

School Safety

Most everyone can agree that schools should be safe and secure places where teachers can teach and students can learn without fear of crime or violence. The tragedy that occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012 is a stark reminder that this is not always the case.

Every year the US Department of Education and the US Department of Justice issue an annual report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety. According to the most recent report issued in 2011 for the 2009-2010 school year:

- 33 school-associated violent deaths (25 homicides, 5 suicides, 3 police interventions) occurred on the campus of a functioning elementary or secondary school in the United States.
- Among students ages 12-18, there were 828,000 nonfatal victimizations at school including 470,000 victims of theft and 359,000 victims of violence (serious violent crimes and simple assault)
- 23% of public schools reported that bullying occurred among students on a daily or weekly basis.
- 16% reported gang activity
- 9% of students ages 12-18 reported being targets of hate-related words at school
- 32-39% of 6th - 8th graders and 20-28% of 9th - 12th graders reported being bullied at school.
- 6% reported being victims of cyber bullying and 3% reported receiving harassing text messages
- 6% of students reported carrying a weapon on school property.
- 4% reported that they were afraid of attack or harm at school.

Responses from **SERAC** (Southeastern Regional Action Council) youth surveys give us a glimpse at the situation closer to home. (Rates based responses from approximately 7000 youth in grades 7-12 from 12 communities in Southeastern Connecticut surveyed between 2010 and 2012).

- 5% definitely *do not feel safe* at school
- 49% report having been bullied in the past year
- 13% report having been bullied in the past month
- 12% report that it would be very easy to get a gun if they wanted
- 3% report having brought a weapon to school in the past year

Although these surveys were conducted in the schools in order to ensure a representative sample of youth, it is important to remember that the findings are representative of the community as a whole and not just of the school environment.

Both the national and regional data support the conclusion that although our schools are generally safe, there are however areas and opportunities for improvement. Since

December 14, 2012, there have been many discussions about how to improve school safety with a specific focus on gun violence. Safety plans have been reviewed. Some have been updated. We must not stop there. We must continue to seek opportunities to make all students feel safe and comfortable in their schools so that they can focus their attention on learning.