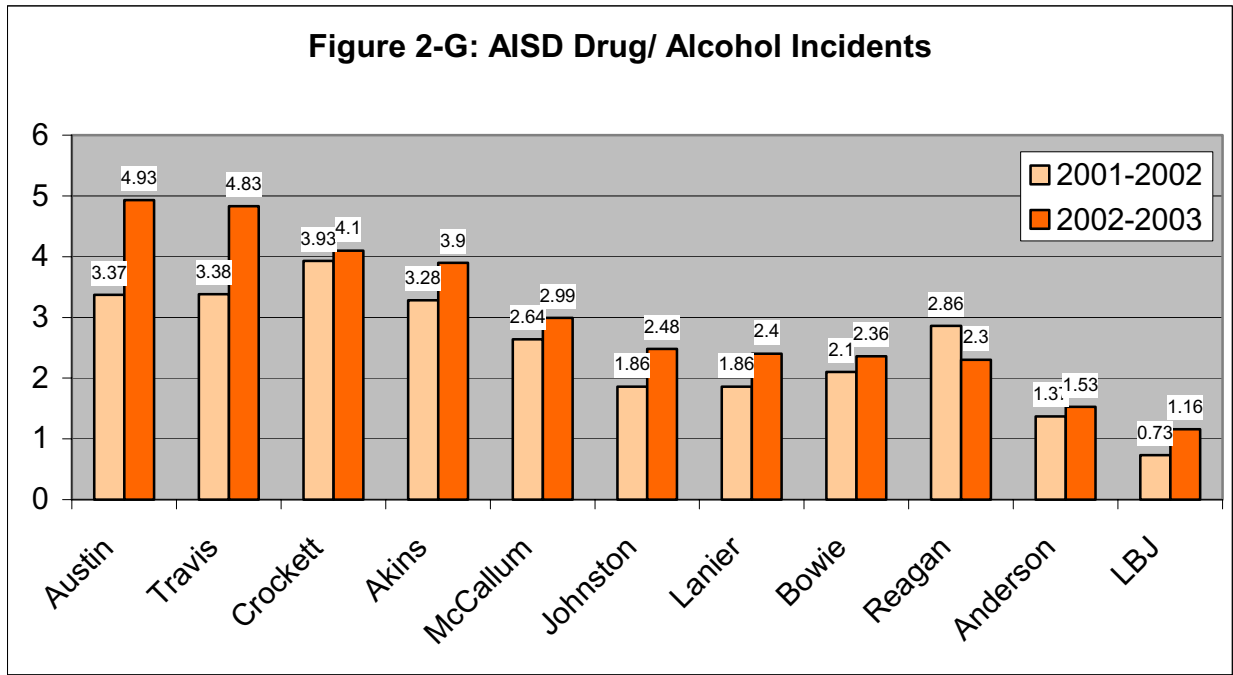


Figure 2-G depicts the number of incidents of received disciplinary removals for each of the represented high school campuses, as a percentage of total student enrollment, for the following reasons: Inappropriate Medicine, Possession of Drug, MS-R, Use of Drug MS-R, Influence of Drug MS-R, Sale of Drug MS-R, Influence of Drug FL-E, Possession of Drug FL-E, Use of Drug FL-E, Sale of Drug FL-E, Paraphernalia D, Possession of Alcohol R, Use of Alcohol R, Influence of Alcohol R, Sale of Alcohol R, Alcohol Felony, and Glue/Aerosol R.

A campus-level comparison of drug and alcohol violations for comparable high school campuses across Texas demonstrates that Reagan High School students were disciplined for drug-related misconduct at levels higher than average for campuses most similar to Reagan High School in terms of the percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunch. See Figure 2-H.

**Figure 2-H: Texas Campus Drug Incidents, 2001-2002**

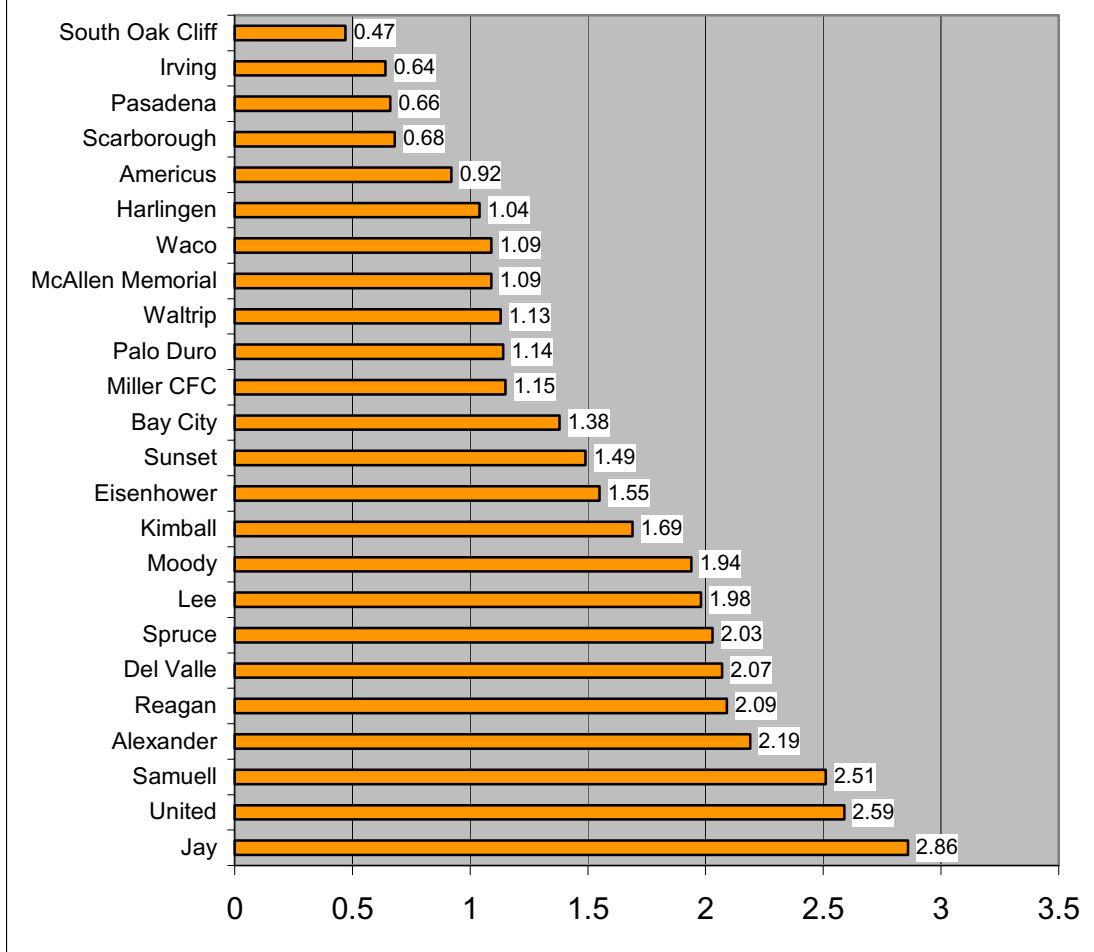


Figure 2-H represents incidents of high school disciplinary removals for each of the represented high school campuses, as a percentage of total student enrollment for the following reasons: Possession, sale, or use of marihuana or other controlled substance; Possession, sale or under the influence of an alcoholic beverage; Abuse of glue or aerosol paint; Felony controlled substance violation; and Felony alcohol violation.

On the whole, Austin ISD recorded disciplinary referrals for drug and alcohol offenses at a rate higher than average for Texas urban school districts. See Figure 2-I.



**Figure 2-I: Texas District Drug/Alcohol Incidents,  
2001-2002**

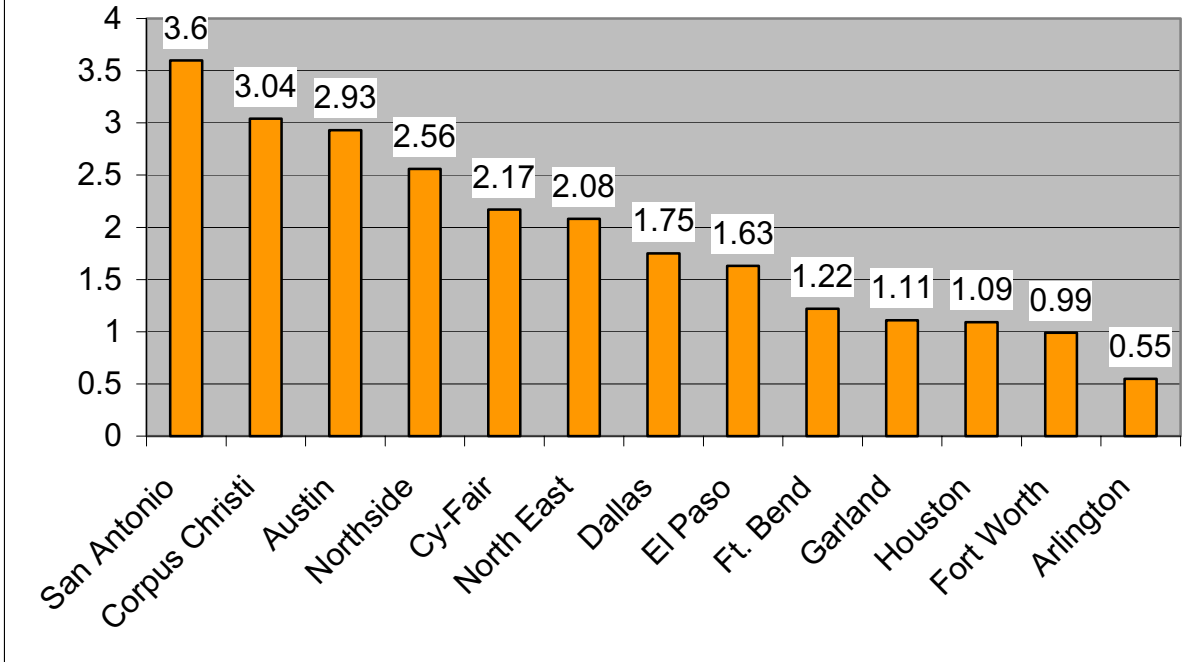


Figure 2-I represents the total number of high school disciplinary removals for each of the represented district's total high school campuses, as a percentage of total student enrollment for the following reasons: Possession, sale, or use of marihuana or other controlled substance; Possession, sale or under the influence of an alcoholic beverage, Abuse of glue or aerosol paint, Felony controlled substance violation, and felony alcohol violation.

### 2.2.6. Student Conduct Resulting in Law Enforcement Referrals

We reviewed student referrals to the Austin ISD district police force and the Travis County Juvenile Courts to compare in-school misconduct data to the prevalence of more serious student misconduct district- and community-wide.

Travis County juvenile records reflect that students are much less likely to be involved in serious behavior of a criminal nature in school as opposed to in the community. Youth residing in the Reagan attendance zone experienced 205 juvenile court referrals for the 2002 calendar year, as compared with 6 on-campus juvenile court referrals during the 2001-2002 school year.<sup>25</sup>

#### Juvenile Assaults and Aggravated Assaults in School and Out of School in the Reagan High School Area

	Aggravated Assault/ Weapon/ Injury	Assault with Injury	Assault/ Student	Assault/ Adult	Aggravated Assault/ Student	Aggravated Assault/ Adult	<b>Total</b>
Reagan H.S. as per AISD report (2001-2002)	NA	NA	0	4	1	1	6
Reagan H.S. area reports as per juvenile records (2002)	44	161	NA	NA	NA	NA	205

Data reflecting regarding the number of Aggravated Assaults with Weapon and Injury are from the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department for the 2002 calendar year. Figure reflects the total number of offenses within those zip codes comprising the Reagan High School attendance zone. Information regarding the Reagan Assault/Student, Assault/Adult, Aggravated Assault/Student, and Aggravated Assault/Adult are from the Austin Independent School District Student Discipline Aggregate Report for the 2001/2002 school year. Figure reflects the total number of disciplinary actions.

While national studies reflect an overall decrease in juvenile offenses since 1994,<sup>26</sup> Austin ISD Police Department figures reflect increases in most types of juvenile crime occurring on school campuses between 2001 and 2002.

Austin ISD Police Department records reflect an increase number of criminal assaults at Austin ISD high schools. See Figure 2-J.

<sup>25</sup> County juvenile statistics are maintained by the zip code of the juvenile offender. We compared juvenile data to the major Reagan High School student zip codes. Juvenile records reflect a calendar year, as contrasted to school year as reflected in AISD numbers.

<sup>26</sup> United States Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs (1999) 120, available online at <http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/index.html>

**Figure 2-J: Assault AISD Police Reports**

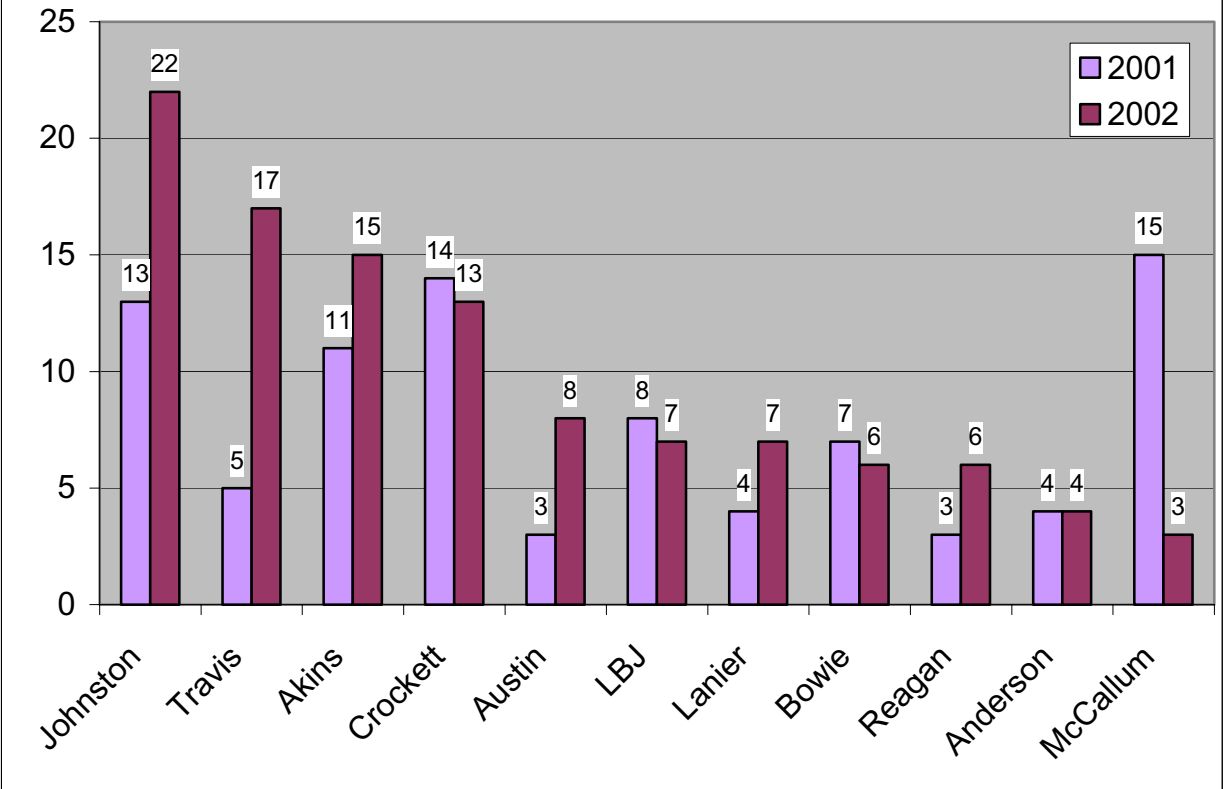


Figure 2-J represents the number of arrests during the respective calendar year for the following reasons: Assault Contact; Assault Intimidation; Assault Knife or Cutting Instrument; Assault Injury Public Servant; Assault Injury Non-Aggravated; Assault Hands, Feet, Fist, etc; Assault Terroristic Threat; Assault Threat; Deadly Conduct; and Assault Other Dangerous Weapon. There were no Sexual Assault arrests or Sexual Assault Felony arrests reported on any AISD campus for the given calendar years.

Similarly, drug and alcohol offenses recorded at most Austin ISD high schools have increased from 2001 to 2002. See Figure 2-K.

### Figure 2-K: Drug & Alcohol AISD Police Reports

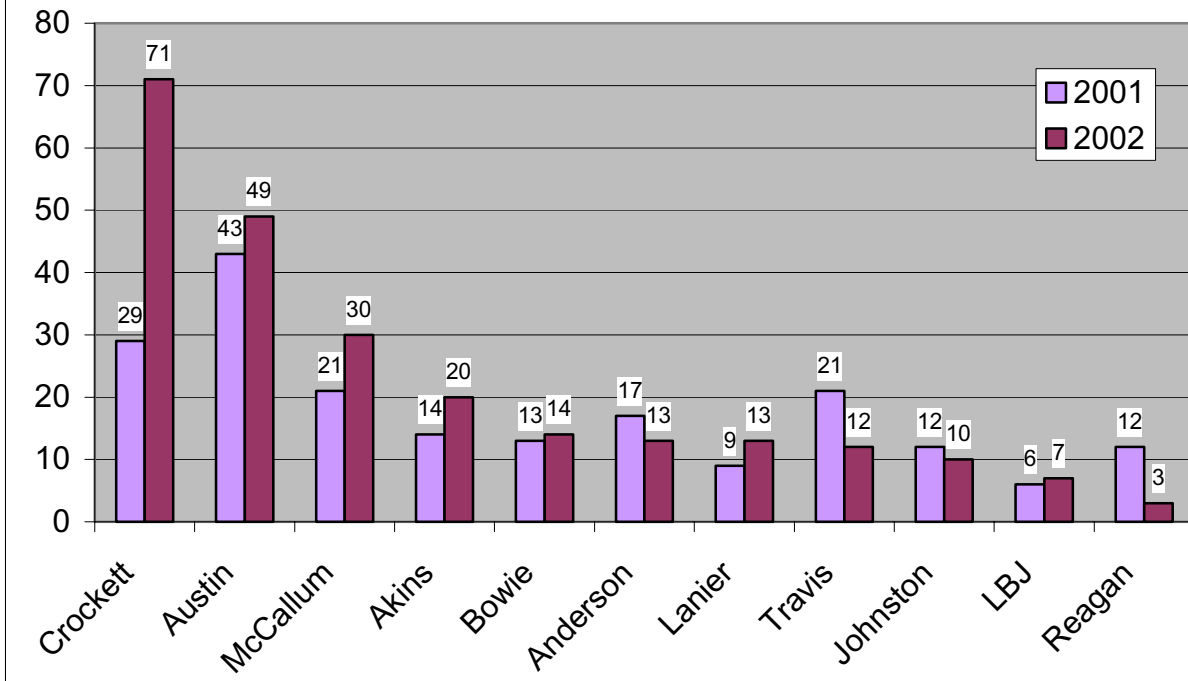


Figure 2-K represents the number of AISD Police Department arrests during the respective calendar year for the following reasons: Minor in Possession of Alcohol; Possession of Controlled Substance Felony; Possession of Controlled Substance Misdemeanor; Drug Paraphernalia Misdemeanor; Possession of Marijuana Misdemeanor; Possession of Marijuana Felony; Public Intoxication; Delivery of Marijuana; Delivery of Controlled Substance to a Minor; Possession of Intoxicant on Public School Grounds; Unlawful Delivery of Controlled Substance; Delivery of a Dangerous Drug; Possession of Dangerous Drug.

Austin Police Department figures suggest that the presence of illegal weapons at school was relatively consistent for the years studied, with increases at Austin and Travis High Schools, and decreases noted at Akins and Reagan High Schools from 2001 to 2002. See Figure 2-L.

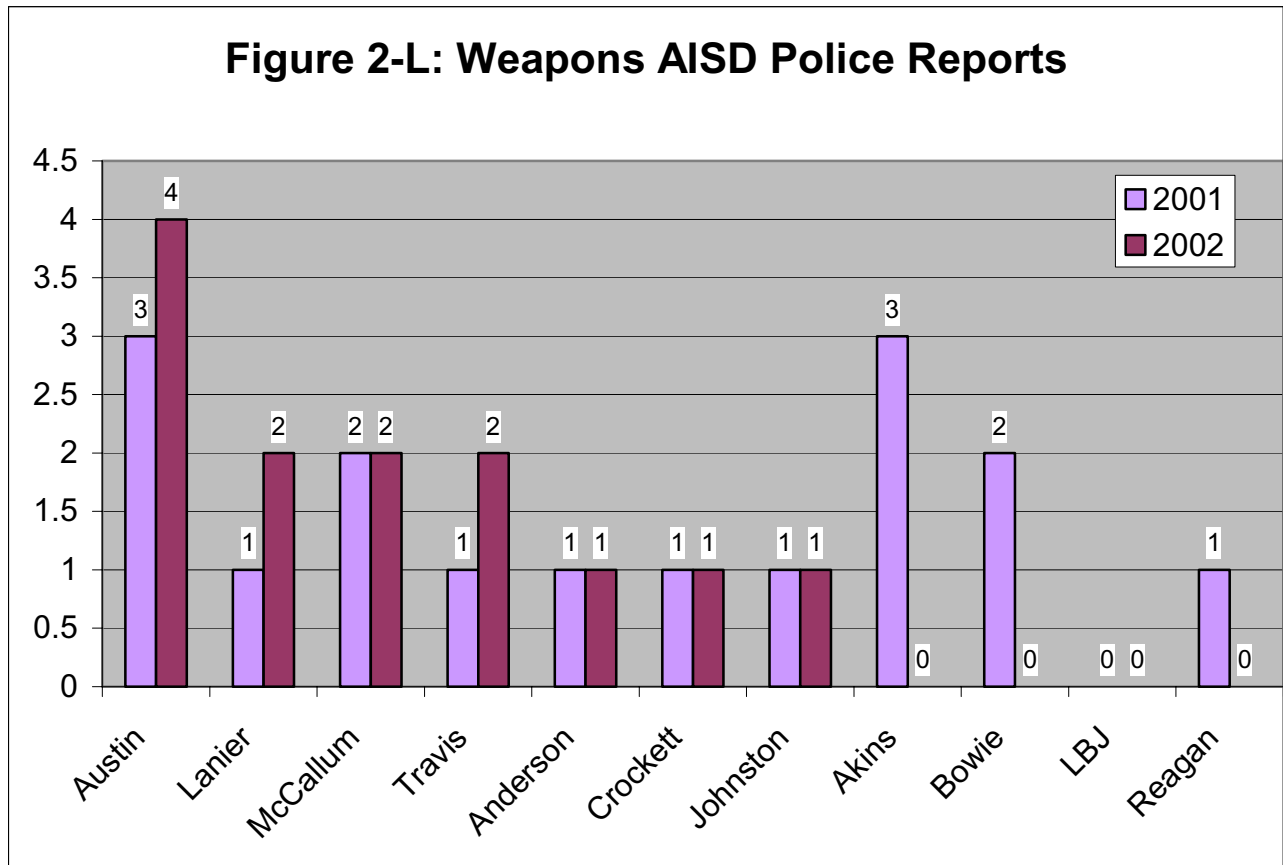


Figure 2-L represents the number of Austin Police Department arrests during the respective calendar year for the following reasons: Places Weapons Prohibited; Unlawful Carrying Weapons; and Weapons/Carrying Prohibited Weapon for the respective years.

District-wide, the incidence of disorderly conduct and fighting reports referred to Austin ISD police showed a consistent increase from 2001-2002 for nearly all high schools in the Austin Independent School District. See Figure 2-M.

**Figure 2-M: Disorderly Conduct/Fighting  
AISD Police Reports**

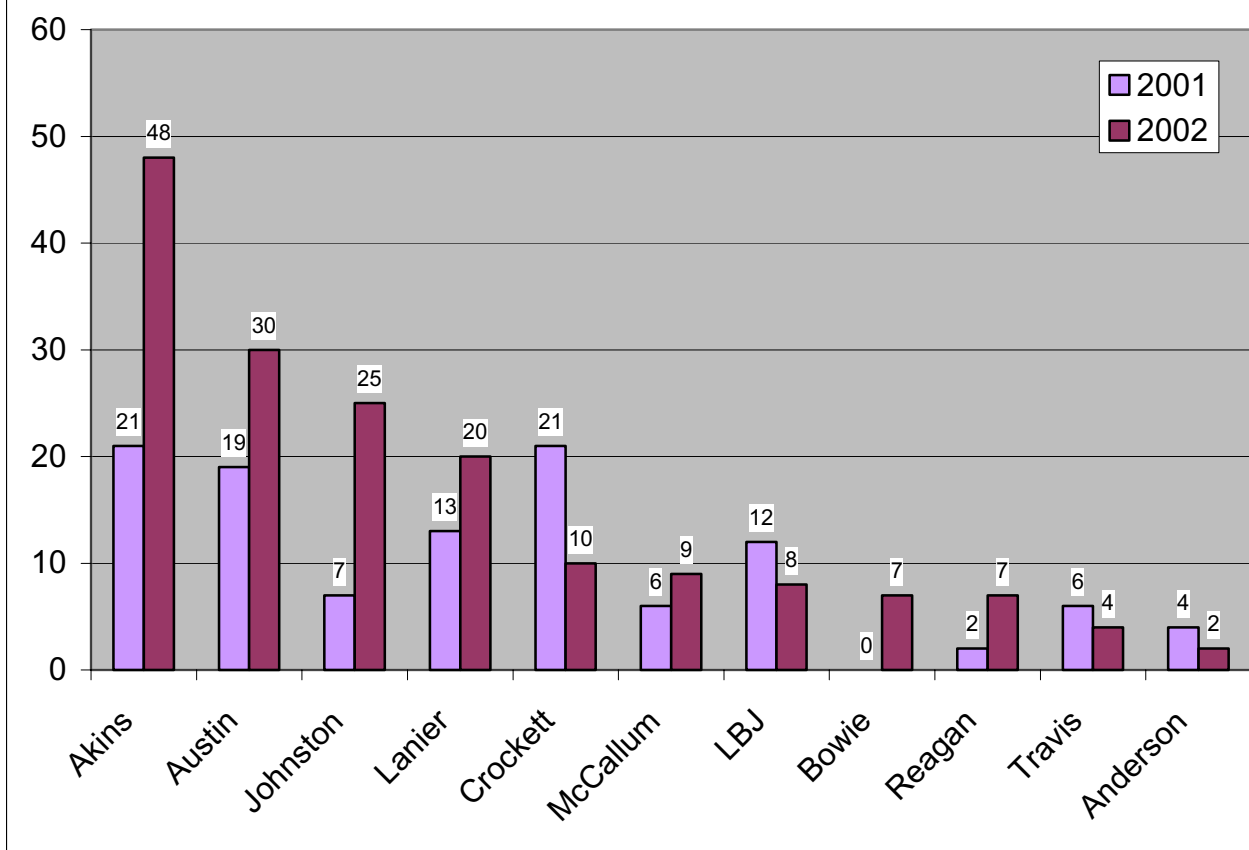


Figure 2-M represents the number of Austin Police Department arrests during the respective calendar year for the following reasons: Disorderly Conduct/Fighting.

### 2.2.7. Weapons Offenses

National statistics indicate that many adolescents have ready access to weapons in their homes. One recent report indicates that 24% of all adolescents report that handguns are easily accessible to them in their homes.<sup>27</sup> In another survey of nearly 130,000 teens, almost 50% of respondents reported having a gun in their homes, and more than half of those stated they those guns were readily accessible.<sup>28</sup> For the period of 1992 through 2003, the great majority of school-associated violent deaths were caused either by shooting (248 deaths) or stabbing/slashing (48 deaths), with non-weapons related deaths being significantly less

<sup>27</sup> Udrey, et al. (1997) <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth>

<sup>28</sup> *USA Weekend*, 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Teen Survey (1999), available online at [http://www.usaweekend.com/00\\_issues/000416/000416teen.html](http://www.usaweekend.com/00_issues/000416/000416teen.html)

frequent.<sup>29</sup> The presence of weapons in the school setting clearly contributes to the opportunity for violent behavior resulting in serious injury or death.

In 2001, one national study reported that 17 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 nationwide reported carrying a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club at some time during the past 30 days; about 6 percent reported carrying a weapon on school property.<sup>30</sup> Another study reported an estimated 370,000 guns were carried by students in the preceding 30 day period in the 1997 school year, and 350,000 in the 1998 school year nationwide.<sup>31</sup> These national data sources rely upon confidential student survey responses, and reflect self-reported behaviors. In contrast, district and statewide data sources are based upon PEIMS data, which only reflects those weapons offenses for which students were disciplined for the conduct.

Reagan High School reported less than 1 weapon offense per 1,000 students in 2001-2002, and 9 per 1,000 in 2002-2003.<sup>32</sup> District-wide, high school weapons offenses are reflected in Figure 2-N.

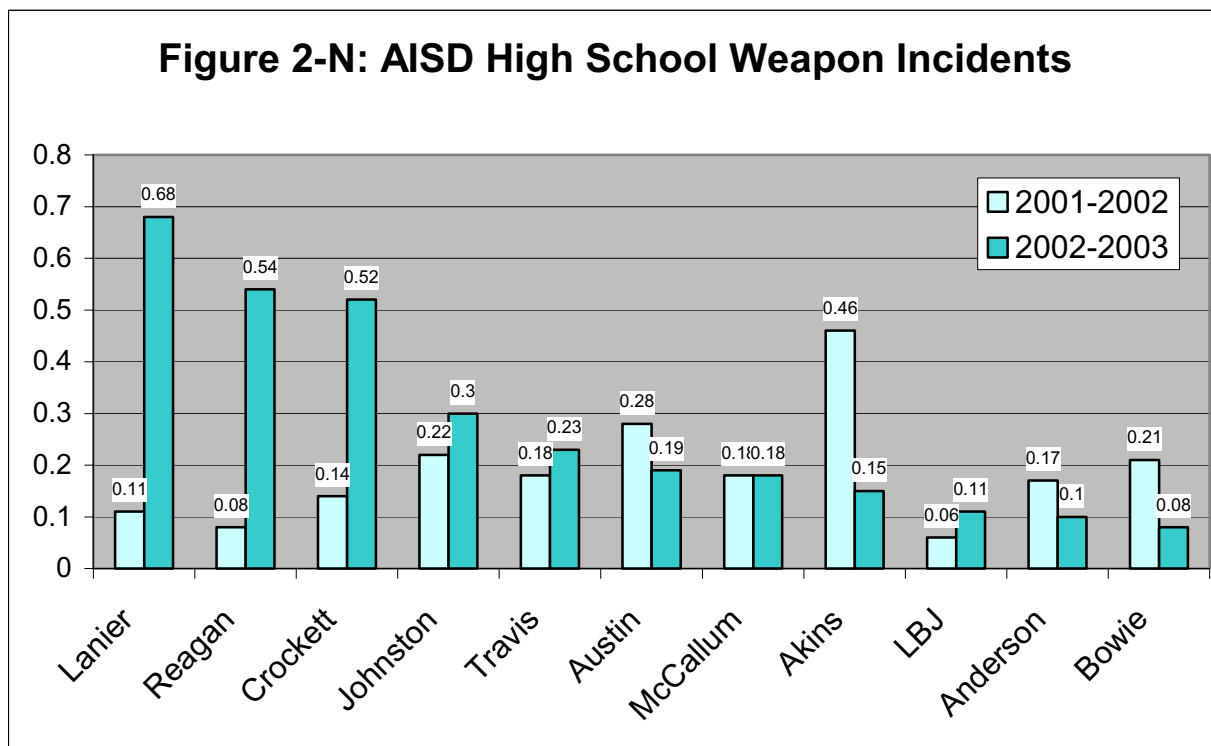


Figure 2-N represents the number of students who received a disciplinary action for the following reasons: Firearm, Legal Knife, Illegal Knife, Club, and Other Weapon during the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years respectively, as a percentage of total student enrollment.

<sup>29</sup> Stephens (2003) 32. (16 deaths due to beating or kicking, 6 deaths caused by hanging, 2 deaths caused by heart attack, 1 death caused by jumping, 6 deaths caused by strangling and 6 deaths of unknown cause).

<sup>30</sup> DeVoe, et al. (2002) 30.

<sup>31</sup> Kingery, et al. (2001)

Because the vast majority of campus level data statewide contains numbers less than 5, which are therefore masked, a meaningful comparison of Reagan High School to other campuses statewide was not possible. When campuses were aggregated on a District basis, however, the masking effect was minimized, and comparisons were possible. See Figure 2-O.

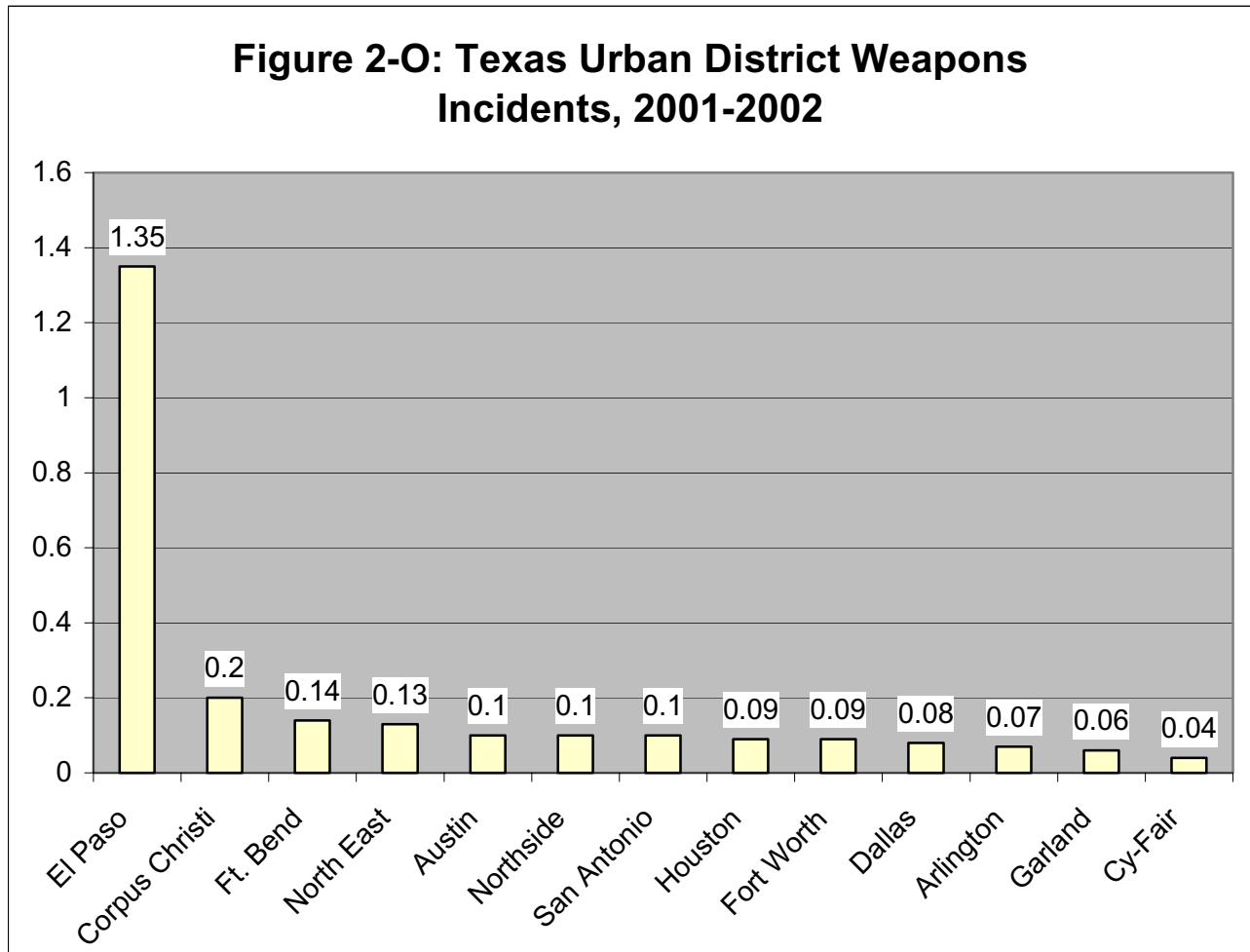


Figure 2-O represents the number of times high school students received a disciplinary action for the following reasons: Use exhibit, or possess a firearm; use, exhibit, or possess an illegal knife; Use, exhibit, or possess an illegal club; and Use, exhibit, or possess a prohibited weapon, during the 2001-2002 school year as a percentage of total high school student enrollment.

Figure 2-O depicts a comparison of the level of weapon violations at Austin ISD to other urban districts in the state. It should be noted that there is some evidence that incidents recorded by El Paso ISD may be over-reported. The team was informed by TEA staff that some administrators in the El Paso ISD were incorrectly coding certain conduct (e.g. a student disciplined for throwing a plastic fork might be improperly coded as a “weapons” offense), yielding potentially unreliable data for that school district.



### 2.3. Disciplinary Actions

A review of disciplinary consequences received by students at Austin high schools demonstrates significant variation in disciplinary styles across the District. The data also suggests that significant numbers of students are removed from the regular school setting during the school year. Other school districts statewide report similarly significant numbers of students removed from the regular school setting for disciplinary reasons.

The level of disciplinary referrals and removals at Reagan High School was cited by parents, students, and administrators as a matter of concern at Reagan. Research indicates that high levels of student removals can significantly impact the learning environment at school. One study notes findings that schools with higher rates of suspension report higher student-teacher ratios and a lower level of academic quality, spend more time on discipline-related matters, and pay significantly less attention to issues of school climate.<sup>33</sup>

During the fall semester of the 2002-2003 school year, 3,194 students were suspended from district high schools for periods ranging from one to three school days. District-wide, 2,698 middle school students were suspended from school between the beginning of school and May 1, 2003. During the 2001-2002 school year, 4,584 high school students and 2,774 middle school students were suspended district-wide. Only 21 students were expelled from school (placed in the JJAEP) during the same period. In comparing district high schools, significant variations are evident in the campuses using suspension as a disciplinary consequence. For example, in the fall of 2002, 757 students were suspended from Lanier High School, and 303 students were suspended from Reagan High School, while only 50 students were suspended from McCallum High School during the same period.

Significant variations between campuses District-wide are also evident as to the use of in-school suspension as a disciplinary consequence. The Akins, Anderson, and Crockett campuses reported one or fewer ISS referrals, as compared to 462 in-school suspension (“ISS”) assignments at Bowie High School and 467 ISS assignments at Travis High School during the 2001-2002 school year.

The following charts illustrate the number of high school and middle student disciplinary removals as a percentage of the campus student body for the 2001-2002 school year. Where the number of referrals exceeds the state average, the number is highlighted. While the number of DAEP and expulsion removals experienced at Austin high schools is relatively consistent with the state average for such removals, certain Austin high schools exceed the state average suspension rate by significant margins. For example, statewide in the 2001-2002 school year, the rate of high school students suspended from any public high school for periods of 1 to 3 school days was 8 in 100 students. Several Austin ISD campuses, including Reagan High School, report a suspension rate as a percentage of student population which greatly exceeds the state average, with more than 18 in 100 Reagan High School students being suspended from school for the same period.

---

<sup>33</sup> Morrison & Skiba (2001) 178

**Austin Independent School District Student Discipline Aggregate Report  
2001-2002 School Year**

<b>High School</b>	<b>Suspension (no. of students)</b>	<b>% Student Body</b>	<b>ISS (no. of students)</b>	<b>% Student Body</b>	<b>AEP (no. of students)</b>	<b>% Student Body</b>	<b>Expulsion as % Student Body</b>
Akins	419	27.49	0	0	93	6.10	0.26
Anderson	173	9.87	0	0	27	1.54	0.11
Austin	137	6.51	231	10.97	85	4.04	0.47
Bowie	128	5.27	320	13.16	64	2.63	0.29
Crockett	222	10.27	2	0.09	91	4.21	0.23
LBJ	115	7.02	1	0.06	25	1.53	0.12
Johnston	262	19.45	375	27.8	39	2.90	0.22
Lanier	604	34.09	87	4.91	101	5.70	0.11
McCallum	86	5.15	166	9.95	63	3.77	0.42
Reagan	244	18.39	74	5.58	54	4.07	0.38
Travis	201	12.15	0	0	71	4.29	0.30

State average for 2001-2002 Suspensions is 8.00%

State average for 2001-2002 In School Suspensions is 18.92%

State average for 2001-2002 DAEP removals is 4.22%

State average for 2001-2002 Expulsions is 0.38%

*Data above the state average is in red ink*

This graph depicts the number of students in Austin Independent School District High Schools during the 2001-2002 school year who received the disciplinary actions of In School Suspension, Out of School Suspensions (Suspension), Alternative Education Placement and Expulsion. The data regarding these incidents was found in the Austin Independent School District=s Student Aggregate Discipline Report for the 2001-2002 school year by campus. The number taken from each category reflects the total number of students receiving each disciplinary action as opposed to the total number of disciplinary actions. Both the Austin ISD high school population figures and total state high school student (grades 9-12) enrollment, used in finding the state average, for the 2001-2002 school year comes from the Texas Education Agency website=s Academic Excellence Indicator System Reports. There is a possibility of a student being counted more than once if the student received more than one type of disciplinary action during this reporting time. Suspension, ISS, AEP, and Expulsion numbers for the state are from the TEA Safe Schools Annual DAEP Evaluation and Discipline Data Report for the state=s high schools by total number of students for the same year.

**Austin ISD Middle School Discipline Information 2001-2002**  
**Number of Students Suspended, ISS, AEP and Expelled**

Middle School/ Junior High	# of Students Suspended	% of Student Body	# of Students sent to ISS	& of Student Body	# of Students sent to AEP	% of Student Body	Expulsion as a % of Student Body
Bailey	66	5.62	159	13.53	23	1.96	0
Bedicheck	178	18.17	55	5.61	39	3.98	0.10
Burnet	229	21.96	299	28.67	48	4.60	0
Covington	122	13.08	211	22.62	33	3.54	0.11
Dobie	280	30.97	369	40.82	58	6.42	0
Fulmore	118	13.79	224	26.17	33	3.86	0.12
Kealing	189	19.15	165	16.78	37	3.75	0.10
Lamar	129	16.27	120	15.13	24	3.03	0
Martin	200	32.31	262	42.33	36	5.82	0
Mendez	133	15.83	128	15.24	39	4.64	0.12
Murchison	116	9.35	170	13.70	21	1.70	0.16
O Henry	137	16.14	260	30.62	24	2.83	0
Paredes	187	17.61	0	0	28	2.64	0.09
Pearce	256	30.19	295	34.79	54	6.37	0.35
Porter	179	25.14	169	23.74	49	6.89	0.28
Small	26	2.38	90	8.25	10	0.92	0.55
Webb	229	29.86	186	24.25	50	6.52	0.13

- State average for 2001-2002 Suspensions is 10.49%
- State average for 2001-2001 In School Suspensions is 21.90%
- State average for 2001-2002 DAEP removals is 3.79%
- State average for 2001-2002 Expulsions is 0.30%

*Data above the state average is marked in red.*

This graph depicts the number of students in Austin Independent School District High Schools during the 2001-2002 school year who received the disciplinary actions of In School Suspension, Out of School Suspensions (Suspension), Alternative Education Placement and Expulsion. The data regarding these incidents was found in the Austin Independent School District's Student Aggregate Discipline Report for the 2001-2002 school year by campus. The number taken from each category reflects the total number of students receiving each disciplinary action as opposed to the total number of disciplinary actions. Both the Austin ISD high school population figures and total state high school student (grades 9-12) enrollment, used in finding the state average, for the 2001-2002 school year comes from the Texas Education Agency website's Academic Excellence Indicator System Reports. There is a possibility of a student being counted more than once if the student received more than one type of disciplinary action during this reporting time. Suspension, ISS, AEP, and Expulsion numbers for the state are from the TEA Safe Schools Annual DAEP Evaluation and Discipline Data Report for the state's high schools by total number of students for the same year.

District-wide, middle school campuses also reflect high numbers of student suspensions and removals to in-school suspension, in many cases in numbers far exceeding the state average for such disciplinary consequences. At the Dobie, Webb, and Pearce campuses, for example, the total number of student suspensions for the 2001-2002 school year equaled approximately 30%

of the total school enrollment for that period. Statewide, the average for student suspensions on the middle school level was approximately 10%.

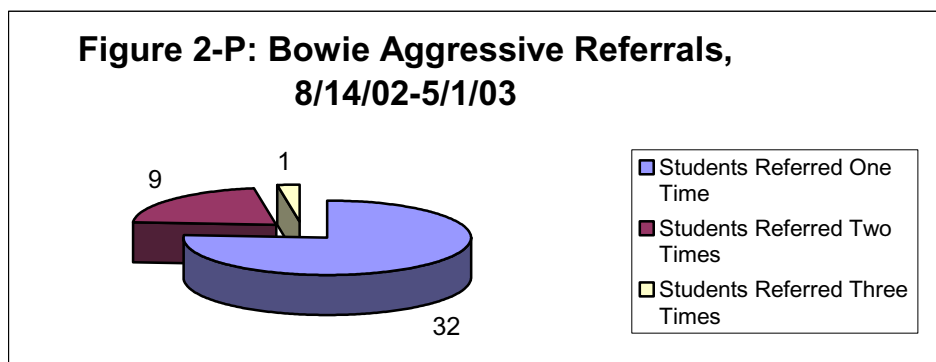
In addition to the substantial impact on school funding that such levels of removals represent, the students assigned to out of school suspension experience a meaningful interruption of their educational program. As discussed in our survey and interview findings, Reagan High School students do not perceive out of school or in-school suspension as a meaningful deterrent to misconduct, and we noted little or no evidence to suggest that the use of suspension or in-school suspension as a disciplinary tool resulted in improved student behavior.

### 2.3.1. Student Level Comparisons

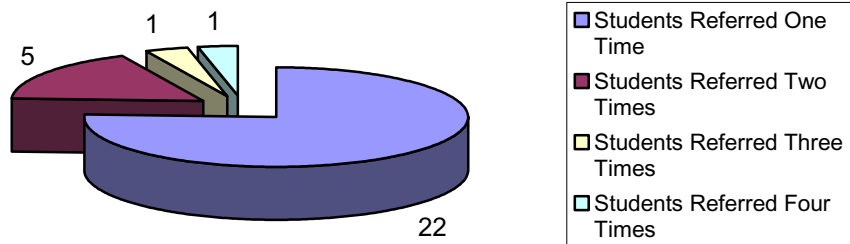
Because both district and state level PEIMS data contains certain internal duplications, we selected four focus campuses for closer analysis. Discipline referrals for two campuses reporting high levels of aggressive behavior, Reagan and Lanier High Schools, and two campuses reporting low levels of aggressive behavior, McCallum and Bowie High Schools, were analyzed on an individual student-level basis to ascertain whether differences in administrative or reporting styles might explain the levels of student aggressive conduct reported, or whether isolated repeat offenders on individual campuses represented disproportionate numbers of total referrals.

For each of these campuses, the team reviewed disciplinary referral information on an individual student basis. Individual administrators were also personally interviewed to ascertain whether other disciplinary strategies used on the campus might explain the level of aggressive conduct reported.

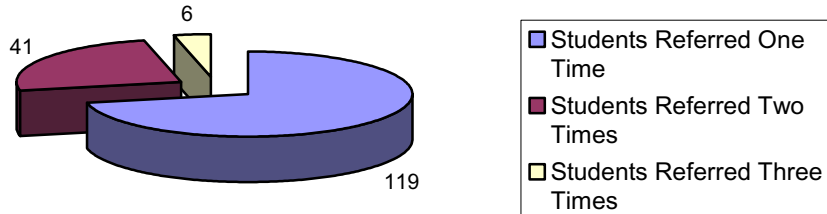
Figures 2-P, 2-Q, 2-R, and 2-S represent, on a student-specific basis, the number of students who received disciplinary consequences for aggressive conduct at each of the four focus campuses. Because the team evaluated each disciplinary referral on a per-student basis, the duplication effect which occurs in the PEIMS data is eliminated in these graphs. While the total number of students engaged in aggressive misconduct is lower at the McCallum and Bowie campuses, as anticipated, of significant interest is that the proportion of students who engage in such conduct one, two, three, and four or more times on each of the focus campuses was strikingly similar.



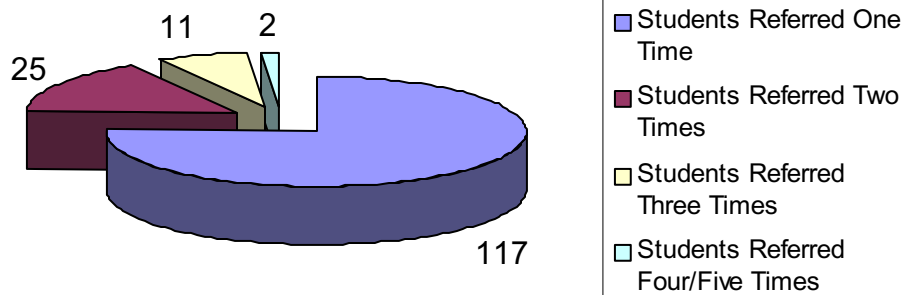
**Figure 2-Q: McCallum Aggressive Referrals.  
8/19/02-5/1/03**



**Figure 2-R: Lanier Aggressive Referrals,  
8/19/02-5/1/03**

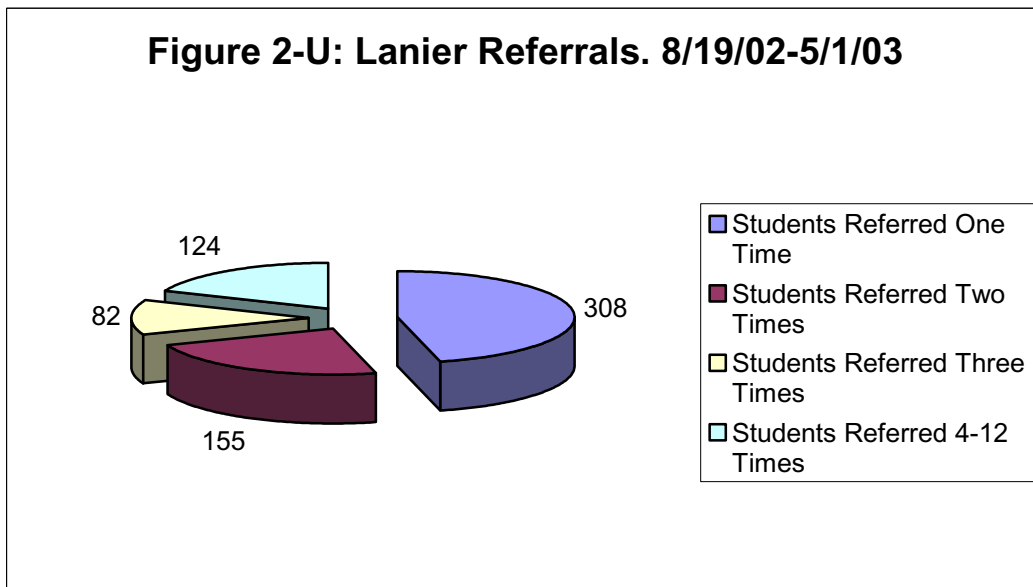
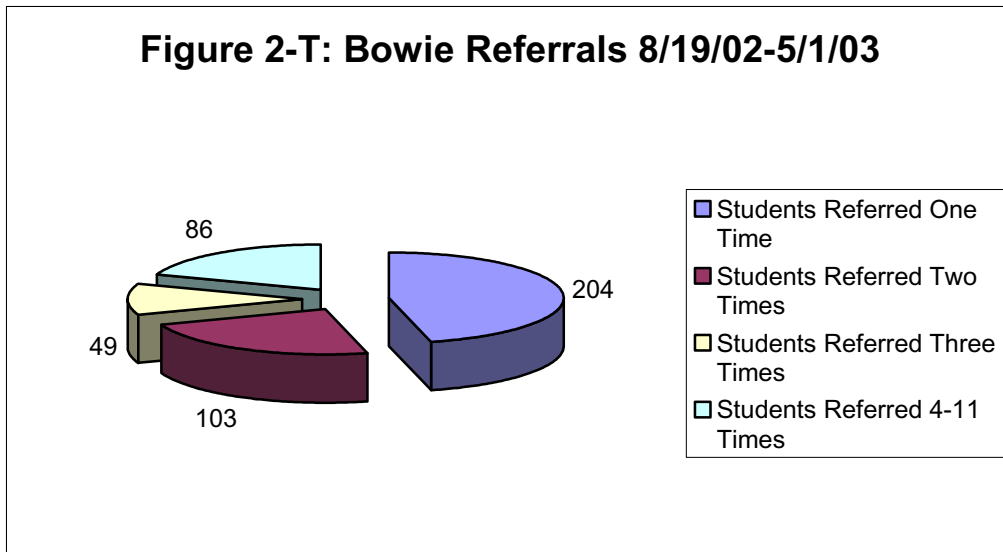


**Figure 2-S: Reagan Aggressive Referrals, 8/19/2002-5/1/2003**

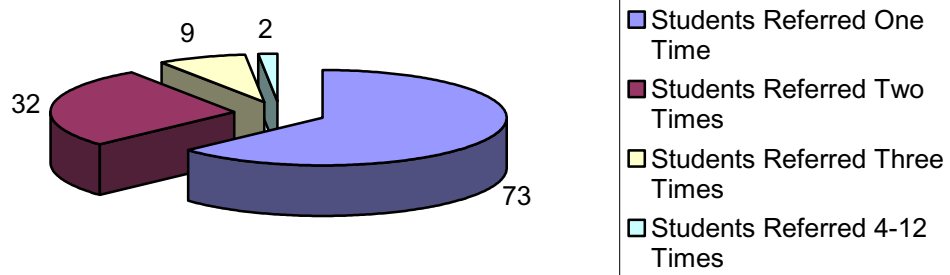


In each case, approximately 75% of the students receiving disciplinary referrals for aggressive conduct received only one referral for the 2002-2003 school year. In each school, a very small proportion of students were disciplined for aggressive conduct three or more times during the school year.

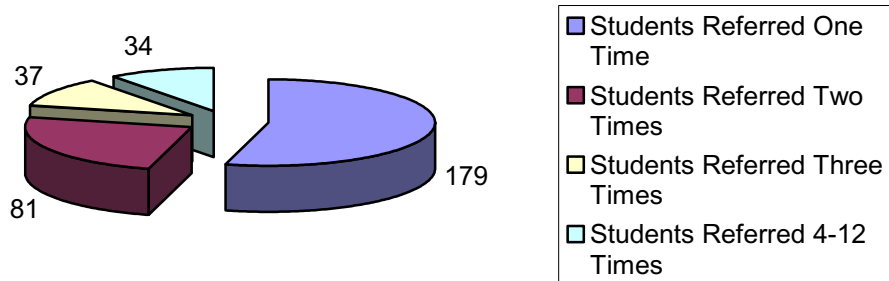
The team also reviewed the number of students who received repeated disciplinary referrals for any type of misconduct for each of the four target campuses. (See, Figures 2-T, 2-U, 2-V, and 2-W)). Again the relative proportionality of the referrals is of interest. On each of the four focus campuses, the proportion of students with single and repeated office referrals were comparable; and even adjusting for the duplication effect of the PEIMS district-wide data, the Reagan and Lanier High School campuses continued to demonstrate clearly higher numbers of student disciplinary referrals in absolute terms. On each of the focus campuses, a measurable number of students experienced persistent disciplinary referrals (as many as 10-12 in the 2002-2003 school year).



**Figure 2-V: McCallum Referrals 8/119/02-5/1/03**



**Figure 2-W: Reagan Referrals, 8/19/02-5/1/03**



## SECTION THREE: REAGAN COMMUNITY OPINIONS

A school's climate, including student and parent connections within the school, has been found to be a significant factor in developing and maintaining a safe school environment. The team therefore attempted to evaluate the atmosphere at Reagan High School through site visits, community meetings, personal interviews with stakeholders and written questionnaires. The team's work in this area was completed in a relatively brief period of time, as our work began shortly before the end of the school year, and conflicts with end of school programs and activities did raise some barriers to our efforts. However, by collecting statements from a variety of sources, we feel our observations fairly reflect opinions and attitudes currently found at Reagan High School.

### 3.1. Questionnaire Responses

The team, with the cooperation of the Reagan High School staff and administration, provided written questionnaires to students at Reagan High School, to be completed during class time. Staff and administrator surveys were also distributed at school. Parent surveys were mailed to the homes of all Reagan High School students as recorded on the official school attendance roster. Parent surveys were also made available at each of three parent and community meetings held in the school cafeteria. Parent and student surveys were in both English and Spanish languages. Copies of the survey documents are attached at Appendix B.

#### 3.1.1. Student Surveys

At the request of the team, Reagan High School provided students with the student safety survey to be completed and returned to the teacher during the seventh period during the school day. Of a total enrollment of approximately 1,300 students, 376 students returned completed surveys. Twenty of the surveys were largely non-responsive (i.e. students only answered the first page or answered "no comment") but responsive answers were collected whenever possible. While all students had the option to respond to any or all of the questions on the survey, their grade level and race/ethnicity was particularly emphasized as optional. The sample group of students who selected the identifications provided, identified themselves as follows:

Freshman--	110
Sophomore--	75
Junior--	70
Senior--	42

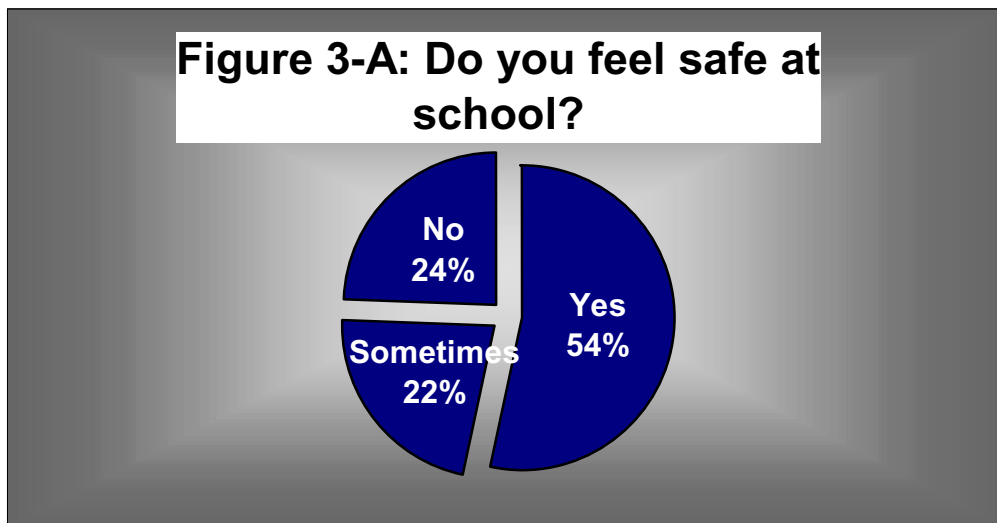
Those choosing to identify their race responded as follows:

Hispanic--	162
African-American--	100
Anglo--	6
Asian--	2
Biracial --	5



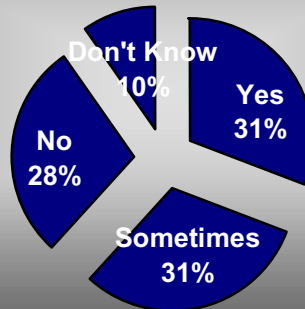
Survey questions requested both quantitative and qualitative responses. Responses to quantitative questions include those that could be classified easily and counted within a general “yes”, “no,” and “maybe” range. Wherever percentages are listed, it is based on the total number of responses for each particular question as not all students answered all questions. Qualitative responses include the most common responses to open-ended questions without any attempt to quantify beyond general trends of commonality. These responses were grouped thematically, and while they typify common trends, they are listed in descending order beginning with the most frequent group of responses. It is important to note that with the open-ended questions in the survey, it is rare to have any response occur more than 20% of the time, and most of those listed generally fall within the 10%-20% range.

Of the students responding to the question “Do you feel safe at school?” 53% responded that they generally felt safe at Reagan High School, 22% responded that they felt safe at Reagan High School some of the time, while 24% of the respondents indicated that they did not feel safe at Reagan High School. See Figure 3-A.



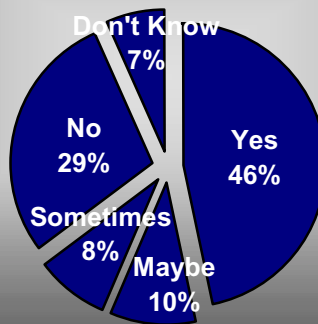
When asked if students felt that school administrators were responsive to student safety concerns, their responses were fairly evenly distributed (28-31%) across “yes,” “no,” and “sometimes.” See Figure 3-B.

**Figure 3-B: Are administrators responsive to student safety concerns?**



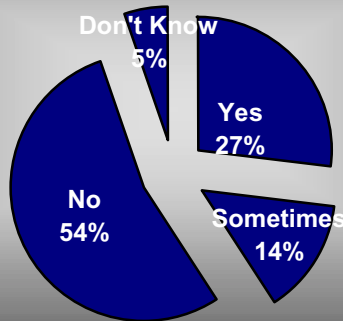
Less than half of the responding students (46%) felt that they could get help from campus administrators if they had safety concerns. Students' explanations for their responses can be found in the qualitative section. See Figure 3-C.

**Figure 3-C: Do you feel you could get help from administrators if you had safety concerns?**



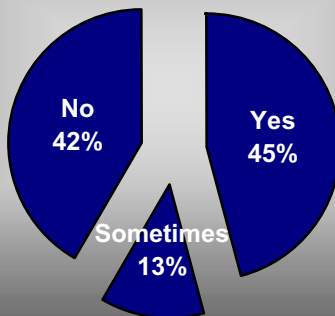
Students responding to the survey generally did not believe that disciplinary rules at school were effective in deterring student violence. See Figure 3-D. Of all respondents, 54% of students believed the rules were ineffective, with only half as many, or 27%, finding them mostly effective.

**Figure 3-D: Do you feel the rules are effective?**



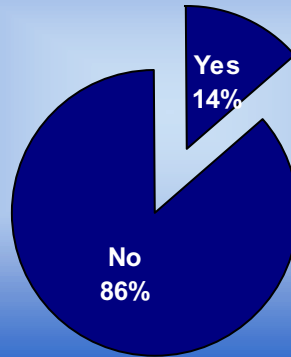
Students were divided in their opinion as to whether the school effectively communicated its expectations for student conduct, with 45% affirmative responses and 42% negative responses. See Figure 3-E.

**Figure 3-E: Does the school effectively communicate expectations?**



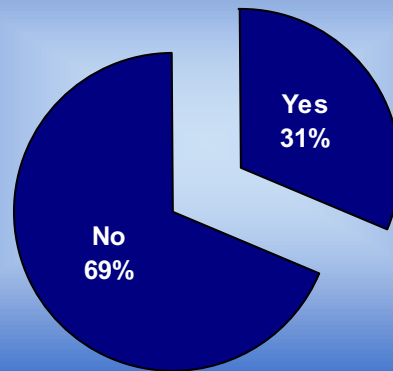
An overwhelming majority of students indicated that they were unaware of gang activity on campus (86% of respondents). See Figure 3-F. Most students explained that gangs were “old school” although 14% specified that gang and neighborhood clique members did attend Reagan but generally kept gang activity off campus.

**Figure 3-F: Are you aware of gang activity?**



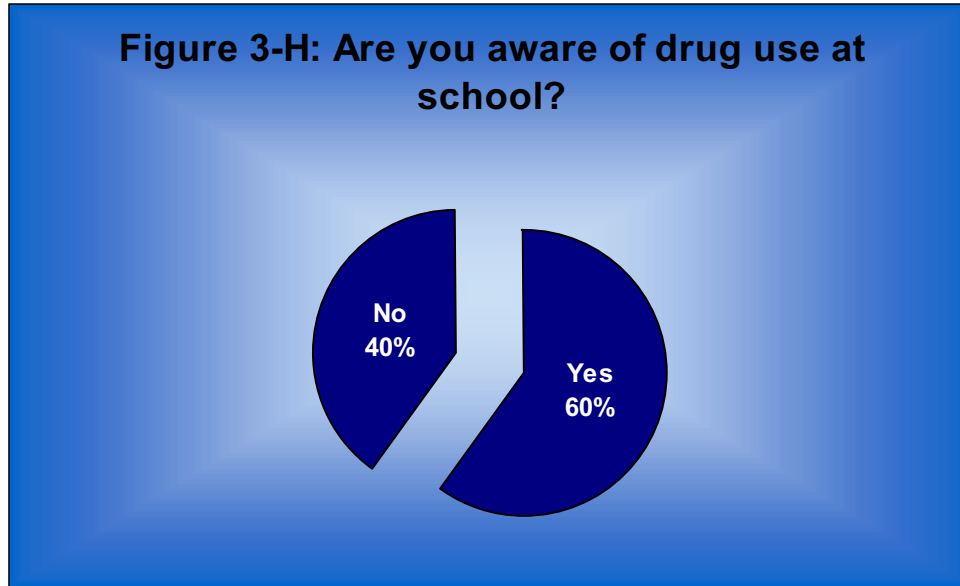
Most students denied the presence of bullying on campus by a ratio of 2:1; however, many of those students responding affirmatively indicated that students who speak English as a second language were often the objects of bullying due to language differences. See Figure 3-G.

**Figure 3-G: Are you aware of bullying?**



As far as drug use among students at school, 60% stated that they were aware of such activity. Marijuana was the drug that students consistently identified with this activity. See Figure 3-H.

**Figure 3-H: Are you aware of drug use at school?**



When students were asked to describe the atmosphere at Reagan High School, there was a fairly even distribution across categories ranging from negative to neutral to positive. Common negative characterizations included: “bad,” “unsafe,” “negative,” and “unpleasant.” Neutral characterizations included: “okay,” “alright,” and “neutral.” Positive descriptors included: “good,” “great,” “fun,” and “cool.”

While most students indicated that they felt safe at Reagan, many expressed specific safety concerns. In particular, students stated that the campus was too open and there was not enough security. Other concerns included 1) weapons, injury, and death; 2) disciplinary problems, fights, and disrespect; and 3) administrators and/or hall monitors who do not care or do their job well.

When asked why students believed administrators were or were not responsive to their safety concerns, there were slightly more negative explanations than positive ones. The most common responses were 1) administrators ignore students, do not take them seriously, are too slow, or only attend to concerns that are of major consequence; 2) administrators do a good job and provide good supervision. The divergence of responses suggests that students may have perceived or experienced inconsistent behavior on the part of administrators.

Respondents enumerated various reasons for the causes of violence by students. Responses, in the descending order of frequency, included: 1) anger, disagreements, arguments, and disrespect; 2) gossip, rumors, trash-talk, “he said/she said;” 3) relationships/relationship abuse, love, sexual harassment; 4) home life; 5) the administration ignores concerns or is non-responsive; and 6) racism.

Consistent with the 2:1 ratio of negative to positive responses to the question, “Do you believe the school’s disciplinary rules are effective in deterring student violence?” students provided more negative than positive explanations (2:1) as to why disciplinary rules were or

were not effective. The most frequent responses in descending order are as follows: 1) students don't obey the rules; 2) administrators, teachers, and security are non-responsive, not strict enough, and do not enforce the rules; 3) the rules improve behavior and reduce the number of troublemakers; and 4) the consequences are not severe enough and/or students do not care about the consequences.

Students provided numerous suggestions when asked what kinds of changes would help them feel safer at school. A prevalent response was a call for more and better hall monitors and/or security. Other responses included statements in which 1) students did not want changes because they felt safe or because they believed changes would be useless, and 2) students wanted to feel that teachers and administrators cared and took them seriously. Other suggestions were consistently brought up, albeit to a lesser degree. Examples include security devices such as metal detectors, fencing, and cameras; the need to address racist attitudes of teachers and hall monitors; and stricter responses to violence and drugs.

Students identified numerous places/people to which they could turn if they had a safety concern: 1) office/administration (this includes students who specifically identified the principal); 2) parents and family; 3) counselors; and 4) teachers (students often identified a particular teacher or emphasized that they would turn to a teacher they trusted). Although much less common, students also said they could turn to the police, friends, or that they had nowhere to turn.

When asked what other resources students thought would be helpful on campus to improve their sense of safety, prevalent responses included more security personnel/supervision, security items (e.g. fences/gates, metal detectors, security cameras that work, weapons check), better administrators, a closed campus, and equal treatment from hall monitors.

Students indicated numerous locations where they felt unsafe on campus. The most common responses included: behind the gym, wherever there were no hall monitors, everywhere, and restrooms.

When students chose to answer the question as to how to improve Reagan High School, they did not limit themselves to one recommendation. The most frequent responses were: 1) more/other responsible hall monitors; 2) attentive/caring/supportive administration, faculty, and staff; 3) more security or police; and 4) fences, metal detectors, and a closed campus.

### **3.1.2. Staff Surveys**

Staff surveys were provided to the campus principal, with the request that they be distributed to staff. A total of 41 surveys were returned for analysis. The breakdown of respondents' professional classification and race/ethnicity provided is as follows:

Teachers--	33
Administrators--	0
Classified employees--	3

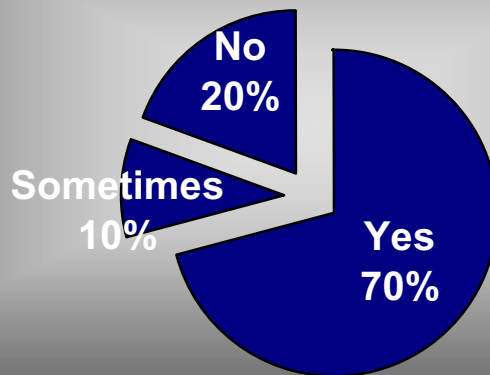
Other professionals--	1
Unidentified--	4

Respondents identified themselves as follows:

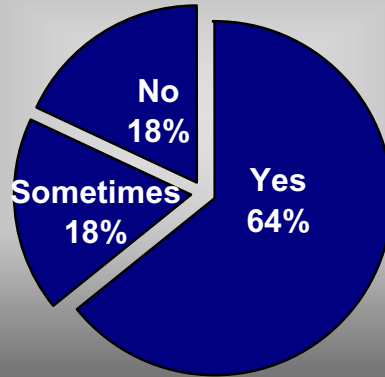
African American--	4
Hispanic--	5
Anglo--	20
Biracial--	1
Other--	0

For an explanation of the analytical breakdown of the survey components and responses, please see the student survey section above. Again, not all respondents answered all questions. Staff responses to the quantitative questions are depicted below:

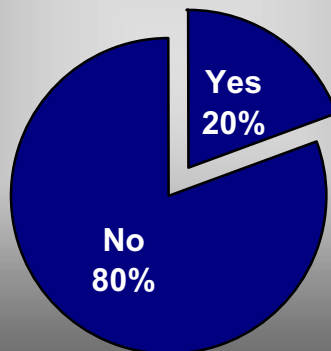
**Figure 3-I: Do you feel students are safe at Reagan?**



**Figure 3-J: Do you feel staff members are safe at Reagan?**

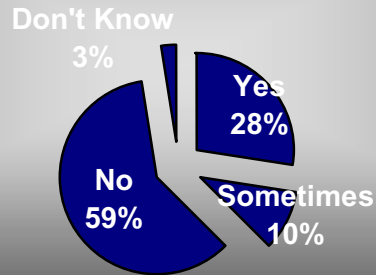


**Figure 3-K: Are you aware of threats to student safety that are not responded to by the school or the district?**

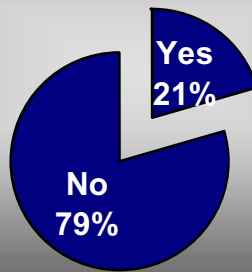




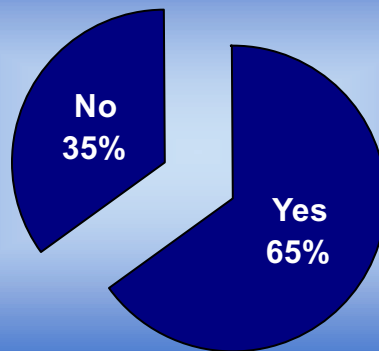
**Figure 3-L: Does the school effectively communicate its expectations for student conduct?**

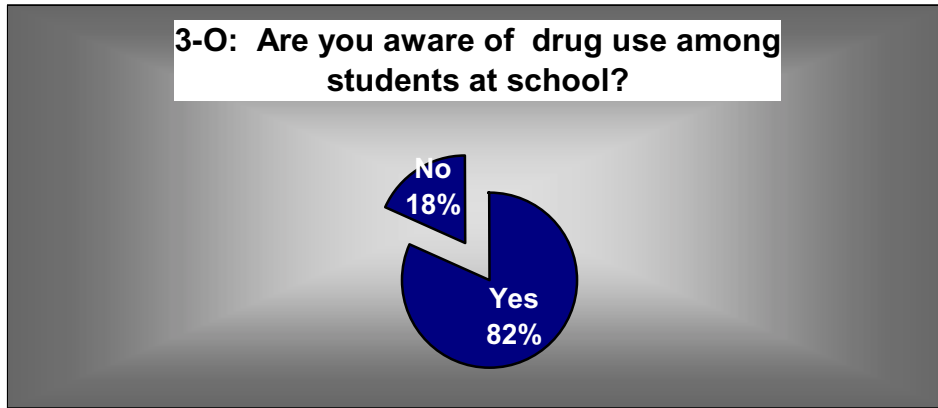


**Figure 3-M: Are you aware of gang activity?**



**3-N: Are you aware of bullying at school?**

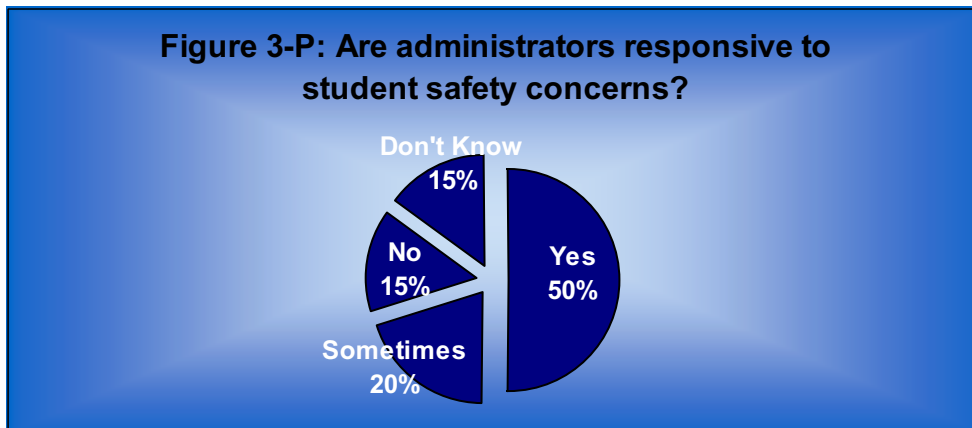




Reagan High School staff members who completed and returned surveys used negative descriptors over positive to describe the atmosphere at the school. They described it as chaotic, uncontrolled, undisciplined, and disruptive as opposed to friendly, positive, and good by a ratio of approximately 2:1. Other common descriptors included 1) tense and stressful; 2) low morale and discouraging; and 3) generally safe.

When asked about the biggest safety challenge at Reagan, security and discipline consistently came up as key components as indicated by the most common responses: 1) campus is too open, too easy to enter and leave; 2) lack of discipline, disrespect for the rules, non-enforcement of rules, and the lack of consequences; 3) students are not in class, were skipping school, or had no intention of learning; and 4) there were too many unsupervised areas, and not enough hall monitors.

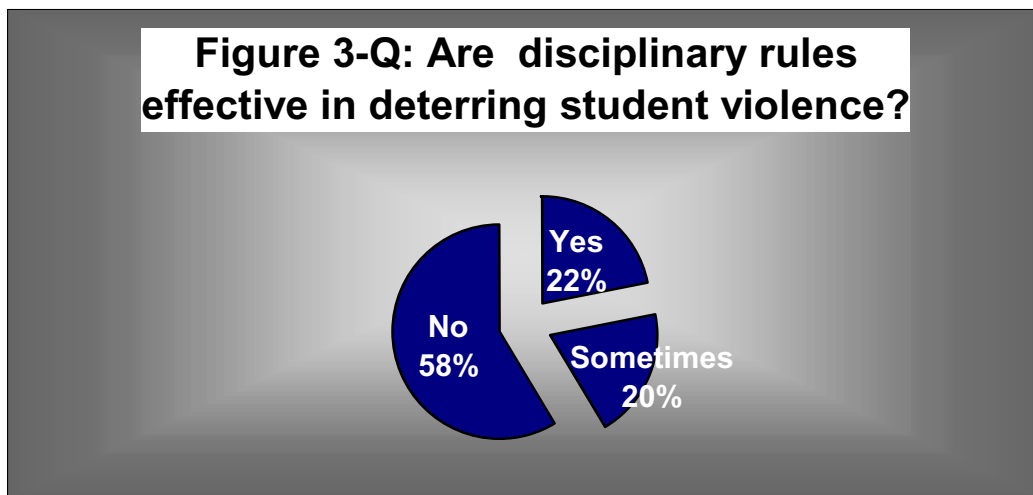
In response to the question whether administrators are responsive to student safety concerns, answers were fairly evenly split between positive and negative explanations. The two most common responses were contradictory: 1) good follow-up, responsive, timely, and 2) not quick enough response/follow-up, overworked, and too busy.



When asked about the causes of violence among students, staff members identified

students' home life 15 times (approximately 37% of those who returned surveys). This was the specific (ungrouped) response that occurred more often than any other in the qualitative section of the staff survey. This strong response may be significant not only because of its occurrence rate but also because it suggests that staff members appear to place responsibility for student conduct outside the realm of their control. It is also interesting to note that student respondents identified home life less frequently as the source of student violent behavior; for students, home life was the 4<sup>th</sup> most common response. Other staff responses included: 1) anger/grudge; 2) no consequences/limits or fear of consequences; 3) playing around and conflicts escalating; 4) gossip, rumors, "he said/she said," and miscommunication; and 4) relationships and jealousy.

Most staff members believed school rules were ineffective in deterring student violence. The most common explanations included: 1) lack of consistency, 2) the need for severe consequences/students were unafraid of consequences, and 3) the rules were not enforced.



When asked what kinds of changes would improve student safety at Reagan, a clear pattern emerged among responses. Responses revolved around three main themes: discipline, security, and staff support and training (in descending order of occurrence). Disciplinary improvements included comments such as the need for strict adherence to rules, a toughening of disciplinary measures, heavy consequences and zero tolerance, expelling repeat offenders, and making ISS more meaningful. Security suggestions included more security/hall monitors (visible and accountable), a monitored gate for entrance and exit, two new police officers on campus, bilingual (English/Spanish speaking) hall monitors, and parent volunteers as hall monitors. Staff support and training responses included: administrators and teachers working together and supporting each other (often shown by quicker responses and higher accessibility and visibility); caring and committed adults who listen to students; simple guidelines, planning and training (including counseling training); and SafePlace involvement.

Staff members identified several places that students and parents could turn if they had a concern about safety at school: 1) front office/administration in general, 2) teachers, and 3) the principal. Less common responses included campus police and the school board.

When asked what other resources would be helpful on campus to improve safety at school, a similar pattern emerged. Again, the three main themes revolved around security, discipline, and support, although in a slightly different order of occurrence with physical security items being the most prevalent. Security suggestions included: more hall monitors on each floor and the new mall, responsible and uniformed police officers, stricter security, a closable campus/monitored entrance, and a parking lot that was closed and monitored. Disciplinary suggestions included consistent rules and consequences and removal of troublemakers such as through expulsion if they had multiple referrals. Support was also brought up several times such as 1) supportive, caring, and committed administration and faculty, 2) AISD putting Reagan High School safety concerns at the forefront, 3) boosting teacher and student morale; and 4) counseling and training. With regard to counseling and training, staff members felt it was not only important that they receive training from Safeplace or behavior management training, but also that students with anger or psychological problems receive counseling.

Staff members identified several locations on campus that they felt were unsafe, and these responses largely coincided with the most common student responses: 1) around/behind the gym, 2) around the dance hall/room, 3) unmonitored areas, and 4) restrooms. Other less common places that staff member identified included crowded inner hallways, the cafeteria, Mr. Glock's area, the soccer field, and the baseball/softball fields.

When asked what recommendation they would make about how to improve Reagan High School, staff members had numerous suggestions: 1) be consistent, follow-through; 2) more security/supervision; 3) strict discipline and consequences; 4) a dress code and/or uniforms; and 5) a communicative, collaborative, and supportive staff and administration.

### **3.1.3. Parent Surveys**

The team mailed parent surveys to every home listed on the Reagan High School student roster, asking that surveys be returned to the school. Parent surveys were also distributed and collected at each of the three community and parent meetings at Reagan High School. Only nine parents returned surveys for analysis; all surveys were completed and returned at the campus meeting. None of the mailed surveys were returned to the team. The resulting sample is much too small to inform any analysis. The low response rate suggests that mailings are an ineffective mode of communication with parents at Reagan High School, but doesn't explain the cause for such a low level of parental response. This low response rate is consistent with concerns raised during focus group interviews with parents in which they expressed feeling disempowered to participate in meaningful change at Reagan High School, and interviews with administrators, who expressed frustration at the lack of parental involvement and support at school.

### **3.2. Personal Interviews**

Recognizing that anonymous surveys are helpful, but are neither the only nor the best tool for obtaining information about campus conditions, the team also conducted personal interviews with various individuals. Initially, hundreds of personal telephone calls were placed,

at random, to students' homes to seek parental permission for an in-depth interview. Parents who responded to our calls were uniformly generous with their consent to speak with their children, and were cooperative with the process. The team attempted to interview each student for whom parental consent had been given.

The team also personally interviewed campus administrators, teachers (by telephone, as the school year had ended), and hundreds of telephone calls were placed to parents, personally inviting them to participate in in-depth personal interviews. Community members, local business owners, and other interested persons were also interviewed.

### **3.2.1. Student Interviews**

Student interviews were conducted in groups of approximately five students being interviewed for a one hour period by one or more team members. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, and between sixty and seventy students appeared for scheduled interviews at various intervals over two school days. Students appeared to be relatively comfortable with the interview format, and were generally cooperative with the process.

#### **Fighting**

Nearly all students interviewed had witnessed fights at school- most reported witnessing in the range of 3-5 fights during the current school year. One student indicated that he was aware of 20 fights during the 2002-2003 school year. In general, students felt that these fights were "not a big deal" (minor scuffles) about "dumb things" (i.e. people bumping into each other in the hallway, jealousy over romantic relationships, or talking about people/rumors). Students indicated that fights took place in front of the cafeteria, in the locker room, behind the gym, outside the dance room, in front of the office, at Nelson Field, in hallways, by the bus stop, and off campus. Most students believed that fighting at Reagan is no worse than at other schools, and even less than other schools in Austin ISD. Many students acknowledged that Reagan students have a reputation for fighting.

While most fights involved students of the same race, students regularly brought up a racially motivated fight that occurred on Nelson Field in the 2001-2002 school year, and expressed a belief that there was typically one racially motivated fight around the end of each school year. Students regularly indicated that unless they knew of something "major" where someone could get seriously hurt, they would probably just "stay out of it" and not tell anyone.

#### **Discipline**

Most students believed that suspensions did little to deter fighting. For many students, suspensions were viewed as a reward, or break from school, although they indicated the effects of such a consequence were different depending on the student. Many students felt that discipline was not administered uniformly, and some felt that favoritism or discrimination was sometimes evident in disciplinary decisions, based upon the race of the student and the adult administering the discipline.

## **Campus Security and Safety**

Most students interviewed stated that they felt safe at school. Of those students who stated that they did not feel safe at school, many referenced the tragic death of Ortralla Mosley as the basis for their fear (if it could happen to her, it could happen to anyone).

Students consistently indicated that one of the major obstacles to security was the openness of campus. Many students stated that they felt that it would be a good idea to build a fence around the school. Some students believed that Reagan should be a closed campus (students not allowed to go out for lunch). Numerous students indicated that they would feel safer if there were metal detectors or security checking backpacks, etc; however, most felt this would be difficult to do because of the open layout of campus.

Other measures that students cited that would make them feel safer at school included the addition of a peace officer, more hall monitors and a security guard in the parking lot. Students commented that hall monitors are not visible in all areas of campus, and do not always circulate through the campus.

Although students are aware of the existence of security cameras, students were also of the opinion that “nobody pays attention” to security cameras. It is a common belief that cameras are not working or are broken.

While some students felt that administrators/teachers were doing a good job in general, most indicated that they needed to be more involved with students and know what is going on in their lives. Some students felt that administrators and teachers should also be responsible for patrolling halls and making their presence known for the sake of security.

Latino students stated that Spanish speakers were mocked and picked-on because of their accents and Mexican students were regularly called names like “wet-backs.”

Many students had heard of or had knowledge of weapons being brought onto campus. Students frequently reported that drugs are available at school (particularly behind the gym) and generally felt that there was little evidence of enforcement in this area. While students indicated that it could be disruptive, they did not feel that drug use was directly linked to any fighting or violence.

## **Campus Atmosphere**

Most students felt that Reagan was an “okay” school that could improve with more discipline and greater participation to encourage school pride. A few students suggested a dress code that would make Reagan students easy to identify on and off campus (they saw it as a way to minimize skipping school).

Only a small number (one or two) of the students interviewed were familiar with Crime Stoppers.

In general, students did not express excitement or positive comments about the learning environment at Reagan, with the exception of one member of the Avid program, who did express positive comments about the learning atmosphere. Students were more frequently positive about the athletic program, particularly Reagan's successful football and track programs.

Students believe that their school is poorly thought of in the community—a “ghetto school.” When asked where they would turn for help if they had a safety concern, students identified parents, friends, and generically, one particular hall monitor, “the front office” as well as SRO Officer Anderson. Most students were unable to identify the assistant principal to whom the students were assigned.

### **3.2.2. Administrator Interviews**

Interviews with school administrators took place at various times on campus. Not all administrators were interviewed. Those administrators interviewed were cooperative. In general, administrators perceived themselves as spending a significant portion of their time dealing with routine disciplinary matters. Some administrators felt that a small number of the teachers (generally inexperienced teachers) were responsible for a majority of the disciplinary referrals and that these referrals were excessive and required disproportionate amounts of administrative time.

Administrators perceived themselves as visible in the school, and expressed surprise that students did not seem to know them individually.

One administrator stated that the campus discipline grid (the campus guidelines for routine disciplinary referrals) had not been made available to all administrators and was not, therefore, uniformly followed.

Administrators generally felt that they were limited in the number of students that could be sent to the ALC, and that ALC referrals had limits both as to the race of students referred (that is, that racial minorities not be disproportionately referred to the ALC) as well as the total number of students referred from the campus. Administrators felt that as a result, escalating consequences for conduct such as fighting was not always utilized at Reagan.

Reagan has no after school or Saturday detention or on-site alternative to out of school suspension. Some administrators felt that a well structured alternative school-type setting on campus would be a better alternative to suspension and ISS as it is currently structured.

All administrators expressed frustration with the lack of parental involvement at school. There is little or no PTA activity and administrators report parents frequently change phone numbers and addresses without notification to the school. One administrator reported a practice of allowing three opportunities for a parent to appear for a scheduled removal conference before

conducting the conference. (This is not required by law, and may result in a delay in removing students from school).

### **3.2.3. Parent Interviews**

Approximately 250 parents were personally (randomly) contacted by telephone and invited to participate in personal interviews. Additionally, those parents who had attended other meetings or who had expressed an interest in school safety issues were invited. All parent surveys contained a separate page where parents could identify themselves as being willing to participate in an interview. All of those responding were contacted. The largest numbers of parents declining interviews cited work obligations or lack of transportation as the reason for not participating in an evening meeting. Of the 250 contacts or attempted contacts, approximately 45 parents stated they were interested or would attend an interview. Childcare and a meal were provided for the interviews. Approximately 20 parents ultimately participated in the detailed interviews. Of note is the fact that all but one of the parents attending the interview session was native Spanish speaking. While the parent interviews clearly did not reflect a broad cross-section of the Reagan High School community, the opinions of those who participated in the interview are found below.

Truancy was a significant concern for the parents interviewed. Generally, parents were very concerned about students skipping school and believed that more security would help address the problem of truancy. Some parents had requested contracts that each teacher would have to sign to prove the student was attending class but that this was typically short-lived since teachers would tell students they were too busy to sign their forms every day. Parents stated that they were only informed that their children were skipping classes after they missed 3-5 times. Parents wanted more support with respect to truancy, as they had no other way of knowing their children were not attending school. This group of parents had heard their children speak of teachers humiliating students because the students did not speak English well. They felt this hurt students in numerous ways but also contributed to truancy since students were afraid of teachers rather than feeling helped.

Parents expressed a desire for better communication with school administration, although a few indicated that they had positive experiences in this respect. Parents consistently felt that more involvement between counselors and students as well as teachers and students was necessary. Parents were concerned about weapons on campus and wanted more supervision and checking for weapons.

Some parents felt that consequences were ill-suited for misbehavior (either too harsh or too weak given the act). Some parents were unaware of disciplinary rules.

The parents we interviewed strongly believed that the teachers/administrators/staff should know their students – *i.e.* be able to identify who belongs on campus and who does not as well as know their community and notice changes in students' attitudes, behavior, etc. Parents stated that students sometimes feel ignored by faculty and administration. Parents would like teachers and administrators to meet with them more regularly so everyone can be better informed about



issues and problems that students are facing at home and in school. Some of the parents shared stories in which students were humiliated or treated disrespectfully. These parents believed that such disrespect led to discipline problems and truancy.

One parent indicated that her child held back information about an armed threat because the child was frightened. Even after the student eventually told a teacher, this teacher did not contact the parent. Parents concurred that students often ask them not to get involved in threats from other students or problems with teachers because they are afraid it will make the situation worse at school.

Several parents showed concern about one hall monitor who has allegedly humiliated students and treated them badly, “like delinquents.” Parents had heard that some hall monitors discriminate and don’t treat all students equally. They felt it was important to treat all students with respect because otherwise they also teach students to be disrespectful. One parent stated and many agreed, “Lack of respect, lack of advice, lack of communication – all of this leads to violence.”

Many parents felt that a fence around campus would be a good idea although there was some concern that it would make students feel like they were in jail. Security guards were considered more important than fences.

Parents understood that parental participation was lacking; they suggested holding meetings on weekends, making follow-up reminder/confirmation calls, and informing them that there would be Spanish translators available. Regular meetings were important so parents can also get to know each other on numerous occasions. Parents all felt that they needed to see that they were being heard. They state that they need to see results of meetings, perhaps through follow-up calls, or sending out minutes of meetings, or informed of steps being taken to address concerns. This would also show students that parents are active—and effective—in school matters.

### **3.3.4 Teacher Interviews**

The Reagan team also interviewed teachers at the Reagan campus. Following are comments received during those interviews. The comments appeared consistent regardless of the level of teacher experience or grade level. Teachers noted the presence of racial tension or distrust. This perception was noted between students and staff, as well as staff and staff. Teachers acknowledge that Reagan has a poor reputation, and feel that the reputation is unfair. Reagan teachers feel the school has much to offer, and is being unfairly stigmatized in the community by an undeservedly poor reputation. Some teachers are not paying attention to their classroom management responsibilities and there is a lack of consistency in student discipline because of this fact. Teachers feel frustrated in that they perceive the referral system is ineffective. They view this problem to be present to some extent because administrators feel constrained by the District and limit the number of students they send to the Alternative Learning Center (ALC). Other noted responses include:

Some teachers are afraid of their students, and these teachers do not effectively manage their classrooms.

Administrators are often too slow in acting to remove troubled students from class.

Teachers become apathetic after a period of time because they do not feel as though they receive needed support.

The school needs additional, security staff, either an additional SRO or hall monitors.

These responses were somewhat consistent with the information found in other interviews and is utilized in the recommendations and observation portion of the report.

## **SECTION FOUR: RESEARCH BASED STANDARDS FOR SAFE SCHOOLS**

The team reviewed research-based literature in the area of school safety. While the available literature is extensive, we placed our focus on recognized national, state and local sources. The sources we relied upon in this report reflect the results of years of research, analysis, and thought from nationally recognized leaders in the areas of education and law enforcement. Our focus, therefore, developed in recognition of the credible nature of the reported sources, and the organization of this section of our report follows the four prevailing themes found in the literature:

- Prevention and Assessment
- Parental Involvement
- Availability of Programs
- Availability of Funding

The members of this team are not social scientists and do not hold themselves out as such. Prior to implementing any plan, program or methodology, the District and/or Reagan High School should avail itself of, and rely upon the opinions and thoughts of the recognized experts in the field of school safety as pointed out in this section of the report.

### **4.1. Targeted School Violence: Prevention and Assessment**

Violence at school is a topic that has drawn significant recent attention in the media and in schools throughout the nation. All such violence is a concern for the community, the schools, and the parents of school age children. Recent incidents nationwide have shaken the image of school as being a safe and secure environment. The United States Department of Education reports that in the year 2000, over 60 million students attended the nation's 119,000 schools.<sup>34</sup> Statistics indicate that few of these students will be victims of serious violence in the school setting.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, research and common sense tell us that the impact of a violent death at school cannot be measured by statistics alone. School violence in the form of suicide or homicide, while rare, has a lasting and significant impact upon the school and the surrounding community.

To place the problem of targeted school violence in perspective, in 1998 the federal government reported the following statistics:

- the odds that a child in grades 9-12 would be threatened or injured with a weapon at school were 7-8%
- the odds of a child getting into a physical fight at school were 15%
- the odds that a child would die in school, by homicide or suicide were 1 in 1 million<sup>36</sup>.

---

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of Education (2000).

<sup>35</sup> Id.

<sup>36</sup> Id.

In 1998, students in grades 9-12 were the victims of 1.6 million thefts and 1.2 million nonfatal violent crimes, while in this same period 60 school-related violent deaths were reported for the same student population.<sup>37</sup>

In 2002, the United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education recognized the importance of these issues and collaborated on a study to help American communities and schools formulate policies and strategies aimed at preventing school based violent attacks. The study, the Safe School Initiative, was implemented through the Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center and the Department of Education Safe and Drug Free School Programs<sup>38</sup>. A follow-up manual entitled “Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates” was also published in 2002 through the United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education.<sup>39</sup>

While these reports often discuss school shootings, they are specifically applicable to “targeted school violence” (any incident of violence where a known or knowable attacker selects a particular target prior to the violent attack). To better understand the application of these findings to our task, two of its authors were interviewed by this team (Brian Vossekeil, Director the National Violence Prevention and Study Center and William Modzeleski, Director of the Safe and Drug Free Schools Program of the United States Department of Education).

The report states that the Secret Service and the Department of Education made efforts to ensure that the Safe School Initiative would produce useful information to benefit school administrators, law enforcement officials, and others working in the schools. To that end, the report further states that the researchers consulted regularly with experts in the fields of education, school violence and juvenile homicide to develop study designs and protocols. Their feedback was used to develop the “initiative” and the “guide.”

Moreover, the Texas School Safety Center at Texas State University, San Marcos (which publishes a Safe School Manual of its own) has endorsed the Safe School Initiative Study and Report and follow-up documentation as applicable and useful information to be used by school districts and/or specific schools. These findings have also been recognized and essentially adopted by the Greater Austin Crime Commission in their published report of October 2002 entitled, “School Violence, Is Austin Ready?”<sup>40</sup> Finally, similar findings, methodologies, and thoughts are contained in the Attorney General’s School Violence Prevention Task Force’s final

---

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Department of Education and Department of Justice (1999). 1999 Annual Report of School Safety. Washington, DC: Authors.

<sup>38</sup> Vossekuil, B., et al. *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center, Washington, D.C., 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Vossekuil, B., et al *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center, Washinton, D.C., 2002.

<sup>40</sup> *School Violence: Is Austin Ready?* Fourth Annual School Safety Week-October 2002. Greater Austin Crime Commission, Austin, 2002.

report of May 2000.<sup>41</sup>

Each of these reports and studies support the development of certain action plans for creating a safe and connected school climate and implementing assessment programs. The Guide lists eleven components and two suggestions for creating a safe and connected school climate:

### **Suggestions**

1. Develop the capacity to pick up on and evaluate available or known information that may indicate a risk.
2. Employ the results of this risk evaluation in developing a strategy to prevent attacks.

### **Components**

1. Assess the school's emotional climate.
2. Emphasize listening.
3. Take a strong but caring stance against the code of silence found within student populations.
4. Change the perception that talking to an adult is "snitching."
5. Find ways to stop bullying.
6. Empower students by involving them in planning, creating and sustaining a school culture of safety and respect.
7. Insure that every student feels that he/she has a trusting relationship with at least one adult at the school.
8. Create mechanisms for developing and sustaining safe school climates.
9. Be aware of physical environments and their effect on creating comfort zones.
10. Emphasize an integrated systems model.
11. Recognize that ultimately, all climates of safety are "local."<sup>42</sup>

The Guide recognizes that conditions and circumstances may not manifest themselves in

---

<sup>41</sup> Office of the Texas Attorney General. *School Violence Prevention Taskforce Final Report*. Austin: 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Vossekuil, et. al *Threat Assessment in Schools* (2002) 20-22.

the same way at every school. For example, the research findings suggest that there is no accurate or useful profile of students who engage in targeted school violence.<sup>43</sup> The Guide goes on to state that schools and communities are in the best position to determine whether and how to best use these suggestions and components to address any potential problem of targeted school violence.<sup>44</sup> These documents are referenced in the Resources section to this report and can be used to implement training or change where needed. This team recognizes the effort and diligence evidenced in these studies.

The Dallas Independent School District has developed an assessment instrument, based upon the above-reported findings. Dallas ISD has generously shared their instrument with the team, and we attach it as Appendix “C” to this report. A detailed discussion of the development and implementation of the instrument can be found in *Threats of Violence in Schools: The Dallas Independent School District’s Response* (see the Resources section of this paper). The instrument appears to incorporate the significant findings of the Department of Education and Secret Service in a manner that can be implemented by all school staff members.

## 4.2 Parental Involvement

Thirty years of research confirms that family involvement is a powerful influence on children’s achievement in school.<sup>45</sup> When families are involved in their children’s education, children earn higher grades and receive higher scores on tests, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates, and are more likely to enroll in higher education than students with less involved families.<sup>46</sup> For these reasons, increasing family involvement in the education of their children is an important goal for schools, particularly those serving low-income and other students at risk of failure.

Barriers to family involvement in schools arise from many sources, some related to the constraints facing teachers and other school staff, some related to the challenges and pressures that families face, and others related to language, cultural, and socioeconomic differences between families and school staff.<sup>47</sup>

School organization and practices, especially in secondary schools, may discourage

---

<sup>43</sup> Id. 20

<sup>44</sup> Id. 17

<sup>45</sup> Eagle, E. “Socioeconomic Status, Family Structure, and Parental Involvement: The Correlates of Achievement.” In A.T. Henderson & N. Berla (Eds.), *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education (1989) 59-60; A.T. Henderson & N. Berla (Eds.). *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement* (A report from the National Committee for Citizens in Education). Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education. (1994); U.S. Department of Education. *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning*. Washington, DC (1994); Ziegler, S. “The Effects of Parent Involvement on Children’s Achievement: The Significance of Home/School Links” in A.T. Henderson & N. Berla (Eds.), *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement* Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education (1987) 151-152.

<sup>46</sup> Funkhouser, Janie E., Miriam R. Gonzales, Oliver C. Moles. United States Department of Education. *Family Involvement in Children’s Education: Successful Local Approaches* (Washington, D.C.: 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Id.

family members from becoming involved. For example, survey data shows that parents of older children are less likely to attend a school event or volunteer at their child's school than parents of younger children. Sixty-one percent of principals of Title I elementary schools report that most or all of their parents attend regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences, compared with twenty-two percent of principals of Title I middle schools.<sup>48</sup>

Language and cultural differences as well as differences in educational attainment separating families and school staff can make communication and family participation in school activities difficult. For example, national data reflects that parents who do not speak English at home are less likely to participate in school-based activities, and more likely to participate in fewer activities over the course of the school year.<sup>49</sup> A compensatory education program supported by funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Title I provides money to school districts that have high concentrations of low-income children in participating schools. Although breaking the language barrier between English speakers and those whose primary language is other than English constitutes a giant step towards increasing parent involvement in their children's education, building bridges with families of different cultures and backgrounds also deserves special attention if all families are to feel comfortable participating in school activities.

Finally, 87% of Title I principals report that lack of time on the part of parents is a significant barrier to parent involvement, and 56% report that lack of time on the part of school staff is a barrier.<sup>50</sup>

### **4.3 General Strategies for Increasing Parental Involvement**

The United States Department of Education offers practical guidance on school-wide planning in areas for the successful implementation of strategies to increase parental involvement. In *Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches* (1997),<sup>51</sup> the Department of Education notes:

- Schools that succeed in involving large number of parents or other family members in the education of their children invested energy in finding solutions for problems, not excuses.
- Successful schools viewed children's successes as a shared responsibility and all stakeholders including parents, administrators, teachers and community leaders played important roles in supporting the children's learning.
- School leaders must assume individual responsibility in order for partnerships to work. Schools under the leadership of their principal possess the primary responsibility for initiating school/family partnerships.

---

<sup>48</sup> Id.

<sup>49</sup> Id.

<sup>50</sup> Id.

<sup>51</sup> Id.

- Normally, if schools initiate the dialogue and bring parents in as full partners, families typically respond and are willing to assume responsibility.<sup>52</sup>

Further, the Department of Education identifies the following guidelines as useful in the development for effective home/school partnerships:

- Home/school partnerships must be tailored to meet the needs of the community. Begin the school/family partnership by identifying with families the strengths, interests and needs of families, students and school staff and design strategies that respond to those needs.
- Training and staff development is an essential investment. Strengthen the school/family partnership with professional development and training for all school staff as well as parents and other family members.
- Communication is the foundation of effective partnership. School leaders should plan strategies that accommodate the language and/or cultural needs of the family as well as lifestyle and work schedule of the school staff.
- Flexibility and diversity are key.
- Projects need to take advantage of the training, assistance and funding offered by sources external to schools. While these certainly include school districts, they are much broader than that and would by necessity include community organizations, public agencies, colleges, universities, and churches.
- Change takes time. A successful school/family partnership requires continued effort over time.
- Projects need to be regularly assessed.

#### **4.4. Specific Steps Toward Increasing Family Involvement**

In *Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches* (1997), the United States Department of Education describes how schools, community-based organizations, businesses, states, and federal programs can help parents take more active roles in their children's learning. This Idea Book identifies and describes: (1) common barriers to effective parental involvement in education of Title I participating children; and (2) common barriers to full teacher participation.

##### **4.4.1. Overcoming Barriers to Family Involvement**

The U.S. Department of Education recommends various strategies for overcoming a

---

<sup>52</sup> Id.



common set of barriers to parental involvement in schools, which include:

- overcoming time and resource constraints
- providing information and training to parents and school staff;
- restructuring schools to support family involvement;
- bridging school-family differences; and
- tapping external supports for partnerships.

Schools can also help parents by: (1) providing early notices of meetings and activities, allowing parents time to adjust their schedules; (2) establishing homework hotlines or voice mail systems so parents can stay in touch regarding their children's schoolwork without leaving their homes;<sup>53</sup> (3) offering the same event more than once; and (4) providing information to parents who could not attend a meeting to keep them informed.<sup>54</sup>

Schools can also address parents' resource constraints by: (1) providing parents with transportation and child services so that they can attend school events; (2) holding school-initiated events near families' homes (e.g. at community or public housing centers); and (3) conducting home visits. In focus group interviews, parents noted that these supports send a strong message that the school is serious about getting them involved.<sup>55</sup>

#### **4.4.2. Overcoming Barriers to Full Teacher Participation**

Strategies for helping teachers make time to develop school-family partnerships include:

- assigning parent coordinators or home-school liaisons to help teachers maintain contact with parents through home visits or by covering classes for teachers so they can meet with parents
- providing time during the school day for teachers to meet with parents or visit them at their homes
- providing stipends or compensatory time off for teachers to meet with parents after school hours
- freeing up teachers from routine duties in order to meet with students' family members
- providing specific training and resources for those parent coordinators.

---

<sup>53</sup> Id.

<sup>54</sup> Id.

<sup>55</sup> Id.

## SECTION FIVE: LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF SAFE SCHOOLS RESEARCH

Specific programs have been implemented at other locations that appear to have had a strong measure of success. Specifically, the Schoolbridge Program has been successfully used at Bowie High School and at other school districts within the State of Texas. This program was developed and modeled to address those findings from the Secret Service and the Department of Education's Safe School Initiative and Assessment Guide. Schoolbridge ([www.schoolbridge.com](http://www.schoolbridge.com)) provides a system for students to report their safety concerns anonymously by use of the internet. When a district or school requests the company's services, Schoolbridge sends representatives to each school and organizes a task force of students. This student task force works with Schoolbridge to design a website where students can anonymously notify a school official when they want to report potentially violent situations. For instance, if a student feels threatened, hears about a threat against another student, reads a suicide note, or sees a student with a weapon at school, that student may use the school's Schoolbridge website to notify someone in authority at the school without the fear of being "a snitch."<sup>56</sup>

Every student has his/her own log-in name as a unique identifier, and the student is able to choose the school official to whom he/she wants to send a message. When the student sends the message, School Bridge sends an e-mail alerting the school official that there's an important e-mail message in his/her e-mail mailbox. Each message is encrypted for privacy, and the school's website is hosted offsite. Reagan students have access to computers at school and Austin Public libraries, which could be used for this purpose.

Other resources exist for facilitating student reporting. Austin ISD currently subscribes to Crime Stoppers and Weapons Watch, anonymous telephone hotlines that include a reward component. As discussed elsewhere in this report, this resource does not appear to be being used effectively at this time, and most students (and many teachers and administrators) interviewed were unaware of these types of programs. Other telephone hotline programs, such as "Report-It" offer similar hotline reporting services. See <http://www.report-it.com>.

Another resource in this area is the United States Department of Education in conjunction with the Secret Service, which offers specific training to implement their recommendations found in the manuals mentioned above. In fact, since the release of the Initiative and Assessment Guide, they have given over 100 seminars to educators and law enforcement personnel.

Finally, the Department of Education provides, as a resource, a list of idea books, federal laws, and guidance for school wide program planning in the area of parental involvement.

### 5.1 Funds for Prevention and Assessment

Training relative to the Safe School Initiative and Guide to Creating Safe School

---

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.schoolbridge.com/page2.html>

Climates can be made available at no cost to Austin ISD so long as the district guarantees the participation of 100 individuals and provides a facility for the training. Further, it is clear that specific and ongoing training in this area could be provided by Texas State University, San Marcos personnel who are recognized for their knowledge and expertise in this area. This recommendation is consistent with that of the Greater Austin Crime Commission.<sup>57</sup>

The School Bridge Program referenced herein addresses many of the concerns that the Threat Assessment Guide and Safe School Initiative raise. The School Bridge system costs approximately \$5,000 per year for an individual school to operate it, and costs less than that amount per school when an entire school district implements the system in multiple schools. Austin ISD is familiar with this program's successful implementation at Bowie High School. The Bowie High School principal commented favorably to us on the effectiveness of the program in decreasing the number of weapons and threats of violence on the Bowie High School campus.

## **5.2 Funds for Parental Involvement**

According to the 2001-2002 Title I Evaluation Report published by the Austin ISD Office of Program Evaluation, Reagan High School receives funds under Title I.

According to the 2000-2001 Title IV Safe and Drug Free Schools (SDFSC) Evaluation Report, the purpose of the SDFSC grant is to supplement the school districts' efforts towards education on and prevention of drug abuse and violence.

According to the 1999-2002 Account for Learning (AFL) Evaluation Report, AFL is a locally funded initiative with the goal of increasing reading and mathematics achievement at campuses with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students.

All three of these programs give discretionary grants to schools, and all three of these programs have plans that include parental involvement. Schools may use both Title I and AFL funds to employ parent support specialists. Schools may also use Title IV funds to supplement district-wide programs like Positive Families/INVEST (school-based curriculum programs offered to students and their parents after the student has been referred to the Alternative Learning Center) at their campuses.

---

<sup>57</sup> Selber, 12-13.

Reagan High School’s discretionary grant expenditures for the 2002-2003 school year were approximately as follows:

	<b>Total Grant Appropriations</b>	<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>Total Remaining as of July, 2003</b>
<b>Title I</b>	196,501	189,202	7,299
<b>School Improvement (2 years)</b>	465,305	460,548	4,756
<b>Title IV</b>	1,566	0	1,566
<b>Account for Learning</b>	112,472	91,844	20,627

Unspent monies may either be returned to the District or ultimately lost.

Federal grant money is earmarked for Reagan for the upcoming school year. This money includes funds for non-staff related items including, but not limited to, technical assistance and training. According to the Austin ISD Department of Grant Development and Program Support, the grant guidelines allow this training and technical assistance to be available for use by Reagan in the area of parental involvement.

### **5.3 District/Reagan Plans**

The Office of Program Evaluation for AISD published a Parent and Community Involvement Report for the 2001-2002 school year on the AISD website.<sup>58</sup> The Report is a district-wide evaluation of parent and community involvement. The Report makes the following statement:

...teachers, parent support specialists, and other school staff, are the ‘gate keepers’ of communication between school and parents. They often are the first contact opportunity with the school, they provide the first impression, and they often must interpret policy. Thus, they are the key to more successful involvement of parents in schools. (p. 19)

The Report also says that “some parents’ lack of knowledge about certain school issues and resources” is an area of weakness, and that most teachers surveyed for the purposes of the Report list “parental involvement” as one of the areas in which they need training. The Report’s final recommendation is that school staff members, including teachers and parent support specialists, must be trained in order to learn “strategies for involving parents successfully.” The Report further mentions, “every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), PTA/PTO, or some other group with parent representation.” The Report states that AISD has a “Parent Programs Office” that provides “training for parent support specialists,” coordinates

<sup>58</sup> [http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/about/docs/ope\\_ParentComInvRep02.pdf](http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/about/docs/ope_ParentComInvRep02.pdf)

“parent involvement activities district-wide,” facilitates “Title I...meetings,” and performs “Spanish translations as needed for parent events” among several other activities.<sup>59</sup>

According to AISD records, Reagan High School submitted a Campus Improvement Plan (CIP) for the 2002-2003 school year. This CIP has now been modified to represent Reagan’s plan for 2002- 2004. Additionally, the Reagan Parent Involvement policy for the 2002-2003 school year was reviewed by the team.

In its 2002-2003 CIP, Reagan outlines its action plan for violence prevention/discipline management and improved school climate and parental involvement. In its violence prevention/discipline management plan, Reagan states two performance objectives: reduce incidents of violence by 10% and reduce the number of discipline referrals by 25%. In order to accomplish these objectives, Reagan plans to employ five “key” strategies:

- Continue to implement year two of a comprehensive discipline management system which includes (a) clearly defined procedures based on a specific philosophy and (b) a social skills program.
- Focus on each 9<sup>th</sup> grader having a connectedness to at least one adult for counseling and support service.
- Staff will study and address disproportionate disparities in assignment to alternative education programs by ethnicity.
- Improve response of administration to severe incidents and shift focus of classroom management to instructional teams.
- Develop cultural and gender competencies that result in clear behavioral expectations for all students and staff.

In its plan for improving school climate, the Reagan Campus Improvement Plan states two performance objectives: increase staff participation in peer observations and coaching by 100% and increase positive attitudes in serving public, families, students, and teachers by 100%. To accomplish these objectives, Reagan High School states it will employ four “key” strategies:

- Provide a regular forum for the safe exchange of concerns and ideas among all staff.
- Implement a consistent program of staff appreciation and recognition.
- Create a system to facilitate flow of information to and from all departments on campus.
- Encourage more significant teacher input into the evaluation and development of

---

<sup>59</sup> Id.

the CIP.

### **5.3.1 District/Reagan Funding for the Plan**

The Reagan High School Campus Improvement Plan delineates action steps to effectuate each of these objectives. For each action step, there is a chart that exhibits resource allocation. In both the violence prevention/discipline management and improving school climate plans, the vast majority of the action steps that receive resources receive them from the local “BTO” fund. The only action steps stated to receive discretionary grant funds are found in key strategy 1 of the violence prevention/discipline management plan, (“Continue to implement year two of a comprehensive discipline management system which includes a) clearly defined procedures based on a specific philosophy and b) a social skills program.”)

According to the CIP, action step 5 (“provide security officers”) receives its resources from local sources. According to Principal Correa at Reagan, there is one security officer at the school, Officer Anderson. Principal Correa also said that Officer Anderson’s salary is paid by the Austin Independent School District Police Department. Action Step 6 (“implement tighter security at games, parking lot, and campus through systematic ID monitoring”) receives its resources from Title I, and action step 7 (“instructional teams will standardize exceptions for classroom behavior, interventions for classroom management”) has n/a under funding.

The “campus program description” is a part of the application for funding from the Title I School Improvement Program. Part 2 of the campus program description lists ten areas of need, and the school must provide a description of need in that area, a specific data source identifying the need, the research-based strategy or activity to be implemented to address identified need, and the name of a technical assistance provider.

The “Reducing Incidents of Drugs Use and/or Violence” area of need (line 8) was left blank in all four columns in which the school is to provide information. Rather, the documents show that Reagan plans to use the bulk of the grant for reducing dropout rates. As noted in this, and prior year’s Campus Improvement Plans, a high dropout rate has been a chronic problem on this campus. The “campus management,” “improving student attendance,” and “reducing student dropout rates” areas of need all have descriptions of need that address student retention and plans to address the areas of need (including the hiring of several additional employees). However, there is neither a need nor plan stated for reducing incidents of violence.

## **SECTION SIX: OBSERVATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Reagan High School has many teachers, staff, and administrators who care about the school and the students. Many parents and community leaders passionately shared their views with the members of this team. For this we are grateful.

In comparing Reagan High School with other similarly situated high schools in the District, state, and nation, we found that the level of violent conduct is comparable to that found at other campuses and districts in this state and nation.

Nevertheless, conditions at Reagan High School could and should be improved. Levels of aggressive and disruptive conduct at the high school and middle school grades are a matter of concern. There has been an increase in disciplinary and law enforcement referrals district-wide from 2001-2002 to 2002-2003. Statistics reflect that Reagan High School uses disciplinary suspensions at levels well above state average. The desire to address these patterns motivates our recommendations.

We acknowledge Austin ISD budgetary constraints. In this regard, this team believes some of these changes can be implemented under the current budget. Some of the recommendations may be implemented without any cost to the school district. Other services mentioned are available at low cost, and some of the recommendations merely require a change of policy. Others may require significant commitment of scarce resources.

### **6.1. Observations**

- Reagan High School is a large campus with minimal physical restrictions on movement by individuals coming into and going out of the campus.
- The Reagan High School campus is open, and has a comfortable “feel.” However students, community members and staff reported to us their concern that the facilities are somewhat run-down in areas and in need of maintenance.
- Reagan High School experienced seriously violent student behavior at a level comparable to that experienced in other schools in the district in 2001-2002 and at levels higher than average for District high schools in 2002-2003. Reagan High School experienced the only violent school-related fatality in Texas for the last two years. Aside from this significant tragic incident, Reagan High School’s experience with seriously violent student conduct is unremarkable in comparison with other similarly situated campuses nationwide.
- The incidence of aggressive student conduct as reflected in the discipline referral information suggests that Reagan High School students use aggression at school at levels exceeding that experienced at most other high schools in the Austin

Independent School District. Reagan High School feeder campuses reflect similarly escalated incidents of aggression.

- There are currently existing positive relationships between the Austin Police Department and Reagan High School.
- Local business owners reported a perceived reduction in off-campus delinquent activity in recent years.
- Practices that are geared towards maintaining order and safety during passing periods (such as administrators and teachers being present in hallways) are not consistent within the four focus campuses we studied.
- While campus level comparisons for aggressive conduct statewide were not possible, campus level comparisons for disruptive behavior suggests that Reagan High School's experience as to the levels of student disruptive behavior was below average for the campus group studied.
- Reagan High School students possessed illegal weapons at school at a rate comparable to other campuses in the District, and Austin ISD's experience is comparable to that of other urban school districts in the state and nation. Reagan High School saw a marked increase in such conduct in 2002-2003 from 2001-2002.
- Discipline and law enforcement trends within the District as a whole show an overall increase in disruptive, aggressive and delinquent conduct from the 2001-2002 to the 2002-2003 school years.
- Austin ISD compares favorably to other urban school districts for all indicators studied, with the exception of drug and alcohol offenses.
- Reagan High School students are much less likely to engage in or come into contact with violent conduct of a criminal nature at school than in the surrounding community.
- The present system of reporting disciplinary data is not fully appropriate for the purposes of evaluating the incidence of violence in Austin ISD schools. The reporting of incidents is decentralized. The reporting system is primarily intended to report student attendance information, and conclusions regarding violence levels can only be extrapolated based upon student removal data.
- Although between 14 and 21% of students and staff report the presence of gang activity at the school, such presence does not appear to be a significant factor affecting school violence at this time.



- There is no evidence of a pattern race-based violence at the school, and any such incidents appear to be isolated.
- Parents, administrators, and community members reported to us that Reagan High School suffers from a lack of parent and family involvement.
- Students and parents for whom English is a second language expressed feelings of disenfranchisement and perceptions that they are the subjects of discrimination.
- There is evidence of distrust along racial lines between students, administrators and staff.
- Local businesses, parents, administrators, teachers, and students report students leaving the campus during lunch and at other unauthorized times.
- Students, parents and staff report inconsistency in the application of disciplinary rules.
- Although Austin ISD maintains PEIMS data with greater detail as to disciplinary actions than is required by the Texas Education Agency, there is currently no one at Austin ISD for whom the analysis of this data, in a manner similar to that presented in this report, is a current job responsibility. Similarly, the Texas Education Agency does not provide such analysis in the routine course of business.
- Austin ISD has no department of school psychology or designated school psychologist or psychiatrist to serve non-special education student mental health needs.
- There is no use of metal detectors at Reagan High School and ineffective use of security cameras.
- There is evidence of availability and use of marijuana and to a lesser extent, other drugs, among a small population of Reagan High School students. We do not find that the degree of drug use or drug-related conduct accounts for increased violence on the Reagan High School campus.
- Not all resources available to Reagan High School for use in improving the school's climate and violence prevention/discipline management have been identified and utilized.
- Campus administrators perceive that they are discouraged from referring students to A.L.C., particularly where such referral may result in racially disproportionate numbers of students so placed.

- Administrators reported to us that Reagan High School historically suffers from an inability to recruit and retain experienced staff.
- We noted a limited degree of positive school spirit or attachment among students, parents and staff throughout our investigation.

## **6.2. Recommendations**

The team makes the following recommendations as a result of our investigation and findings. There should be stated goals and an evaluation component for any policy that may be implemented.

### **Focus on Prevention and Threat Assessment Instead of Crisis Response**

Reagan High School has a well contemplated Crisis Management Plan. However, the existing plan focuses on *response* to crisis, rather than *crisis prevention*. This focus is noted in other high schools in the District as well.

This team recommends that Reagan High School and other District high schools, take advantage of the free training offered by the Secret Service and Department of Education, SafePlace, and the Texas School Safety Center, among other credible training providers, to focus attention on developing a proactive approach to crisis prevention. The program developed by Dallas Independent School District is one model program, which appears to meaningfully integrate the findings of the United States Department of Education and Secret Service in an accessible format.

Attention should also be placed on implementing a program under which students can be encouraged to report unsafe conditions at school. Although the District currently uses the Crime Stoppers program, our investigation suggests that this program is poorly implemented at Reagan High School and that it is not well utilized by students. Either better implementation of Crime Stoppers, or implementation of another proven program, such as Schoolbridge, should be implemented.

The District may wish to consider whether the services of a school psychologist might assist administrators in making risk assessment determinations. The District may wish to evaluate implementing a risk assessment instrument, such as that developed at the Dallas Independent School District. (See Appendix C).

### **Evaluate Security Policy and Increase Hall Monitoring**

The students identify hall monitors and the SRO as the primary level of security at the school. The campus SRO is supervised by the Chief of Police, and hall monitors are supervised by the campus administration. The hall monitor positions suffer from high levels of turnover. In

interviews, many of the students stated that they feel comfortable talking to a specific hall monitor or in talking to the Austin ISD police officer assigned to the campus.

The position of hall monitor should be considered a security sensitive position. Training and supervision, appropriate to a security-sensitive position, should be provided. Pay scales should be evaluated to ascertain whether adequately qualified and successful monitors are being recruited and retained.

Perhaps administrators and teachers should be in the halls and visible during passing periods. This will help students identify school leaders, as well as increase the sense of security and order during these times.

### **Support for Reagan**

Given the challenges facing Reagan High School as discussed in this report (low morale, lack of student and family involvement, heightened levels of disruption in the learning environment due to disciplinary issues), the District should consider the assignment of experienced staff at this campus a priority. The District may wish to consider implementation of mentoring programs for new school staff.

### **Focus on Improving Morale**

The issue of poor morale at Reagan High School should be addressed. While this may be related to the recent tragedy at the school, attention to facilities may also play some role in improving the perception of students, staff, and visitors to the campus. A focus on student activities—both academic and extracurricular-- and increasing parental involvement might also play some role in improving morale at the school.

### **Assure that Available Funds are Fully Utilized**

The District should assure that monies spent at Reagan High School are expended in the most worthwhile manner to achieve the desired impact. The District should provide training and oversight for the campus in this area to maximize identification and utilization of resources available for this campus.

### **Improve Cultural Sensitivity**

An undercurrent throughout our investigation was the marked divide between members of the Spanish speaking Hispanic community, and the African American community. Students from both races identified staff from the opposite race as demonstrating racial bias. While we found no evidence that administrators were racially biased, the fact that many students and parents perceive such a bias should be taken seriously. Where students perceive themselves as being treated unfairly based upon race, it is difficult to develop a level of trust which must exist if the school is to be fully successful.

Lack of an effective means of communication between the school and students' families was evidenced in our interviews. Meaningful efforts to reach out to all of the communities served by Reagan High School should be made. Teachers and administrators should receive training on cultural sensitivity, and learn to appreciate and value the different cultural perspectives that students attending this school may have.

### **Implement a Continuum of Consistent Disciplinary Sanctions**

We found little evidence that the use of suspension and in-school suspension as a disciplinary consequence has a meaningful impact on student behavior. Some students and administrators reported to us that many students act up or otherwise remove themselves from class as they viewed ISS as a reward rather than a punishment. Similarly, suspension is frequently viewed by students as a means of avoiding school obligations, and seems to have little positive impact on student behavior. While student misbehavior should not be tolerated, it appears to us that an absence of alternative disciplinary measures to ISS and suspension is a matter for further examination. A comprehensive discipline management approach, which includes prevention, targeted strategies for chronically disruptive children, and integration with community resources should be implemented and/or expanded. Students should be involved in the development and implementation of discipline management strategies. Examples of alternative strategies include:

- Saturday school
- After school detention
- Restitution geared to the nature of the offense
- Individual behavior plans
- Alternative disciplinary models, such as teen court
- Community team approach—coordination with community based services

All criminal acts by students should be reported to law enforcement authorities. In assault cases, although the wishes of the victim and the parents of both the perpetrator and the victim should be considered, such wishes should not be the sole factor in determining whether criminal reports are made and what other accountability responses should be utilized by school administrators.

In order to monitor school safety and violence issues, collection of incident data, separate and apart from discipline data, should be centralized, and analysis of such data performed periodically.

### **Provide Training**

Disciplinary rules should be effectively and uniformly applied. Inconsistent enforcement of school rules leads to perceptions of bias, and undermines the rules themselves. All staff should be trained and familiar with the rules and consequences for misbehavior. Students should also receive consistent, clear messages from school officials as to what the rules are, and that consequences will be administered consistently.

## **Evaluate Security Devices**

While Reagan High School has security cameras, currently they are not effectively used. The District may wish to evaluate the selective—and effective—use of security cameras, internally and externally, at Reagan High School. Monitors should be placed in location where they are visible to responsible adults. Given the heightened level of drug offenses recorded at Austin high schools, the District may wish to evaluate a more aggressive approach to deterrence and prevention district-wide.

Students, administrators, parents, and staff agree that ease of ingress and egress from this campus detracts from the learning environment and diminishes security. This team is not qualified to advise the Board as to whether physical barriers to the campus are feasible; however, evaluation of this issue by a facilities expert is recommended.

## **Direct Resources Toward Improving Family Involvement**

Consistent throughout our investigation was the observation (from parents, staff, and community members) that the atmosphere at Reagan High School would be enhanced by more parental and family involvement. Many administrators and staff members point to the absence of an active PTA and poor involvement from families as an impediment to improvement at Reagan High School. Reagan High School's final budget for the 2002-2003 school year reflects unspent funds that could have been used in this area. Discretionary funds in the form of grants are available to the school for the 2003-2004 school year in the areas of:

- training for staff in the area of parental involvement;
- using other modalities to assist staff in this area;
- creating programs to facilitate parental involvement; and
- focusing attention to this significant need.

As discussed in this report, parental involvement is the foundation of any successful—and safe—school. The focus at Reagan High School has been on dropout recovery. While these efforts have been successful in the critical need of decreasing the number of dropouts at Reagan High School, dropout recovery efforts may have diverted attention from family involvement initiatives. Both of these needs are significant, and neither should be omitted in an integrated campus improvement plan. Implementation of a parental involvement strategy should be a priority. The team recommends that Reagan High School consider adopting and implementing an effective parental involvement program for the 2003-2004 school year. An example of an effective program, highlighted by the United States Department of Education (1997) in one Kansas City urban school, might serve as a reference for such a program.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> See, <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/FamInvolve/wendell.html>

## SECTION SEVEN: RESOURCES

- California Department of Education and Office of the California Attorney General. *Safe Schools: A Planning Guide for Action*. (Sacramento: 2002).  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/safety/SafeSchoolGuide/ssgcover.pdf>
- DeVoe, J. F., K. Peter, P. Kaufman, S.A. Ruddy, A. K. Miller, M. Planty, T.D. Snyder, D. T. Duhart, and M. R. Rand. U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2002*. (Washington, DC: 2002).  
<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003009.pdf>
- Dwyer, K., D. Osher and C. Wagner, C. United States Department of Education. *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* (Washington, D.C.: 1998).  
<http://cecp.air.org/guide/guide.pdf>
- Fein, Robert A., Bryan Vossekuil, William S. Pollack, Randy Borum, William Modzeleski, Marissa Reddy, Marissa. United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education. *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*. (Washington, D.C.: 2002). [http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi\\_guide.pdf](http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf)
- Funkhouser, Janie E., Miriam R. Gonzales, Oliver C. Moles. United States Department of Education. *Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches* (Washington, D.C.: 1997).  
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/FamInvolve/title.html>
- Kingery, Paul M., and Mark B. Coggenshall. "Surveillance of School Violence, Injury, and Disciplinary Action." *Psychology in the Schools* 38, no. 2 (2001): 117-126.
- Morrison, Gale M. and Russell Skiba. "Predicting Violence from School Misbehavior: Promises and Perils." *Psychology in the Schools*, 38: 2 (2001) 173-184.
- Nansel, T., P. Overpeck, R. Pilla, W. Ruan, B. Simons-Morton, and P. Scheidt. "Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth: Prevalence and Association with Psychosocial Adjustment." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 285 (2001) 2453-2460.
- Office of the Texas Attorney General. *School Crime and Discipline Handbook: A Practical Reference Guide*. (Austin: 2001).  
[http://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG\\_Publications/pdfs/schoolcrime2001.pdf](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/pdfs/schoolcrime2001.pdf)
- Office of the Texas Attorney General. *School Violence Prevention Taskforce: Final Report*. (Austin: 2000).

- [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG\\_Publications/pdfs/sch\\_viol\\_prev\\_task\\_force.pdf](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/pdfs/sch_viol_prev_task_force.pdf)
- Ryan-Arredondo, Kim, Kristin Renouf, Carla Egyed, Meredith Doxey, Maria Dobbins, Serafin Sanchez, and Bert Rakowitz. "Threats of Violence in Schools: The Dallas Independent School District's Response." *Psychology in the Schools* 38:2 (2001) 185-196.
- Skiba, Russell, Kimberly Boone, Angela Fontanini, Tony Wu, Allison Strussell, and Reece Peterson. Safe and Responsive Schools Project, Indiana Education Policy Center, *Preventing School Violence: A Practical Guide to Comprehensive Planning* (Bloomington: 2002). <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/psv.pdf>
- Sprague, Jeffrey, Hill M. Walker, Steve Stieber, Brandi Simonsen, Vicky Nishioka, and Linda Wagner. "Exploring the Relationship Between School Discipline Referrals and Delinquency." *Psychology in the Schools* 38:2 (2001).
- Stephens, R.D. *National School Safety Center's Report on School Associated Violent Deaths*. (Westlake Village: 2003). <http://www.nssc1.org/savd/savd.pdf>
- Texas Education Agency. *Annual DEAP Evaluation and Discipline Data Reports* (Austin: 2003). <http://pease.tea.state.tx.us/safeschools/reports.htm>
- Texas Education Agency. *2001-2002 Academic Excellence Indicator System*, (Austin: 2003). <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2002/index.html>
- Udry, Richard J. et al. *The National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health*, (Chapel Hill: 1997) <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth>
- United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics 2000* (Washington, D.C.: 2000) <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002312.pdf>
- United States Departments of Education and Justice. *1999 Annual Report on School Safety*. (Washington, DC.: 1999) <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/iscs99.htm>
- United States Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims 1999 National Report* (1999), available online at <http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/index.html>.
- USA Weekend. "13<sup>th</sup> Annual Teen Survey." (1999). [http://www.usaweekend.com/00\\_issues/000416/000416teen.html](http://www.usaweekend.com/00_issues/000416/000416teen.html)

**Reagan High School Student Safety Survey/Encuesta para estudiantes sobre seguridad**  
**Escuela Reagan High**

Please answer each of the following questions—use the back or extra sheets of paper if necessary. *Por favor responde a las siguientes preguntas. Si necesitas espacio adicional para escribir, usa la parte de atrás o adjunta hojas extras.*

1. How would you describe the atmosphere at Reagan High School generally? *¿Cómo describirías que es generalmente la atmósfera en la escuela Reagan High?*
2. Do you feel safe at Reagan High School? *¿Te sientes seguro en la escuela Reagan High?*
3. If not, what is your biggest safety concern? *Si no, ¿qué es lo que más te preocupa respecto a la seguridad?*
4. Are Reagan High School administrators responsive to student safety concerns? *¿Los administradores de la escuela Reagan High responden a las preocupaciones de seguridad de los estudiantes?*
5. Why or why not? *¿Por qué sí o por qué no?*
6. In your opinion, what are the causes of violence by students? *En tu opinión, ¿cuáles son las causas de la violencia estudiantil?*



7. Do you believe the school's disciplinary rules are effective in deterring student violence? *¿Crees que las reglas de disciplina de la escuela son efectivas para frenar la violencia estudiantil?*
  
8. Why or why not? *¿Por qué sí o por qué no?*
  
9. What kinds of changes would help you to feel safer at school? *¿Qué tipos de cambios te ayudarían a sentirte seguro en la escuela?*
  
10. Are you aware of threats to student safety that are not responded to by the school or the school district? If yes, describe. *¿Estás enterado de amenazas a la seguridad estudiantil a las cuales la escuela o el distrito no han respondido? Si es así, describe por favor.*
  
11. If you had a concern about safety at school, where do you feel you could go for help? *Si tuvieras una inquietud con la seguridad en la escuela, ¿a dónde crees que puedes acudir para solicitar ayuda?*
  
12. Do feel that if you had concerns about safety that you could get help from the campus administration? *¿Crees que si tuvieras alguna inquietud*

*relacionada con la seguridad, podrías solicitar ayuda a la administración del plantel?*

13. What other resources do you think would be helpful on campus to improve your sense of safety while at school? *¿Qué otros recursos piensas que serían útiles en el plantel que crees que te harían sentir más seguro en la escuela?*
  
14. Does the school effectively communicate its expectations for student conduct? *¿La escuela comunica efectivamente sus expectativas sobre la conducta estudiantil?*
  
15. Are you aware of gang activity at school? If yes, describe the problem. *¿Estás enterado sobre actividades de pandillas en la escuela? Si es así, describe el problema.*
  
16. Are you aware of bullying at school? If yes, describe the problem. *¿Estás enterado de que se hagan intimidaciones en la escuela? Si es así, describe el problema.*
  
17. Are you aware of drug use among students at school? If so, what are the most common drugs, and how do they get to school? *¿Estás enterado del uso de drogas entre los estudiantes de la escuela? Si es así, ¿cuáles son las drogas que se usan más comúnmente y cómo las obtienen?*

18. Are there any locations on campus that make you feel unsafe?  
Why? *¿Hay algunos sitios en el plantel que crees que no son seguros? ¿Por qué?*

19. If you could give the school board one recommendation about how to improve Reagan High School, what would you say? *Si pudieras darle una recomendación a la Mesa Directiva sobre cómo mejorar la escuela Reagan High, ¿qué recomendación harías?*

Optional/ *Opcional*

My grade level is: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior  
*Mi grado es: 9º grado 10º grado 11º grado 12º grado*

My race/ethnicity is: Hispanic African American Anglo Asian Other  
*Mi raza/ origen étnico es: hispano afro-americano anglo asiático otro*

OPTIONAL/ OPCIONAL

The Reagan High School Safety Team will be conducting personal interviews with students, staff and community members. If you feel you have information that would be helpful to us, and are willing to speak with us personally, please detach this page and return it with the surveys.

*El Equipo de Seguridad de la escuela Reagan High llevará a cabo entrevistas personales con los estudiantes, el personal y miembros de la comunidad. Si crees que tienes información que nos puede ser útil, y deseas hablar personalmente con nosotros, por favor desprende esta hoja y devuélvela con las encuestas.*

Parental Consent: I am the parent/guardian of the above-referenced student. I consent to my child participating in a personal interview regarding student safety at Reagan High School. I consent to the Reagan High School Safety Team using information provided by my child in the investigation for any purpose related to the investigation.

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

*Consentimiento de los padres: Soy el padre/ madre/ custodio legal del estudiante bajo mencionado. Doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo(a) participe en una entrevista personal relacionada con la seguridad estudiantil en la escuela Reagan High. Doy mi consentimiento al Equipo de Seguridad de la escuela Reagan High para usar la información que mi hijo(a) les proporcione en la investigación para cualquier propósito de la misma.*

*Nombre del estudiante:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Teléfono:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Padre/ Madre/ Custodio legal:* \_\_\_\_\_

## **Reagan High School Staff Safety Survey**

Please answer each of the following questions—use the back or extra sheets of paper if necessary.

1. How would you describe the atmosphere at Reagan High School generally?
2. Do you feel students are safe at Reagan High School? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel staff members are safe at Reagan High School? Why or why not?
4. What is the biggest safety challenge at Reagan?
5. In your opinion, are Reagan High School administrators responsive to student safety concerns?
6. Why or why not?
7. In your opinion, what are the causes of violence by students?
8. Do you believe the school's disciplinary rules are effective in deterring student violence?

9. Why or why not?
10. What kinds of changes would improve student safety at Reagan High School?
11. Are you aware of threats to student safety that are not responded to by the school or the school district? If yes, describe.
12. If students or parents had a concern about safety at school, where do you feel they could go for effective help?
13. Have you been trained in a school safety plan? Are you comfortable with any existing procedures established for crisis situations?
14. What other resources do you think would be helpful on campus to improve your sense that staff and students are safe at school?
15. Does the school effectively communicate its expectations for student conduct?
16. Are you aware of gang activity at school? If yes, describe the problem.



19. Are there any locations on campus that you feel are unsafe? Why?

20. If you could give make one recommendation about how to improve Reagan High School, what would it be?

Optional

I am a (circle one) Teacher Administrator Classified Employee Other Professional

My race/ethnicity is African American Hispanic Anglo Asian Other



## **OPTIONAL–PERSONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST**

If you would like to speak with the Reagan School Safety Team in greater depth about your experience at Reagan High School, or any concerns or suggestions you have related to school safety, please separate this sheet from your survey responses, and return it with the surveys.

My name is : \_\_\_\_\_

The best time to contact me is : \_\_\_\_\_

The best way to contact me is: \_\_\_\_\_

**Reagan High School Parent Safety Survey**  
***Encuesta para padres sobre seguridad***  
***Escuela Reagan High***

Please answer each of the following questions—use the back or extra sheets of paper if necessary. *Por favor responda a las siguientes preguntas. Si necesita espacio adicional para escribir, use la parte de atrás o adjunte hojas extras.*

1. How would you describe the atmosphere at Reagan High School generally?  
*¿Cómo describiría que es generalmente la atmósfera en la escuela Reagan High?*
  
2. Does your child feel safe at Reagan High School? *¿Su hijo(a) se siente seguro en la escuela Reagan High?*
  
3. Do you feel that your child is safe at Reagan High School? *¿Usted siente que su hijo(a) está seguro en la escuela Reagan High?*
  
4. What is your biggest safety concern at Reagan? *¿Cuál es su mayor preocupación sobre seguridad en la escuela Reagan High?*
  
5. In your opinion, are Reagan High School administrators responsive to student safety concerns? *En su opinión, ¿los administradores de la escuela Reagan High responden a las preocupaciones de seguridad de los estudiantes?*

6. Why or why not? *¿Por qué sí o por qué no?*
  
7. In your opinion, what are the causes of violence by students? *En su opinión, ¿cuáles son las causas de la violencia estudiantil?*
  
8. Do you believe the school's disciplinary rules are effective in deterring student violence? *¿Cree usted que las reglas de disciplina de la escuela son efectivas para frenar la violencia estudiantil?*
  
9. Why or why not? *¿Por qué sí o por qué no?*
  
10. What kinds of changes would help you to feel that your child would be safer at school? *¿Qué tipos de cambios le ayudarían a sentirse que su hijo(a) estaría seguro en la escuela?*
  
11. Are you aware of threats to student safety that are not responded to by the school or the school district? If yes, describe. *¿Está usted enterado de amenazas a la seguridad estudiantil a las cuales la escuela o el distrito no han respondido? Sí es así, describa por favor.*
  
12. If you had a concern about safety at school, where do you feel you could go for help? *Si tuviera una inquietud relacionada con la seguridad en la escuela, ¿a dónde cree que puede acudir para solicitar ayuda?*

13. Do feel that if you had concerns about safety that you could get help from the campus administration? *¿Cree que, si usted tuviera alguna inquietud relacionada con la seguridad, podría solicitar ayuda a la administración del plantel?*
14. What other resources do you think would be helpful on campus to improve your sense that your child is safe at school? *¿Qué otros recursos piensa que serían útiles en el plantel que lo harían sentir mejor que su hijo(a) está seguro en la escuela?*
15. Does the school effectively communicate its expectations for student conduct? *¿La escuela comunica efectivamente sus expectativas sobre la conducta estudiantil?*
16. Are you aware of gang activity at school? If yes, describe the problem. *¿Está usted enterado sobre actividades de pandillas en la escuela? Si es así, describa el problema.*
17. Are you aware of bullying at school? If yes, describe the problem. *¿Está usted enterado de que se hagan intimidaciones en la escuela? Si es así, describa el problema.*
18. Are you aware of drug use among students at school? If so, what are the most common drugs, and how do they get to school? *¿Está usted enterado del uso de*

*drogas entre los estudiantes en la escuela? Si es así, ¿cuáles son las drogas que se usan más comúnmente y cómo las obtienen?*

19. Are there any locations on campus that you feel are unsafe? Why? *¿Hay algunos sitios en el plantel que usted cree que no son seguros? ¿Por qué?*

20. If you could give make one recommendation about how to improve Reagan High School, what would it be? *Si pudiera dar una recomendación sobre cómo mejorar la escuela Reagan High, ¿qué recomendación haría?*

*Optional/Opcional*

My child/children's grade

level(s) is/are: Freshman    Sophomore    Junior    Senior

*El grado de mi(s) hijo(s) es/son: 9º grado    10º grado    11º grado    12º grado*

My child's race/ethnicity is: Hispanic    African American    Anglo    Asian    Other

El origen étnico de mi(s) hijo(s) es: hispano    afro-americano    anglo    asiático    otro

OPTIONAL/ *Opcional*

We would like to speak with individual students. If your child has information regarding a specific incident, or school safety issues generally, and you will permit your child to speak with us personally, and permit us to use your child's statements for our investigation, please sign your name below. *Nos gustaría hablar con estudiantes de manera individual. Si su hijo(a) tiene información relacionada con algún incidente específico, o sobre asuntos de seguridad escolar en general, y usted le permite que hable con nosotros personalmente y usar la información que su hijo(a) nos da por nuestra investigación, por favor llene la información de abajo.*

---

name of student/*nombre del estudiante*

---

telephone number/*número telefónico*

---

parent signature (student under age 18)  
*firma del padre/ madre (si el estudiante es menor de 18 años)*



## **Procedures for Assessing Threats of Violence**

Any person who has information regarding a violent act or the threat of a violent act must contact the principal. If the situation warrants immediate action, the principal will take the necessary steps to assure the safety of all students. All threats are taken seriously and must be reported. The principal will decide if the seriousness of the threat warrants calling the police to investigate it as a terroristic threat.

### **I. Responding to Possible Terroristic Threats (*When to call police*)**

The Dallas Police Department uses the following criteria for determining whether a threat is considered terroristic:

- a. the threat must be direct and verbal, i.e. the targeted person must hear the threat**
- b. the person making the threat must have the means to carry out the threat at that time**

As stated in the Student Code of Conduct, a student who engages in a terroristic threat commits a criminal offense according to the Texas Penal Code, Section 22.07. The Penal Code defines a terroristic threat as the threat to commit any offense involving violence to any person or property with intent to:

- a. cause a reaction of any type to this threat by an official or volunteer agency organized to deal with emergencies;
- b. place any person in fear of imminent serious bodily injury;
- c. prevent or interrupt the occupation or the use of a building or room; place of assembly; place to which the public has access; place of employment or occupation; aircraft; automobile, or other form of conveyance; or other public place; or
- d. cause an impairment or interruption of public communications, public transportation, public water, gas, power supply or other public service.

If the principal suspects that a student has made a terroristic threat, he/she should follow these steps:

**(Special circumstance: If the threat of violence follows an allegation of child abuse, neither the threat of violence procedures nor the risk assessment should be initiated. Report the abuse to the District Child Abuse Office and follow instructions from the Police Department regarding steps to take in response to the threat of violence.)**

1. Call the police. (Only the police can determine if a terroristic threat has been made).
2. If the police charge the student with making a terroristic threat or related offense and do not arrest the student, the principal will notify parents and send the student home



Dallas Independent School District

on an emergency placement. Police do not arrest students under the age of 10. No student will be left alone, returned to class unsupervised, or released from school until a parent or guardian has been notified and an intervention plan agreed upon. Student access to all dangerous implements should be removed.

3. The principal will schedule a hearing within five (5) days whether or not the student has been released from juvenile detention or an adult jail or is home on emergency placement.
4. Prior to sending the student home, the principal will ensure that a *Threat of Violence Risk Assessment* is completed to determine the risk of carrying out the threat. The *Risk Assessment* may be conducted by the counselor, nurse, visiting teacher, social worker, or licensed specialist in school psychology. The principal will ensure that the student, parent, and school staff are interviewed to gather critical information to complete the *Risk Assessment*. A *SCANTRON Threat of Violence Report Form* will also be completed. Parents will be notified regarding the results of the assessment.
5. Also, prior to sending the student home, if the risk level is determined to be high, a licensed specialist in school psychology (LSSP) or visiting teacher/social worker from Psychological Services must be called to further interview the student and parent to assess the need for additional services such as psychological assessment, counseling, enrollment in a prevention program, etc. If the parent chooses to schedule the interview through a public or private agency, the parents are responsible for all costs. If an interview is completed by an outside agency or individual, a *Verification of Services Provided* form should be completed upon return to school.
6. If a terroristic threat was made, the principal will state at the hearing that state law requires the expulsion of a student to either the Dallas County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (DCJJAEP) or an off-campus Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP).
7. The student remains at the DAEP for the time required by local policy.
8. Follow-up services should be provided by assigning a case manager through the Student Support Team to monitor the progress of the student.
9. A copy of the *Threat of Violence Risk Assessment* worksheet and a copy of the *Threat of Violence Report Form* will be sent to the JJAEP or DAEP principal along with other required paperwork. The JJAEP or DAEP principal will ensure that the *Risk Assessment* worksheet and the *Report Form* are reviewed. If the *Risk Assessment* worksheet and/or *Threat of Violence Report Form* were inadvertently not completed at the home school, the JJAEP or DAEP principal will ensure that they are completed.
10. The ORIGINALS of the *Threat of Violence Risk Assessment* worksheet and the *SCANTRON Threat of Violence Report Form* are sent to Box 437, Psychological Services (attn Rakowitz). A copy is placed in the counselors' files and student discipline file.





**II. Responding to Non-Terroristic Threats of Violence** (*When police do not cite the student with a criminal offense or when the police are not called due to the nature of the threat*)

1. The principal will notify the parent about the student's behavior. No student will be left alone, returned to class unsupervised, or released from school until a parent or guardian has been notified and an intervention plan agreed upon. Student access to all dangerous implements should be removed.
2. The principal will ensure that a *Threat of Violence Risk Assessment* is completed to determine the risk of carrying out the threat. The *Risk Assessment* may be completed by the counselor, nurse, visiting teacher, social worker, or licensed specialist in school psychology. The principal will ensure that the student, parent, and school staff are interviewed to gather critical information to complete the *Risk Assessment*.
3. Parents will be notified regarding the results of the *Risk Assessment*.
4. If the risk level is determined to be high, the counselor will notify Psychological Services (214-932-5212) and request assistance in interviewing the student and parents to determine what additional services are needed such as psychological evaluation, counseling, enrollment in a prevention program, etc. If the parent chooses to schedule the interview through a public or private agency, the parents are responsible for all costs. If an interview is completed by an outside agency or individual, a *Verification of Services Provided* form should be completed upon return to school.
5. If the risk level is determined to be medium or low, the counselor will interview the student and parent to determine what additional services are needed. The counselor may request consultation from Psychological Services, if desired.
6. With medium or high risk cases, follow-up services should be provided by assigning a case manager through the Student Support Team to monitor the progress of the student. With low risk cases, follow-up services, if deemed necessary, may be provided through the SST.
7. The ORIGINALS of the *Threat of Violence Risk Assessment* worksheet and the *SCANTRON Threat of Violence Report Form* are sent to Box 437, Psychological Services (attn Rakowitz). A copy is placed in the counselors' file.



Dallas Independent School District

“Breaking the Code of Silence” Pilot Project  
2002-2003

The “Breaking the Code of Silence” brochure and related Guidance Activities (see attached) were adapted by Psychological Services from materials provided by Joe Park, M.A., C.A.S. School Psychologist II, Safe and Drug Free Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. The purpose of the program is to break students’ general reluctance to share information, often critical information, with adults such as their parents and teachers, about potentially dangerous individuals and situations. Dr. Lillie Haynes is currently piloting the program in grades 4 to 12 of Seagoville area schools.

To date, Dr. Haynes has trained 500 students in Seagoville High School and Seagoville Middle School in such forums as Career Day, peer mediation groups, health class, drama class, and English class. The Seagoville Middle School principal presented the program to his faculty and the Parent Teachers Association and received their support. The Area 1 associate superintendent reportedly is also in support of the program.

Dr. Haynes is scheduling more training:

- ⌘ The Seagoville Middle School principal has scheduled school-wide training through the health, physical education, and ROTC classes.
- ⌘ The Kleberg Elementary School principal has scheduled all fourth through sixth graders this spring.
- ⌘ Seagoville High School, as part of its “Character Counts Program” and “School Climate Initiative” is preparing a training tape on “Breaking the Code of Silence” to provide ongoing training through Channel 3.
- ⌘ San Jacinto Elementary will provide training to the entire sixth grade girls through the “Girl Talk Initiative.”
- ⌘ Florence Middle School has requested a school-wide training through the health/physical education classes.

Principals, parents, and teachers commented that they were glad that students are receiving help with these issues. As a result of the program, students have referred themselves and others for mental health and violence issues.



Dallas Independent School District

## Breaking the Code of Silence Guidance Activities

### I. Introduction

The phrase *Code of Silence* is found in some of the literature on school violence and is used to describe the general reluctance of students to share information, often critical information, with adults such as their parents and teachers, about potentially dangerous individuals and situations. This reluctance to trust and confide in an adult is nothing new and, in fact, represents a long-standing “communication gap” between children, teens, and adults. Somewhere along the line, however, the consequences of not sharing certain critical information seem to have gotten more severe as longitudinal violence rates for adolescents continue an upward trend and stories of multiple homicides are reported with increased frequency. This hesitancy of students to share critical information with a trusted adult or other responsible person helps create a situation whereby lethal actions can take place without prior notice or the chance for intervention. It is this same silence that stands as a major obstacle to tips being properly investigated to determine if and what type of additional measures need to be taken. It is believed that many of these situations can be prevented or resolved in a productive and peaceful manner if school personnel are properly trained and receive advanced notice of impending trouble. Reminding students of certain responsibilities, that they have options other than remaining silent, and that there are adults who will listen and respond, are part of a larger prevention strategy that holds promise in the ongoing battle violence in the schools.

### II. Rationale for Brochure

- A. Concerns about the reluctance of students to share critical information with an adult are expressed repeatedly in the literature on school safety and school violence. Most recently, in a September, 2000 report on school shootings, the FBI listed “leakage” from students among the Prong One characteristics which need to be considered when evaluating student behavior. Later on in their report they make direct reference to the *Code of Silence* and indicate that “...few (students) feel they can safely tell teachers or administrators if they are concerned about another student’s behavior or attitudes.” If this was not enough, a Secret Service report released the following month indicated that in 75% of the 37 school shooting cases they examined, the attacker told someone about his interests and plans. In all but 2 cases, this person was a friend, classmate or sibling. In his talk in Clemmons, NC on 10/25/00, Rick Kaufman, the Executive Director of Public Engagement and Communication Services for Jeff Co Schools in Colorado (Columbine), made reference to the “leakage” idea mentioned above and stressed the need for creating an atmosphere in which students feel secure in sharing information about potentially critical situations.
- B. Researchers and writers mention the fact that students are often not sharing critical information with adults, but few suggestions for addressing the problem are provided. Many school systems are not even aware of the research on this matter or how it might relate to incidents of targeted school violence. Too often people have been overheard saying, “Yea, I know. We really need to do something about that, but...” Others are inclined to say, “This won’t happen to us; we know our kids.”
- C. The *Code of Silence* brochure and the accompanying activities encourage and empower student to think about, discuss, and become a part of the solution to school violence.
- D. This approach is a means of helping students recognize that they have certain responsibilities and options besides remaining silent when they learn about a potentially violent situation.



Dallas Independent School District

- E. These activities can remind students of the possible benefits of involving a trusted and responsible adult in certain situations so information can be checked out further and some resolution is reached.
- F. Discussing this information can serve as a form of educational inoculation that can provide students with facts and direction they will need in case they encounter similar situations in the future.

**III. Target Populations**

- A. Students in upper elementary (4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> graders) through high school.
- B. Any students you suspect might be:
  - 1. bullied or bullying others
  - 2. thinking about or have plans to hurt themselves
  - 3. experiencing dating violence
  - 4. thinking about or have plans to hurt others
  - 5. suffering from child abuse

**IV. Obstacles/Barriers**

- A. From the onset, some people see these behaviors as low probability and thus are not concerned about an incident occurring in the first place.
- B. A sudden influx of referrals may overwhelm a small number of or unprepared responders.
- C. Insufficient training of responders in the following areas:
  - 1. Knowing what to say
  - 2. Know when to do something
  - 3. Knowing whom to involve
  - 4. Understanding and adhering to confidentiality
- D. People who view sharing critical information about potentially dangerous individuals and situations as synonymous with tattling.
- E. Fear and possible instances of retaliation against individuals who share information.
- F. Inability to sustain momentum over time if no incidents occur.
- G. Adult overreaction. Rather than maintaining an “open mind” while checking the situation out further, the adult quickly draws firm conclusions based upon a limited amount of information or such factors as race or appearance (physical looks, style of clothing, etc.).

**V. Process**

- A. School personnel (particularly Support Services)
  - 1. Rather than handing out the brochure for the student to read at a later date, discuss the concepts and brochure with the students.
  - 2. Student Services personnel should keep extra brochures available for new cases that arise.
  - 3. School personnel receive training in the following areas:
    - a. Target behaviors to focus upon
    - b. Understanding the “Code of Silence” concept
    - c. How to respond appropriately
      - 1. How to listen to student concerns
      - 2. Knowing what to say
      - 3. Understanding confidentiality and its limits
      - 4. Respecting a request to remain anonymous
      - 5. Being willing and knowing when to take action
      - 6. Knowing who to contact



Dallas Independent School District

- B. Distribute brochures to all students in 4<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Use the brochure as an outline for discussion. Present the lesson each year as part of \_\_\_\_\_ class. Take \_\_\_\_\_ class periods to present information from any of the following:
1. Introduce and define the phrase and concept *Code of Silence*.
  2. Talk about anger. Also refer to supplemental handout.
    - a. Natural emotion
    - b. The key is how you handle anger
    - c. Usually expressed in feelings toward self or others
    - d. Signals our body and mind send us that signal anger
    - e. Benefits in recognizing the signs of anger
    - f. Strategies to handle anger
  3. Discuss some of the other actual cases from media reports.
  4. Cover the facts and figures regarding suicide, bullying, abusive relationships and shootings (Optional).
  5. Allow students time to react.
  6. Discuss target behaviors discussed earlier. List others.
  7. Talk about strategies and ways of dealing with adults.
  8. Go through strategies listed in previous pages.
  9. Review phone numbers under “What should I do?” on page 4 of the Breaking the Code of Silence brochure and write in your local school’s “Crime Stoppers” phone number, if you have one, or your local school’s number.
  10. Share other helpful phone numbers for students to have. (See Help for Teens on page 4 of the Dallas ISD Suicide Prevention Brochure).

Counseling – Teen Contact	214-233-8336
Mental Health Association	214-871-2420
Runaway Hotline	1-800-392-3352
Suicide Hotline	214-828-1000
Community Helpline	214-379-4357
Aids Information – Health Dept.	214-819-1980
Drug Counseling – Dallas Challenge	972-566-4680
Mother’s Against Drunk Driving	214-637-0372
Mothers Against Teen Violence	214-565-0422
Texas Youth Hotline	1-800-210-2278

11. Reinforce key idea that **SOME SECRETS SHOULD NOT BE KEPT.**
12. Attach business card or office number
  - a. Each presenter will need to decide if he/she will give out home number.
13. Show and discuss the MTV/APA video (22 minutes) or other relevant recordings.
14. Present and discuss the brochure entitled *Warning Signs. Fight for Your Rights: Take a Stand Against Violence*. Order copies by calling 1-800-268-0078 or going to [helping.apa.org](http://helping.apa.org).
15. Use *Safe Schools-Safe Students*, 2-part video series, by Performance Resource Press, 1270 Rankin Dr., Troy, MI 48083, [www.prponline.net](http://www.prponline.net), 1-800-453-7732.
  - a. *Time to Tell* video - Students
  - b. *Understanding Violence* video - Teachers
16. Distribute and discuss Performance Resource Press brochures entitled:
  - a. *Identifying Troubled Children*
  - b. *Helping Potentially Violent Children*
 You may order copies by calling 1-800-453-7733



Dallas Independent School District

17. Use the book entitled *The Bully Free Classroom: Over 100 Tips and Strategies for Teachers K-8* by Alan Beane. Free Spirit Press, 1999. ISBN#: 1-57542-054-6.
18. Implement the programs *Don't Laugh At Me* in Grade 2-5 and Grades 6-8.
19. List and discuss ways "leakage" information can surface
  - A. Verbal/spoken
    1. Threats
    2. Boasting
    3. Innuendoes
    4. Predictions
    5. Ultimatums
    6. Jokes
    7. Offhand comments
  - B. Written
    1. Stories
    2. Diary entries
    3. Essays
    4. Poems
    5. Letters
    6. Songs
    7. Drawings/artwork
    8. Doodles
    9. Tattoos
    10. Videos
    11. Web Pages
20. Discuss ideas such as:
  - A. Some secrets should not be kept.
  - B. Takes all of us working together.
  - C. Better to lose a friendship than a friend.
  - D. Not tattling when you tell an adult information about situation in which someone might get hurt or killed.
21. Distinguish difference between sharing critical information about potentially dangerous situations and tattling.
22. Discuss some the reasons why students might reveal comments in the ways listed in IV C 7 1 & 2 above.
  - A. Cry for help; being bullied
  - B. Sign of inner conflict; family problems
  - C. Depression
  - D. Anger
  - E. Need for control
  - F. Rebellion
  - G. Achieve status among peers
23. Discuss news articles or historical events as they relate to prejudice and intolerance (age, race, sex/gender, national/ethnic origin, religion, or disability).
24. Tell students about community and school resources they can go to for assistance.
25. Role-play:
  - A. Approaching adults about a concern regarding a potentially dangerous student of situation.
  - B. Things students can say and do that will convey seriousness to get and keep the attention of an adult.



Dallas Independent School District

26. Discuss other options than can be pursued if the student is unsuccessful with the first adult he/she approaches.
  - A. Use *Plan A-B-C*. If the first adult does not listen, care, or respond, go to someone else. Do not stop until the issue is addressed.
  - B. Have students provide suggestions on ways they can act and respond that would encourage adults to listen and be more responsive.
27. Talk with students about the possible consequences of making threats and/or false reports. Share actual news articles and reports.
28. Use open-ended discussions and relate to the seven traits in Character Education. Some of the topics might involve:
  - A. Personal and legal responsibilities of knowing and sharing critical information.
  - B. Personal and legal responsibility of knowing but **not** sharing critical information and something happens.
  - C. What are our moral responsibilities to society? Others (teachers, classmates, friends and people we don't even know)?
29. List other instances in which the general public is already sharing vital information about important and potentially dangerous situations.
  - A. Calling in drunk drivers to law enforcement on cell phone
  - B. Contacting the DSS regarding child abuse
  - C. Notifying the IRS about people cheating on taxes.
  - D. Calling anonymous tip/hotlines like *CrimeStoppers*
  - E. Aggressive Drivers Hotline – Forsyth County (773-7977)
  - F. TV programs like *American's Most Wanted*. A tip helped capture the Texas 7 who escaped from prison.
  - G. FBI's Most Wanted List
  - H. Cameras placed in parking lots, stores, schools, buses and at select highway intersections
  - I. Audio and video recording from police cars
  - J. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in NY and DC, President Bush called upon the American public to report suspicious behavior and individuals to law enforcement
  - K. Community Watch Programs
  - L. Fraud Hotlines for insurance carriers (medical, auto, dental, etc.)

Breaking the Code of Silence brochure and Guidance Activities adapted by Psychological Services, Dallas Independent School District from materials provided by Joe Park, M.A., C.A.S. School Psychologist II, Licensed Psychological Associate, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, 1605 Miller, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, N. C. 27103, 336-727-8046.



Dallas Independent School District

THREATS OF  
VIOLENCE

All threats of violence must be reported to the principal by students and school personnel to ensure safety. All threats will be taken seriously. When a student makes a threat the school principal must determine whether it is a terroristic threat or a threat of a less serious nature. [See also Student Code of Conduct]

TERRORISTIC  
THREAT

If the principal suspects that a student has made or engaged in a terroristic threat, the principal shall call the police and the parents. Only the police can determine if a terroristic threat has been made. The Texas Penal Code, Section 22.07, defines a terroristic threat as the threat to commit any offense involving violence to any person or property with intent to place any person in fear of imminent serious bodily injury, or prevent or interrupt the occupation or use of a building, room, place of assembly, place of employment, aircraft, automobile, or other mode of transportation.

THREAT

If the principal determines that the threat is of a less serious or indeterminate nature, the principal shall call the parents.

VIOLENCE  
RISK  
ASSESSMENT

If a threat of violence has been made, the primary caregiver, usually a counselor, must complete a violence risk assessment as follows:

1. For threats assessed as high-risk, the caregiver shall request assistance from psychological services to determine the need for additional services.
2. For threats assessed as low to medium, the primary caregiver:
  - a. Shall develop an action plan and confer with the parent.
  - b. May also obtain consultation from psychological services as needed.

BEHAVIOR  
REPORT FORM

In addition to the violence risk assessment, a behavior report form shall be completed. Copies of these forms shall be placed in the counselor's file, the student's discipline file, and shall be sent to psychological services.

If the police charge the student with making a terroristic threat, state law requires mandatory removal of the student to an off-campus alternative education placement.

Regardless of the level of risk, no student will be left alone, returned to class unsupervised, or released from school until a parent or guardian has been notified and an intervention plan agreed upon.

Student access to all dangerous implements should be removed.

Regardless of the level of risk, all students making threats shall receive follow-up through the local campus student support team.

DATE ISSUED:

08/27/2001

LDU-35-01

FFE(L)-X





Dallas Independent School District

---

**This online presentation of your district's policy is an electronic representation of TASB's record of the district's currently adopted policy manual. It does not reflect updating activities in progress. The official, authoritative manual is available for inspection in the office of the Superintendent. [See BF (LOCAL) for further information.]**



**THREAT OF VIOLENCE RISK ASSESSMENT  
WORKSHEET  
ADMINISTRATION**

**General**

The risk assessment worksheet is to be administered as an interview after a student has made a threat of violence. Do not give the worksheet to the student to fill out. **Many items require additional contacts with a parent, teacher, counselor or administrator to be able to complete the assessment.** Review the student's discipline record if there is one.

Begin the interview with explaining why you were asked to talk with the student and that some information will help get to know him or her better. Identify the feelings that you assume were present at the time of the threat; "You must have been very angry when you said-----," and what you see currently, "I imagine you are worried about what is going to happen now."

The student may be aware of consequences that could result from the threat and not be cooperative, remain silent or deny any intention of harm. If the student denies any intention of harm, respond with a positive statement such as "I'm glad to hear that," or "good," and continue the assessment. The best information may be obtained by asking the student to tell you what is going on and what led up to the incident. Listen and reflect what you hear. Refrain from accusing the student of lying or not telling the truth. Do not point out inconsistencies or contradictions and ask for clarification without being accusatory.

**Items**

The following suggestions may be followed if you need more information to complete the assessment after the student has told his or her story or as an encouragement to continue the story.

- 1.. **Plan: Details** "You have threatened to -----." "How would you do it? What did you have in mind? What are you planning to do?"
2. **Plan: Access to Weapons** "What would you use to do it? Who do you know that has a gun (knife, etc.)? Have you ever seen it? Do you know how to use it?"
3. **Plan: Time** "When would you do it?"
4. **Plan: Viability of Plan** "How real is this plan?" How likely is it that you will carry this plan out?"
5. **Aggressive Behavior** "When you get angry, what do you do?" Do people treat you fairly? Have you ever set a fire to things or a building?"



Dallas Independent School District

6. **Discipline Record** “Have you ever been suspended or expelled? Have your parents ever been called to school because of your behavior?”
7. **Academic Performance** “What grade are you in and what do you think about that?”
8. **Exposure to Violence** “Have you ever seen anyone killed or seriously hurt?”
9. **Previous Threats** “Have you ever threatened to harm anyone before?”
10. **Victim of Abuse** “Has anyone ever intentionally hurt you?”
11. **Cruelty to Animals** “Do you have a pet or have ever had a pet? Have you ever intentionally hurt an animal?”
12. **Victim of Harassment** “Has anyone ever teased or harassed you?”
13. **Gang Affiliation** “What gang are you a member of? Would you like to be a part of one? Do you see the gang as a source of protection?”
14. **Family Support** “Who in your family are you close to now? Who were you close to when you were little?”
15. **Empathy** “Is there anyone you feel sorry for? Do you ever wish you hadn’t done something?”
16. **Relationship Skills** “Do you see yourself as having a lot of friends? Do you wish you had more? How would your friends describe you? Do you think others respect you?”
17. **Preoccupation with Violence** “What kind of movies or TV programs do you like to watch? Do you like to make up stories about violence or do you talk to your friends about violent stories much?”
18. **Drugs** “How much do you use drugs or drink alcohol each week?”
19. **Emotional stability** “Do you get sad or happy? Describe it to me? How often?”

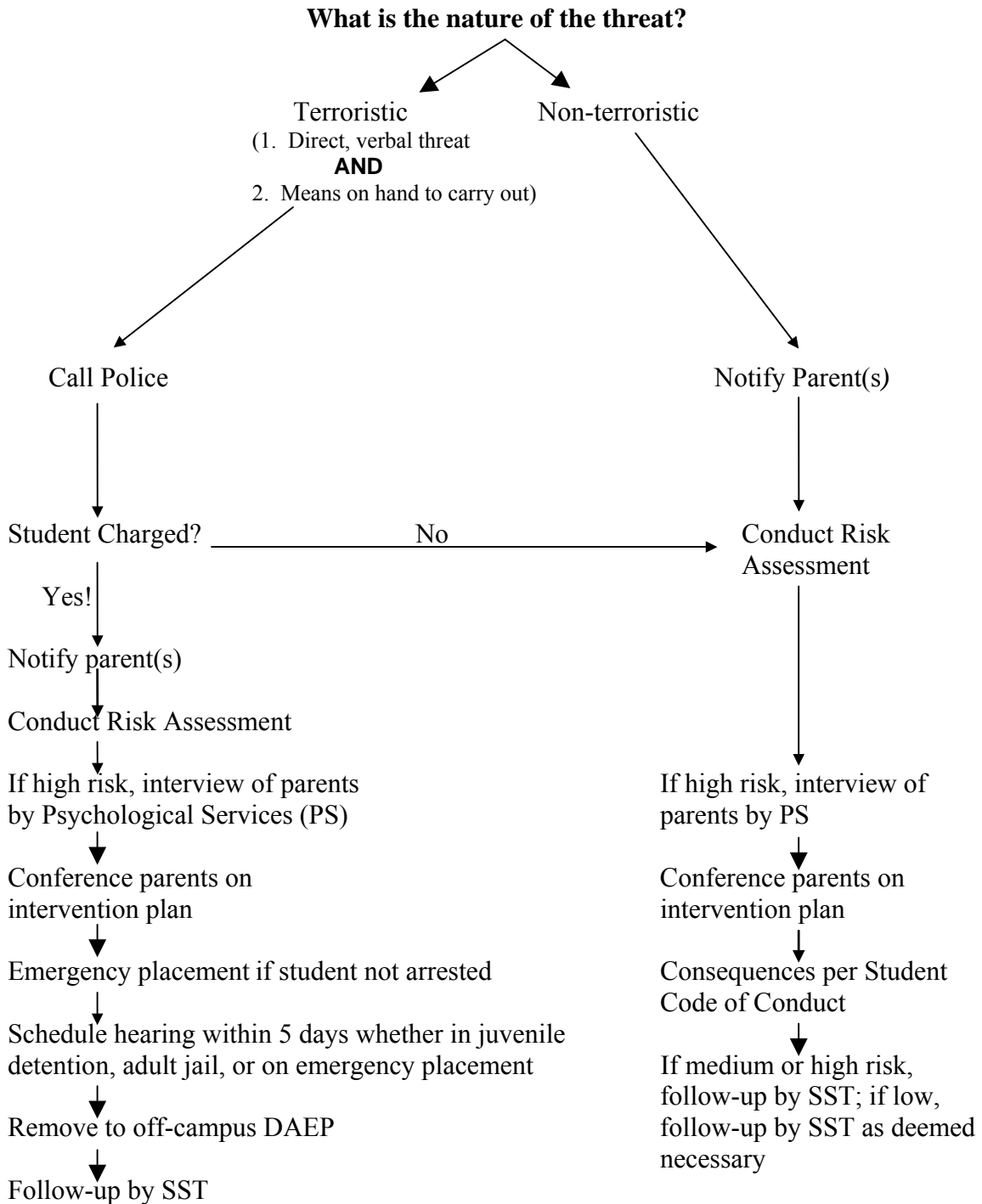
### SCORING

- \* Use the worksheet as a checklist.
- \* Add up the checks in the ‘lower’ category, the ‘medium’ category and the ‘higher’ category.
- \* Indicate the total number of checks at the bottom of each column.
- \* Multiply the ‘lower’ category by 1, the ‘medium’ category by 2 and the ‘higher’ category by 3.
- \* Add these three weighted scores.
- \* Divide the total weighted scores by 3. This number is the final score.
- \* **If the final score is below 9 the risk is lower. If the final score is between 9 and 14 the risk is medium. If the final score is above 14 the risk is higher.**

Note. If all four sections of the plan (item #1) are checked high, the final risk for violent behavior is automatically assessed as high.



## Procedures for Assessing Threats of Violence



*Student may be removed to an off-campus DAEP if the threats are gang related or if the student has a history of threatening behavior.*



## VIOLENCE RISK ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

### Case Scenario 1

Six year-old Jeremy was playing on the sliding board on the blacktop when Jonathan pushed him from behind and made Jeremy fall into the mud puddle beneath the slide. Jeremy busted his lip, blood was everywhere, and his new clothes were mudded and torn. All the children laughed and Jeremy angrily yelled at Jonathan, "I'm going to kill you!"

Jeremy told his school counselor that he "was not goin' to kill Jonathan," just that he "was goin' to get him" for dirtying his new outfit. Jeremy said he was still mad and he "was goin' to beat him up" when he "got good and ready" because he knew he was going to get in trouble at home and "Jonathan had no business doing that to [him]."

When Jeremy's parents, Mr. & Mrs. Williams, were interviewed by the school counselor, they reported Jeremy is generally happy and is an average student, but does have some temper tantrums. They said he likes Bart Simpson and WWF, and sometimes plays with the teen-rated video games with his cousin when he shouldn't. Jeremy comes from a loving family and there is no abuse in the family.

According to his teacher, Jeremy has never made any threats in the past and she does not consider him a discipline problem. His teacher stated that Jeremy is not a member of any gang, but she was surprised to hear him one day talking with another boy about trying to harm the classroom gerbil, which he denied.

Another concern of Jeremy's teacher is that he did not act upset or remorseful over threatening Jonathan, and apologized only after being confronted by the assistant principal. His teacher stated that Jeremy is really looked upon as a leader by his peers and is well liked. His teacher further stated that "if only Jeremy would study more and not be so playful he could be a solid B student." She knows that he likes wrestling because he is always trying to act out some of Stone Cold's antics in class. Frequently, Jeremy tantrums and cries when things do not go his way, and his teacher believes it is because he is an only child and his parents cater to him a little too much.

Additional Information can be found in the "Texas School Safety Center Planning Manual for Safe Schools, 2nd. Ed.", published by the Texas School Safety Center Southwest Texas State University and Criminal Justice Division Office of the Governor (San Marcos 2002); online at :<http://www.txssc.swt.edu/curricula/manual.htm>