Final Report
of the

Optimal School Safety Task Force

School Safety Executive Report

Douglas Strader, Ed.D.
Chief Accountability Officer
and Members of the Optimal School Safety Task Force Team

June 30, 2021

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Task Force Members

Name	Title	Office
Dr. Douglas Strader	**Chief Accountability Officer**	**Division of Accountability**
Dr. Helen Coley	Chief of School Support & Leadership	Division of School Support & Leadership
Dr. David Curry	Associate Superintendent	Area 2 Office
Ms. Elizabeth Faison	Associate Superintendent of Student Services	Student Services
Mr. Robert Foster Jr.	Supervisor-Security Field Operations	Safety and Security Services
Mr. Timothy Gover	Operations Supervisor - Security Services	Safety and Security Services
Mr. Joseph Harris	Supervisor-Security Field Operations	Safety and Security Services
Mr. Bruce Hislop	Data Technical Lead	Monitoring & Accountability
Mrs. Patti Hoellich	Administrative Secretary IV	Division of Accountability
Dr. Kasandra Lassiter	Associate Superintendent	Area 1 Office
Dr. Carletta Marrow	Associate Superintendent	Area 3 Office
Mrs. Jennifer Martin-Johnson	Senior Technical Program Manager	Monitoring & Accountability
Ms. Chavon Matthews	Administrative Secretary I	Monitoring & Accountability
Mr. Archie O'Neil	Director	Safety and Security Services
Ms. Deborah Toppins	Supervisor-Security Field Operations	Safety and Security Services
Mr. Anthony Whittington	Director	Monitoring & Accountability
Ms. Donyale Yorkshire	Business Systems Analyst	Monitoring & Accountability

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Executive Summary

In June of 2020 members of the Prince George's County Board of Education (the "Board") proposed eliminating PGCPS School Resource Officers (SROs). The Board's Operations, Budget and Fiscal Affairs (OBFA) Committee met to review the two Board Action Summary proposals. Noting there were areas of consensus and some areas of disagreement between the two proposals, the committee made three motions that were forwarded to the Board for consideration. In September of 2020 these were presented to the Board along with the CEO's school safety and security report and school arrest data. The Board subsequently approved four recommendations.

Among the recommendations is the instruction for the CEO to report the status and recommendations regarding SROs in the school system to the Board, as well as any additional related recommendations regarding school security and student support services based on her research and findings.

The PG County Police Reform Task Force provided five recommendations to "help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline:

1A.   Realigning PGCPS security protocol.

1B.   Restructuring SROs and security personnel.

1C.   Updating school safety training requirements.

1D.   Establishing school safety data metrics to eventually phase out security personnel.

1E.   Investing in prevention and intervention programming for students.

Regarding the fourth recommendation, the CEO responded, "The Chief Accountability Officer will work with staff to establish school safety data metrics for optimal annual school safety milestones by July 1. PGCPS will also establish processes to ensure SRO arrest and use of force data is captured and published annually on the PGCPS website."

The Optimal School Safety task force was created to define Optimally Safe Schools for PGCPS and to develop data metrics to identify schools that meet this definition.

Purpose

To establish school safety data metrics for optimal annual school safety milestones by July 1, 2021 as outlined in the PG County Police Reform Task Force Recommendations for PGCPS, Recommendation 1D. PGCPS convened a Optimal School Safety Task Force led by the Chief Accountability Officer and 16 central office based staff which included the Director and staff members of the Office of Safety and Security Services.

The task force convened four times for a total of five hours to:

- Review the School Resource Officers Report to the Board of Education
- Develop an operational definition for Optimal School Safety
- Create Optimal School Safety metrics to establish benchmarks
- Establish processes to ensure SRO arrest data and use of force data is captured and published annually on the PGCPS website

Meeting dates:

- February 17th: Introduction, develop Optimally Safe School definition, list metrics used to establish benchmarks; 12 members present
- March 24th: Finalize definition of Optimally Safe School, review background data, begin establishing metrics; 10 members present
- April 22nd: Review data sources regarding school safety measures, update and approval of sample metrics; 7 members present
- May 27th: Update and approval of metrics; 10 members present

Methodology

The team collected data from the following sources:

- SchoolMAX
  - Internal Suspension Data
  - Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation Data
- MSDE Website
  - MSDE Suspension Data
- MSDE Data Collection Reports
  - Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation Data
  - Student Arrests Data
- Mental Health Services
  - Mental Health Trainings captured in My PPS and spreadsheet
  - Crisis Incident Data

- Security Office
  - Student Arrests Data
- Safety Office
  - Number of Emergency Drills Conducted Annually
- 2020 Safety Assessment Survey Responses
  - Building Safety Data
- Vector (Safe Schools Training Platform)
  - Safe Schools Training Data
- Frontline (Substitute Teacher Request System)

  - Teacher Absence Data

The following resources were used to compare safety metrics from other school districts:

[Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools 2020 Report Safety and Security Section starts on page 115 (slide 123)](#)

[Montgomery County Public Schools Safety at a Glance (see slides 15 & 16)](#)

[National Center for Education Statistics Indicators for School Crime and Safety: 2017](#)

[How Many Teachers are Chronically Absent in Your State? edweek.org](#)

[SY19-SY20 Student Arrest - Data Collection Report](#)

Contributing Factors to School Safety

While reflecting on the issue of school safety, there are some inherent factors that influence the actual safety or perception of safety in each school building or central office building. The following are some factors that influence safety:

• Appropriate training and use of progressive discipline and equity in discipline.

• Strategies and focuses on creating a positive school climate.

• The configuration and layout of the building (location of the front office, etc.) as a factor in access control. This includes the need to have open access to accommodate access to temporary buildings.

• Effective use of ID badges and other methods to enforce access control.

• Integration of security systems during construction and modernization projects.

• Effective use of technology such as security cameras to offset the need for more staff.

• Crime rate and socio-economic status of the surrounding neighborhoods.

• Responsiveness and engagement of the community's first responders.

Definition of Optimal School Safety

The Optimal School Safety Task Force met to develop an operational definition for optimal school safety. Breakout groups were established to create aspects of the definition which were then shared with the entire team. After discussion and further refinements, the following operational definition for Optimal School Safety was decided upon with consensus agreement.

> *Optimal School Safety refers to physical environments where students, staff and visitors feel safe and secure from fear and intimidation. It also includes educational environments that ensure climates are safe, caring and inclusive for learning and teaching.*

Indicators

The following data points were selected as indicators of an optimally safe school environment.

- The Performance Index for Suspensions/Expulsions:
  - **The annual Suspension/Expulsion Rate for each school shall be equal to or less than 5.0%.**

  Justification**:** The team looked at Suspension/Expulsion data for SY18 through SY20 for our district. The data indicates a slight increase in suspensions (including expulsions) from SY18 to SY19 and a drastic reduction from SY19 to SY20 due to the pandemic and the switch to virtual learning.

  In the MSDE Suspensions, Expulsions and Health Related Exclusions Report, for SY19 the percentage of students suspended or expelled in PGCPS was 7.1%. MSDE reported 5.2% of students were suspended in SY19. By comparison, Anne Arundel County reported 6.2% in SY19; while Montgomery County reported 1.8% in SY19.

- The Performance Index for Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation (BHI):
  - **Schools shall reduce the number of incidents determined to be Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation by 5% annually.**

  Justification: Harassment, intimidation, and bullying pose a serious public and mental health concern that can poison the climate of schools and affect students' ability to focus on learning. An environment safe for all students includes an environment free from bullying and harassing behavior. Student Services will focus on investigating and documenting incidents, providing and/or referring students for wraparound services, and implementing strategies, including additional training, to reduce BHI incidents in each school.

- The Performance Index for Mental Health Services:

  - **100% of employees who are required to complete the school safety and threat assessment online educational program shall do so by the system-established deadline.**

  - **At least 90% of 6th through 12th grade students will complete the school safety and threat assessment online educational program by the system-established deadline.**

  Justification: We can never predict serious acts or events that impact the well-being of our students and staff. Where mental health services are concerned, we go with this mantra: Prevention is preferred over preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. To this end, these metrics have been selected to reflect our efforts to prevent incidents that endanger the safety of our students and staff.

- The Performance Index for Safety and Security Services:
  - **Student Arrests shall not exceed .002% of enrolled students per year.**
    - For a total enrollment of 131,210 (SY21), .002% would be 262 arrests for the year. That is a slight reduction in annual arrests.
    - For a large school like Eleanor Roosevelt (enrollment - 2,621), 5.24 arrests per year.
    - For a small high school like Central (enrollment - 806) , 1.6 arrests per year.

  Justification: The Safety and Security Office is well in progress with a number of interventions (including pre-diversion programs, a cooling down period and partnering with support programs for at-risk students) to reduce the number of student arrests in our district. In addition, the Safety and Security Office will conduct a root cause analysis investigating outliers in the student arrest data for schools and grade levels that have higher than average referrals and arrests. The proposed metric represents a slight reduction in annual arrests. Refer to recommendations of strategies to reduce student arrests.

- The Performance Index for Emergency Drills Conducted:
  - **100% of mandated emergency drills (including State Mandated Drills) shall be conducted per school year.**

  Justification**:** The school district must comply with COMAR 13A.02.02.03-04 Emergency Plans:

  B. Each local school system and the SEED School shall ensure that:

  (1) Each school facility under its jurisdiction has a school emergency plan that is aligned with the criteria outlined in the MSDE Emergency Planning Guidelines for

Local School Systems and Schools [(April 2013)] (October 2017) and that a copy of each school emergency plan is on file at the central administration office.

(2) A central administration emergency plan that is aligned with the criteria outlined in the MSDE Emergency Planning Guidelines for Local School Systems and Schools [(April 2013)] (October 2017) is on file in each school grounds under its jurisdiction

- The Performance Index for Physical Building Assessments:

  o **100% of "critical" safety features are in working condition (locking doors, intercom access at the main entrance, visitor management system, panic button) or have a documented work order submitted for repair.**

  Justification: The school district must conduct regular safety inspections that are important for compliance and risk mitigation. The Office of Compliance and Ethics Annual Physical Assessment Survey. It is recommended that the goal of our system is to have all "critical" safety features in working order or a work order shall be in place.

- The Performance Index for Mandatory Safe Schools training:

  o **At least 95% of employees will complete required training modules on time.**

  Justification: The current rate of completion of the mandatory Safe Schools training modules is 90% for the assigned modules and cohorts. Using a monitoring and control process to share the Vector Compliance reports with managers, directors, chiefs and the CEO, the Director of the Office of Compliance and Ethics has strong confidence that we are moving toward increasing the compliance target by 5% annually or until we reach full compliance.

- The Performance Index for Teacher Attendance

  o **At least 75% of teachers will have fewer than 10 non-education related days absent in a school year.**

  Justification: Nationwide, 28 percent of teachers were absent for more than 10 school days during the 2015-16 school year. Teacher absences negatively impact student outcomes and student engagement and morale (as students do not feel connected to the classroom and may exhibit negative behaviors). High absenteeism among teachers also reduces the fill rate for substitute teachers, which can contribute to a resource shortage in the school building. Teacher attendance data compiled by the Civil Rights Data Collection was analyzed by the Education Week Resource Center. It revealed an increase from the previous average of 27% of teachers chronically absent in the 2013-14 school year. When analyzing data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, researchers defined teacher absence as being out of the classroom for illness or

personal reasons but did not include days away due to school-related business, like professional development and field trips.

Recommendations

During the course of developing the safety metrics, the team members gathered and analyzed data from various sources. The process of gathering the data was rather arduous as many of these data points exist in different systems and even spreadsheets maintained by departments – often with only one person understanding and managing the data. Further concerns were raised regarding the quality of the data – the completeness and the correctness. Discrepancies between data stored in PGCPS systems and data reported from those systems to MSDE give pause to any conclusions that may be drawn from those data. Ensuring that the data are managed and reported with appropriate data governance strategies while within legal student privacy statutes is fundamentally important and should be a major focus of the school system.

Recommendation 1 – Consolidate Data into Linked Systems

During the course of developing the safety metrics, the team members gathered and analyzed data from various sources. The process of gathering the data was rather burdensome as these data points exist in different systems and even spreadsheets maintained by departments. This causes difficulty in acquiring the data and sometimes single points of failure when only one person understands and/or can pull data and reports. Making these data centralized should be the ultimate goal.

Consolidation also includes standardizing data definitions and determining the governance structures around those data. Specific to this charge, a standardized definition of Use of Force needs to be developed to ensure that data collected are valid and can be compared across years.

Recommendation 2 – Analyze Data Outliers for High-impact Strategies

During SY20 there were 274 arrests in PGCPS. Of these 93 arrests – more than one third – were in Suitland High School. Additionally, 9th grade students accounted for 127 of these 274 arrests – 46% of all arrests. Investigation of the reasons for these outliers, and developing high-impact strategies specific to these groups will greatly reduce the total number of arrests.

Recommendation 3 – Develop and Approve Department of Safety and Security Services Processes Manual

The standard operating procedure, *DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND SECURITY SERVICES Administrative and Operational Manual*, for the department has been under development and review for about a year and should be finalized, approved and implemented as soon as

possible. It is currently unclear where the Department is in this approval process. There is currently no Administrative Procedure that succinctly addresses arrest powers and State and local mandates.

Recommendation 4 – Improve Data Quality

Data quality can be considered in multiple ways. It can be Boolean (the data are either 100% correct or they are incorrect) or on a continuum of sorts (the data are partially correct, mostly correct, etc.). It can also be considered on a confidence scale (I'm confident that the data are clean enough to be used for a particular purpose). With these possibilities in viewing and communicating data quality, we come to see that data quality is more than simply the correctness of the data, but also includes the usefulness of that data for the intended purposes. Regardless of the view taken, the goal is to have quality data – data that we can trust will lead us to correct answers to the discipline questions we pose.

The first recommendation to improve the quality of discipline data is to leverage existing technologies to find and report to schools any errors in discipline data quickly enough for appropriate staff to resolve the errors. Currently there are eight discipline rules being run in Certify. These rules focus mostly on completion and correctness of suspension data. Work continues between Student Services and Monitoring and Accountability to identify, define and catalog additional data rules following the Data-Risk-Rule-Report-Resolution-Monitoring (DR4M) protocol developed in the Monitoring and Accountability Office. It is anticipated that new rules and reports will be in place, tested and released before the start of the SY22 school year.

To summarize, there are two opportunities to improve the quality of data: ensuring that data are correct and complete, and ensuring that all stakeholders fully appreciate the importance of attendance data and see their role in this.

Recommendation 5 – Ensure Administrative Procedures and Subsequent Processes Are Followed

There is concern about the low quality and/or low confidence level in the accuracy of BHI data. The issue revolves around the due diligence that must be exercised for incidents of the type (event code in SchoolMAX) Bullying/Harassment. As indicated in the Bullying Data Collection Guidance Manual:

> The primary responsibility of school personnel is to address the needs of students involved in bullying, harassment or intimidation. It is also important to precisely record the required information so that accurate reports can be filed and a true picture of the problem can be discerned.

There has been a longstanding issue with the reporting, investigation and documentation of BHI incidents to provide necessary services to victims and offenders and to report accurate

information to the MSDE via the annual HB 407 Safe Schools Report and to the United States Department of Education (USDE) in the Civil Rights Data Collection.

There should be an increased focus on enforcing our process for handling BHI incidents as outlined in AP 5143. The Associate Superintendent of Student Services agrees that improved monitoring and control starting at the school level is required as well as more training to all staff who respond to BHI incidents or enter incidents in SchoolMAX and/or have the responsibility to investigate and document BHI incidents. The Office of Technology Applications developed a Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation App that officially went live on October 5, 2020. The app, which is accessible via website and mobile device, will increase students, parents and staff' ability to report BHI incidents. Consequently, each incident reported online must still be entered into SchoolMax by completing all fields with accurate information. Examples of required fields include:

- Age of victims and offenders
- Location of incident
- Description of the incident
- Alleged motives
- Days alleged student victim was absent as a result of the incident
- Days alleged student offender was absent as a result of the incident
- Investigative methods
- Corrective Actions

Each incident must be investigated and documentation of each investigation must be provided to the Office of Student Services. School Administrators receive alerts when BHI incidents are created in the Online Bullying Reporting App that have not been documented into SchoolMax. Follow through on all steps are necessary to create and report accurate information and drive program planning.

Recommendation 6 – Develop User Requirements for Monitoring System

The metrics presented in this document present opportunities to measure and gauge a school's progress toward fitting within our definition of Optimally Safe Schools. Schools and offices will be well served to have the ability to monitor their progress on these metrics. There are various options to provide this support from push-button reports to automated reports to user dashboards. User requirements should be identified and cataloged so the best mode of monitoring can be developed.

Further, processes should be established to ensure that the necessary data are captured, analyzed correctly and reported appropriately. As an example of this the annual Student Arrest Report to MSDE and the Use of Force report to the Maryland Center for School Safety – both of which come from the security office – provide data that can be summarized and published on the PGCPS website. Processes and procedures should be developed to establish the mechanism for collecting these data either from the original data system (see Recommendation
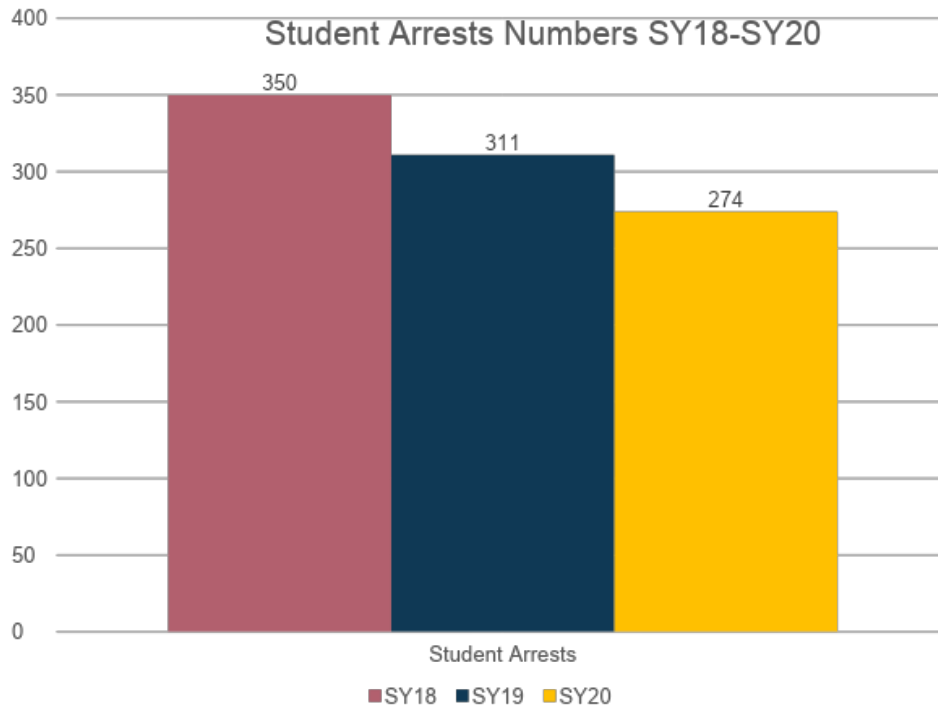
1) or from the report to MSDE, managing these data in the appropriate system (e.g., data warehouse) and reporting these results in a manner that is consistent with state and federal laws regarding student data privacy. Additionally, reporting frequency and timeliness must be determined for all published data. The reports must be designed with the input of users to ensure that they meet the needs of the system and are useful to the purposes of reporting.
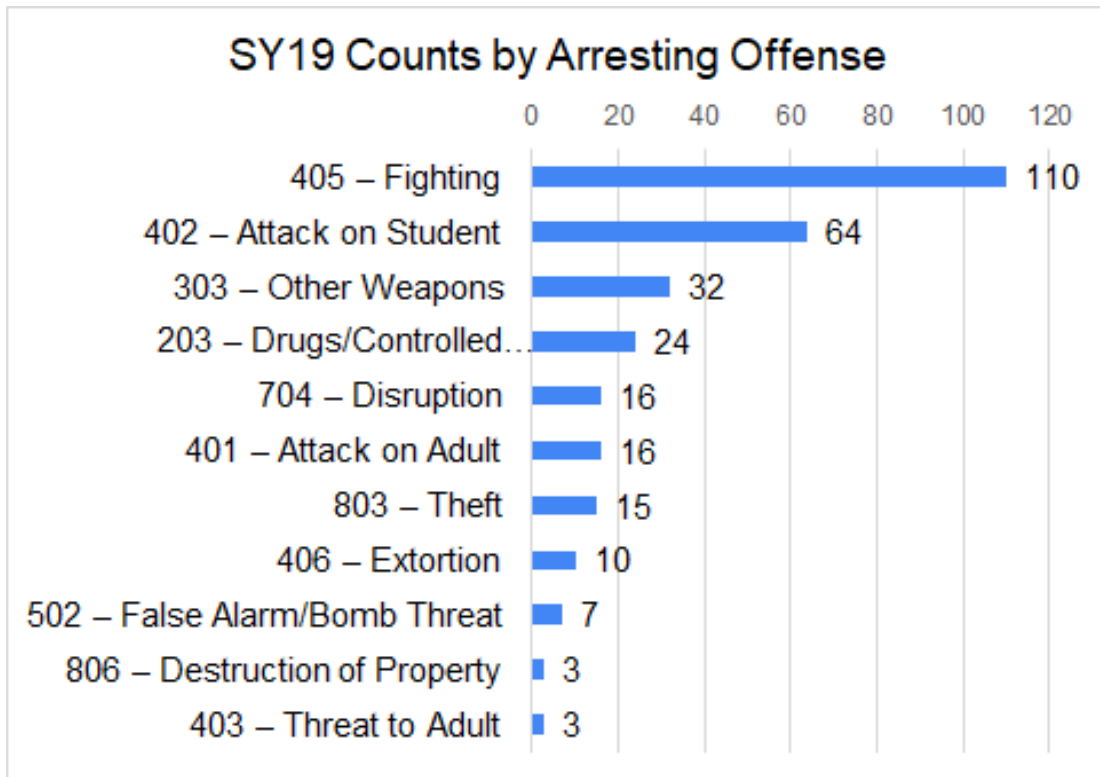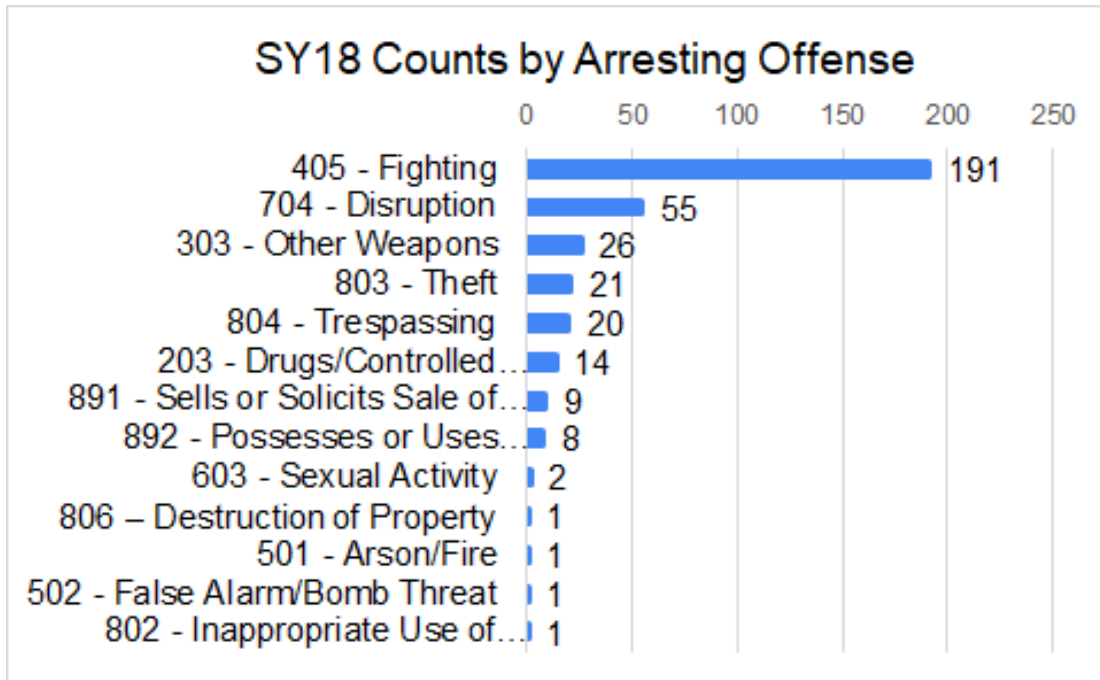
Summary

The Optimal School Safety Task Force has defined an Optimally Safe School in PGCPS. Further, the task force has completed a thorough and deep analysis of the data points that contribute to optimal school safety. The recommendations provided in this document will move the system toward every school being identified as an optimally safe school.
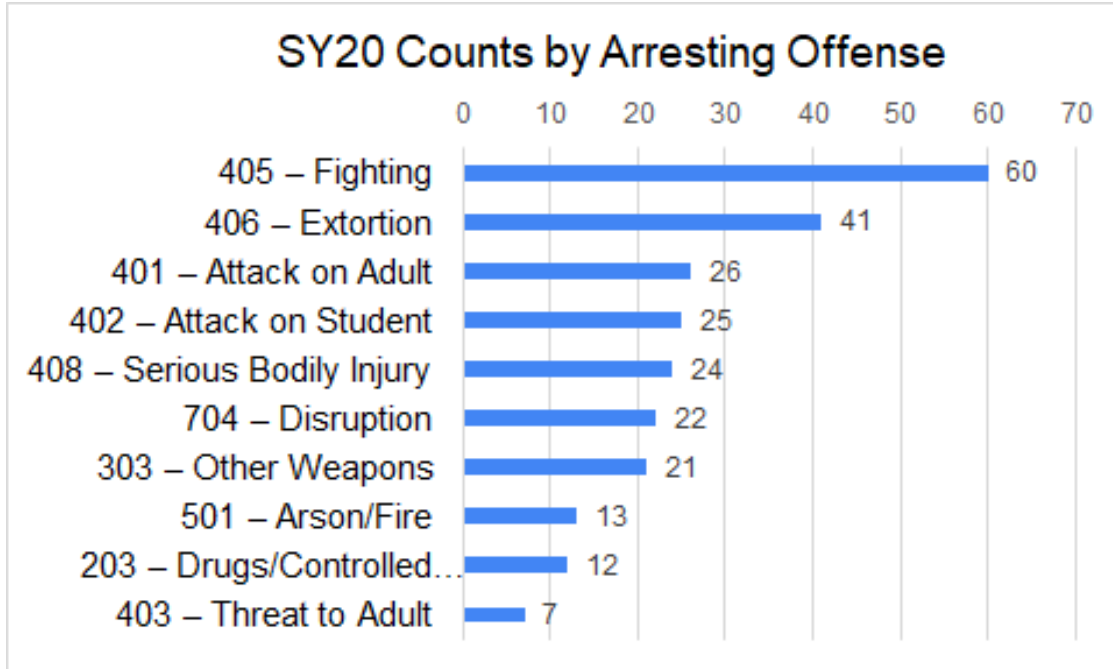
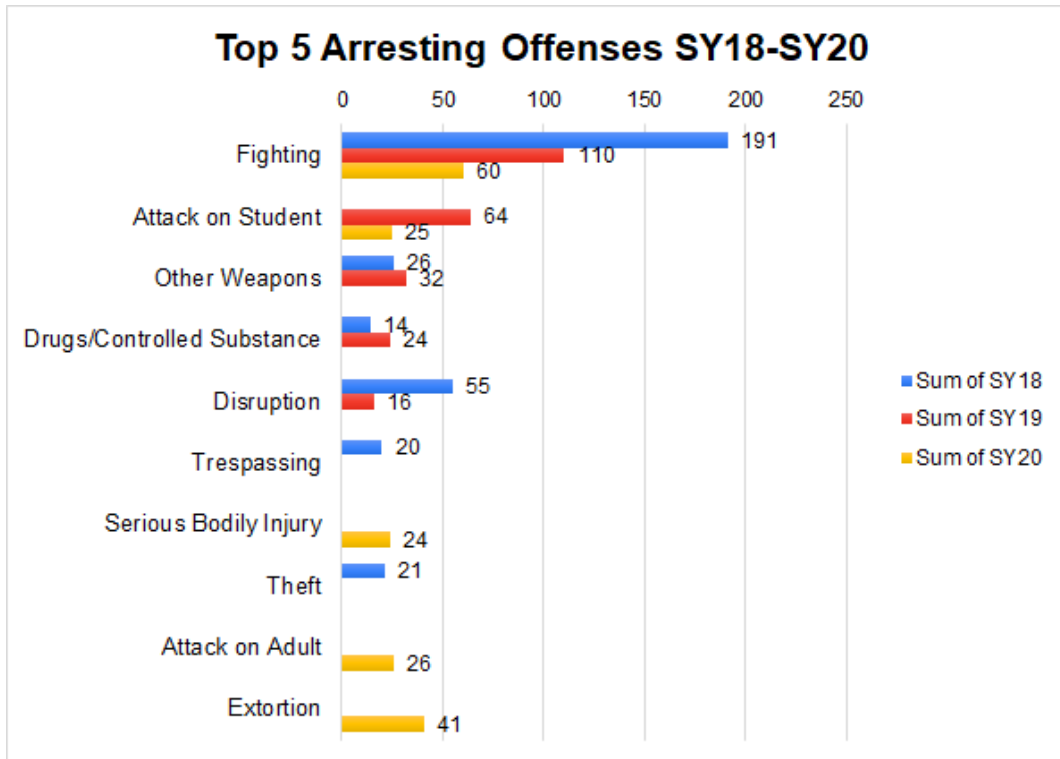# Appendix A - Data Reviewed by the Task Force

Student Arrest Data SY 18 -20

Student Arrests Numbers SY18-SY20

Top 10 Arresting Offenses SY18

SY18 Counts by Arresting Offense

Offense	Count
405 - Fighting	191
704 - Disruption	55
303 - Other Weapons	26
803 - Theft	21
804 - Trespassing	20
203 - Drugs/Controlled...	14
891 - Sells or Solicits Sale of...	9
892 - Possesses or Uses...	8
603 - Sexual Activity	2
806 – Destruction of Property	1
501 - Arson/Fire	1
502 - False Alarm/Bomb Threat	1
802 - Inappropriate Use of...	1

SY19 Counts by Arresting Offense

| Offense	Count
405 – Fighting	110
402 – Attack on Student	64
303 – Other Weapons	32
203 – Drugs/Controlled...	24
704 – Disruption	16
401 – Attack on Adult	16
803 – Theft	15
406 – Extortion	10
502 – False Alarm/Bomb Threat	7
806 – Destruction of Property	3
403 – Threat to Adult	3

Top 10 Arresting Offenses SY20

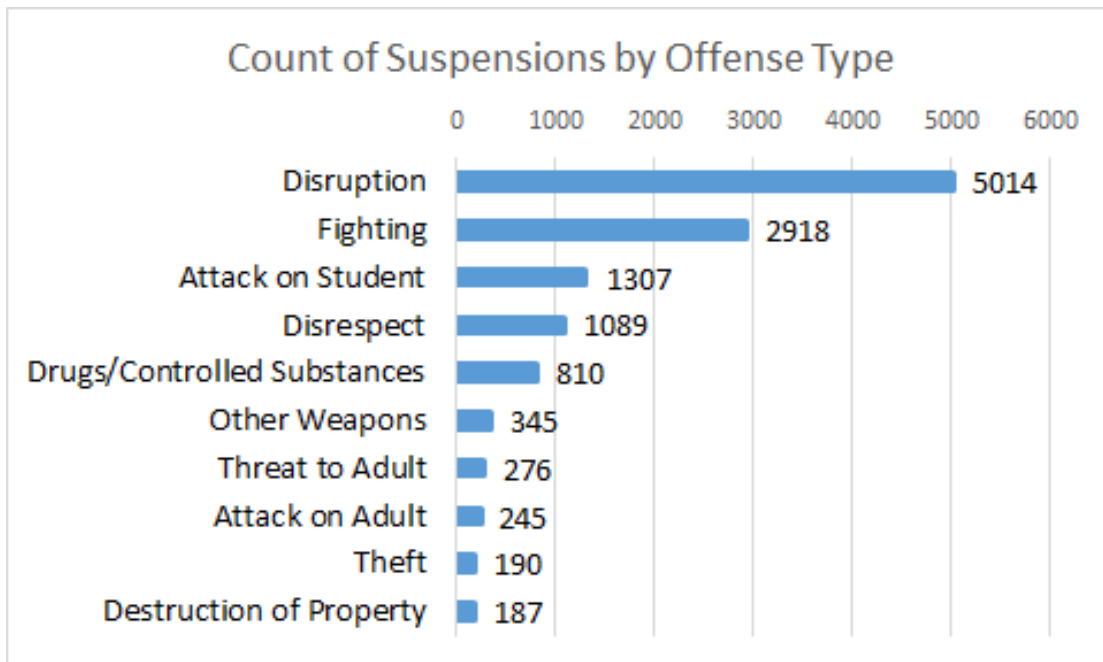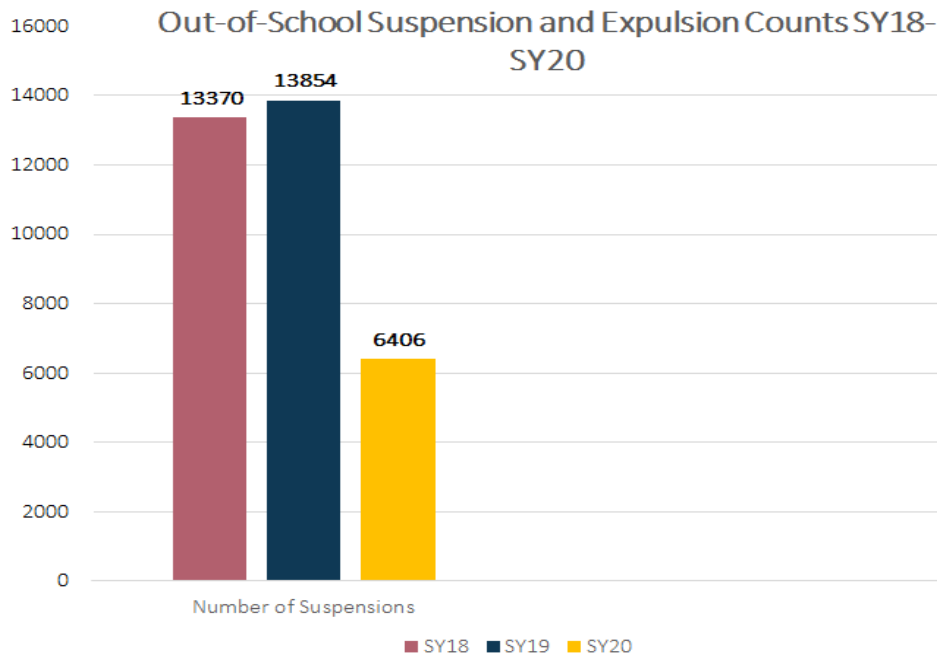## Top 5 Arresting Offenses SY18 - SY20

Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Incidents Reported SY17-20
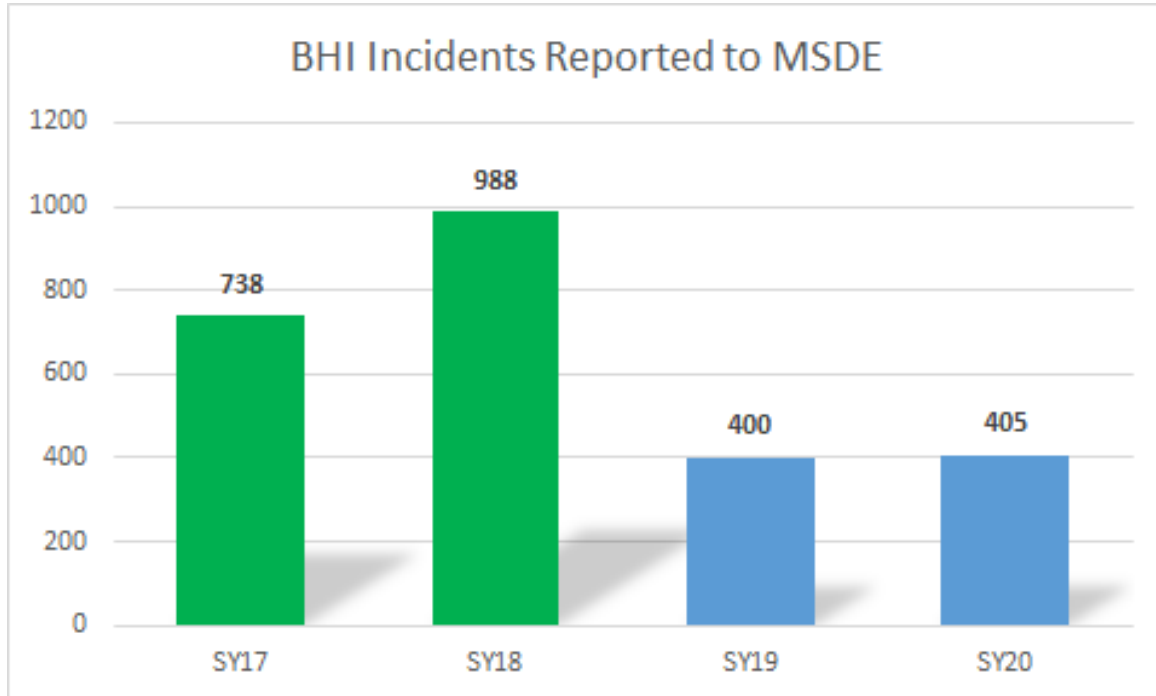
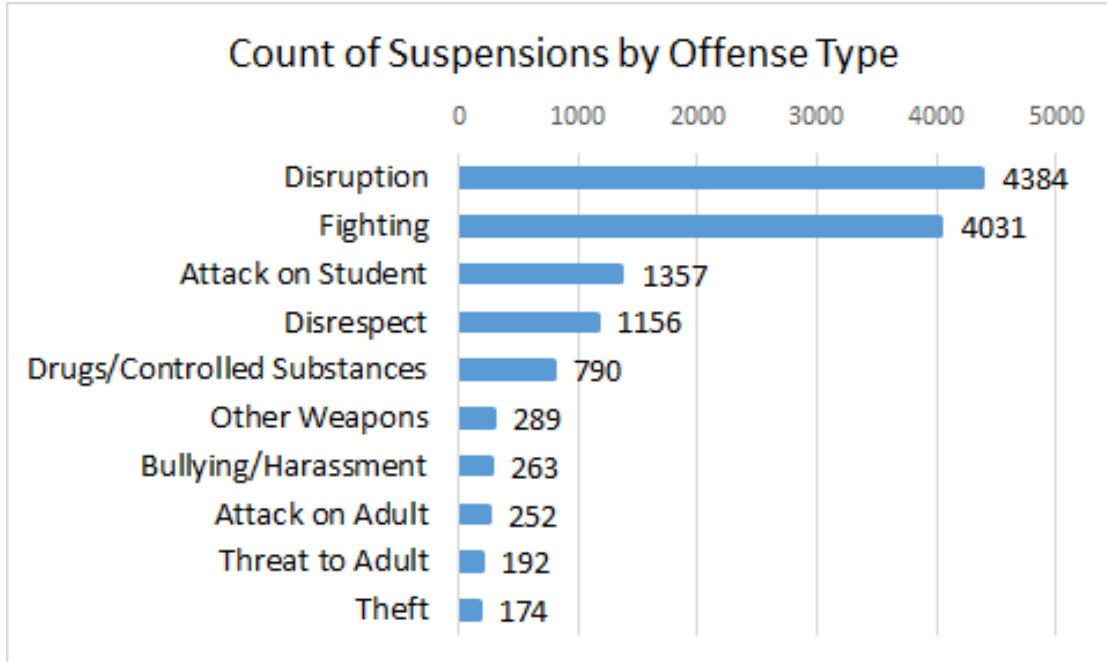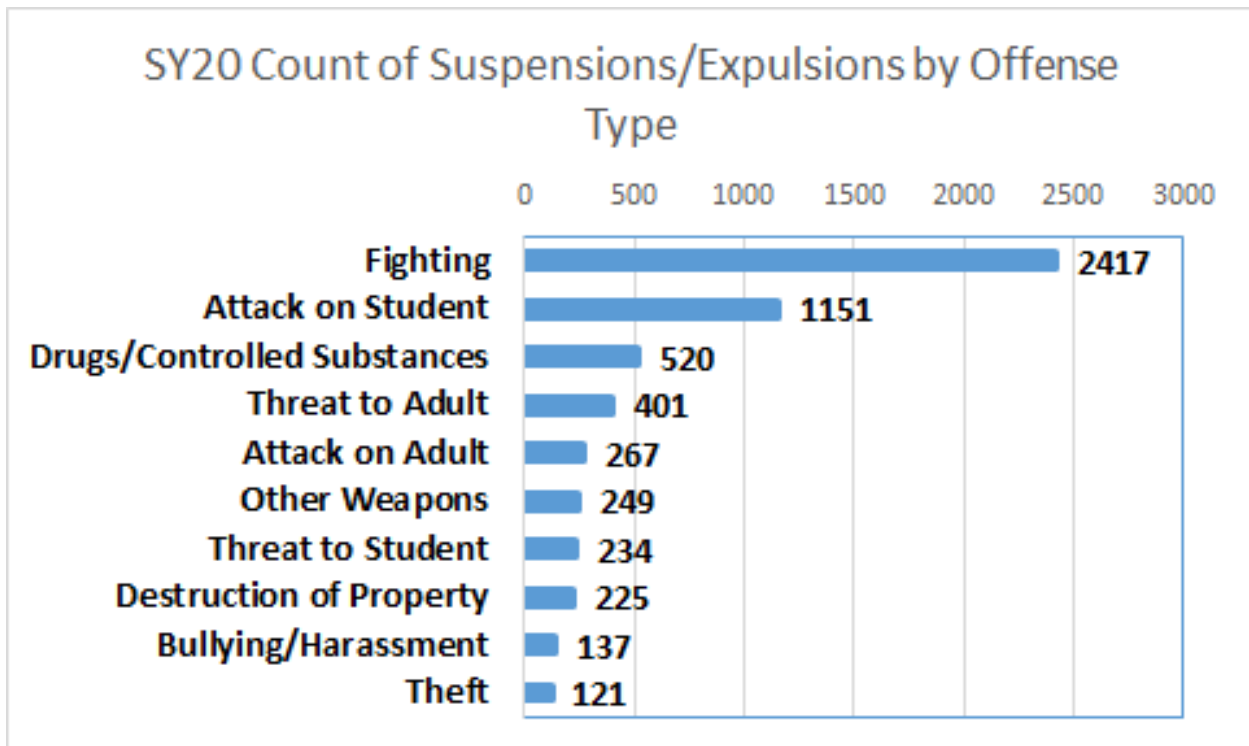From MSDE data verification email
From Incidents Reported on the LSS Form

● **Suspensions and Expulsions SY18-20**

Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion Counts SY18-SY20

13370 (SY18)	
13854 (SY19)	
6406 (SY20)	

Number of Suspensions

■ SY18 ■ SY19 ■ SY20

Count of Suspensions by Offense Type

Offense Type	Count
Disruption	5014
Fighting	2918
Attack on Student	1307
Disrespect	1089
Drugs/Controlled Substances	810
Other Weapons	345
Threat to Adult	276
Attack on Adult	245
Theft	190
Destruction of Property	187

Top 10 Suspensions by Offense Type SY19

Count of Suspensions by Offense Type

Offense Type	Count
Disruption	4384
Fighting	4031
Attack on Student	1357
Disrespect	1156
Drugs/Controlled Substances	790
Other Weapons	289
Bullying/Harassment	263
Attack on Adult	252
Threat to Adult	192
Theft	174

Top 10 Suspensions by Offense Type SY20

SY20 Count of Suspensions/Expulsions by Offense Type

Offense Type	Count
Fighting	2417
Attack on Student	1151
Drugs/Controlled Substances	520
Threat to Adult	401
Attack on Adult	267
Other Weapons	249
Threat to Student	234
Destruction of Property	225
Bullying/Harassment	137
Theft	121

Top 5 (refer to Note) Suspensions by Offense Type SY18-20

Top 5 Suspension Offenses SY18- SY20

Type of Offense	Sum of SY18	Sum of SY19	Sum of SY20
Fighting	2918	4031	2417
Attack on Student	1307	1357	1151
Drugs/Controlled Substances	810	790	520
Threat to Adult	276	192	401
Attack on Adult	245	252	267
Disrespect	1089	1156	0
Disruption	5014	4384	0

Number of Offenses
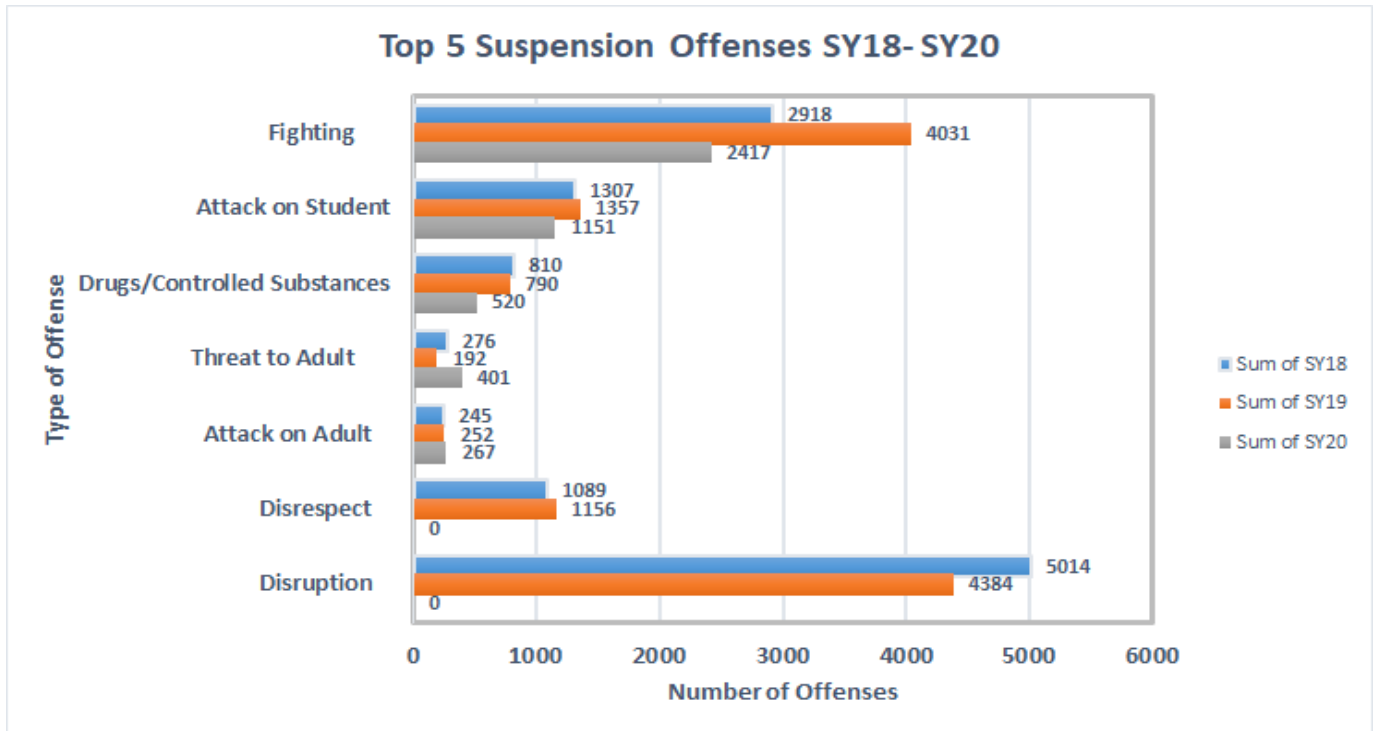
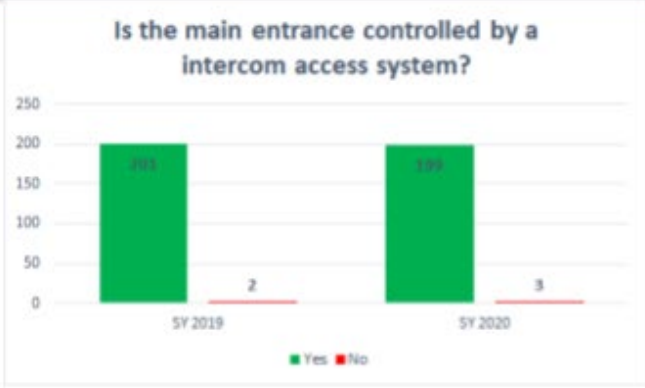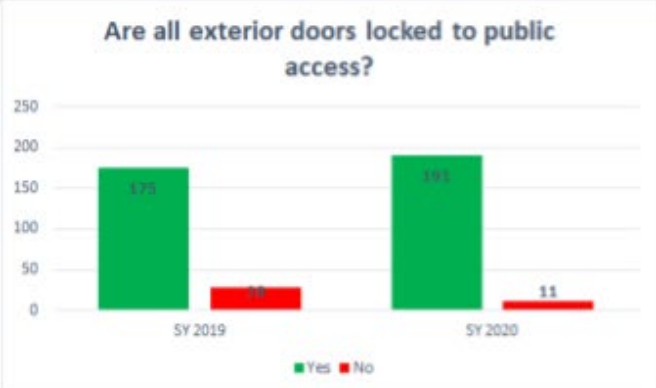## Emergency Drills Conducted SY18-20
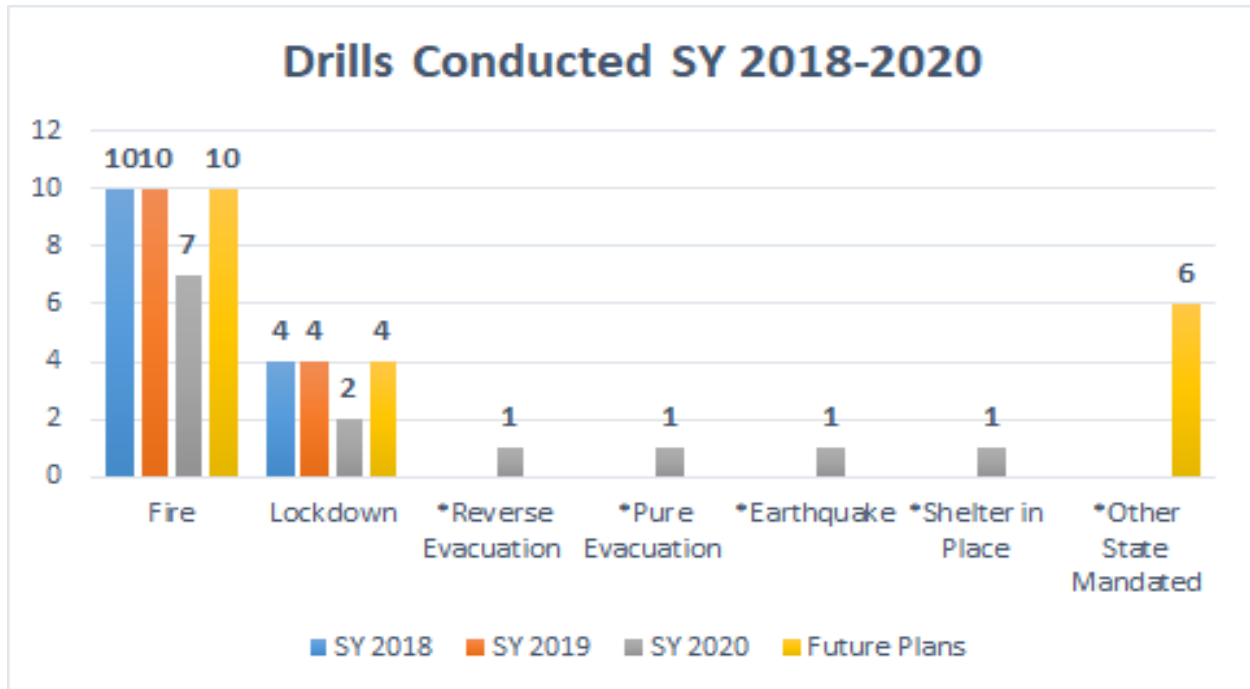
Physical Building Assessments SY19-20
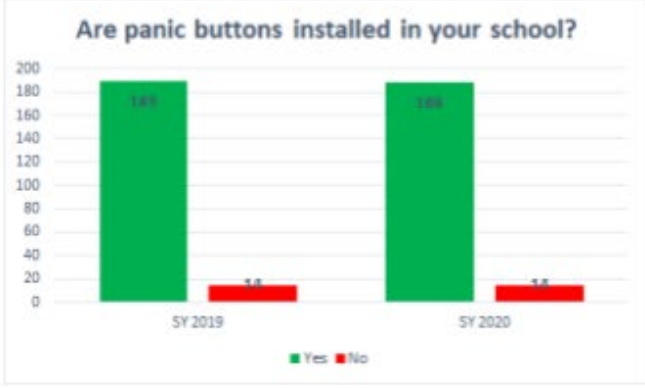
- **Data Sources (provided by Robin Welsh, Director, Office of Compliance and Ethics):** Annual Physical Assessment Survey

Safe Schools Training Completion Data

| Vector Training, K-12 Edition Training Assignment Compliance Prince George's County Public Schools			
**All Buildings	All Positions	Round 3 - Mandatory Training	All Courses**			
Course	**Assignments**	**Past Due**	**Completed**
Discrimination Awareness in the Workplace	13,484	3,028	10,456
FERPA: Confidentiality of Records	8,461	762	7,699
Sexual Harassment: Staff-to-Staff	20,930	4,858	16,072
People:	20,930		
Assignments:	42,875		
Past Due:	8,648		
Complete:	34,227		
Incomplete:	8,648		
Produced by Vector Training, K-12 Edition Training for Robin Christine Welsh, Prince George's County Public Schools			
Apr 16, 2021 4:49pm			

79.8% completion rate for this round of training

Major Crises Responded To

Crises Responded to by PGCPS Crisis Team

(SY18: 37, SY19: 36, SY20: 37)
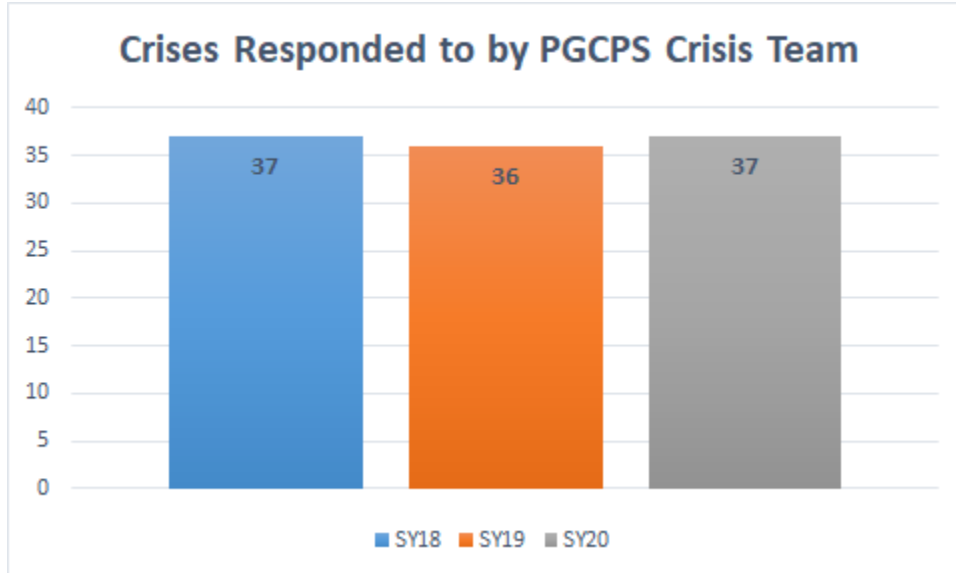
- Understanding the Impact of Trauma & Adverse Childhood Experiences (for staff & parents)
- Suicide Intervention Training (for school mental health professionals)
- Sources of Strength (for middle and high school staff and students)
- Youth Mental Health First Aid (for staff)
- Adult Mental Health First Aid (for staff)
- SafeTALK (for staff)
- Trauma Sensitive Schools Workshops (for staff)

Teacher Absences SY18-20
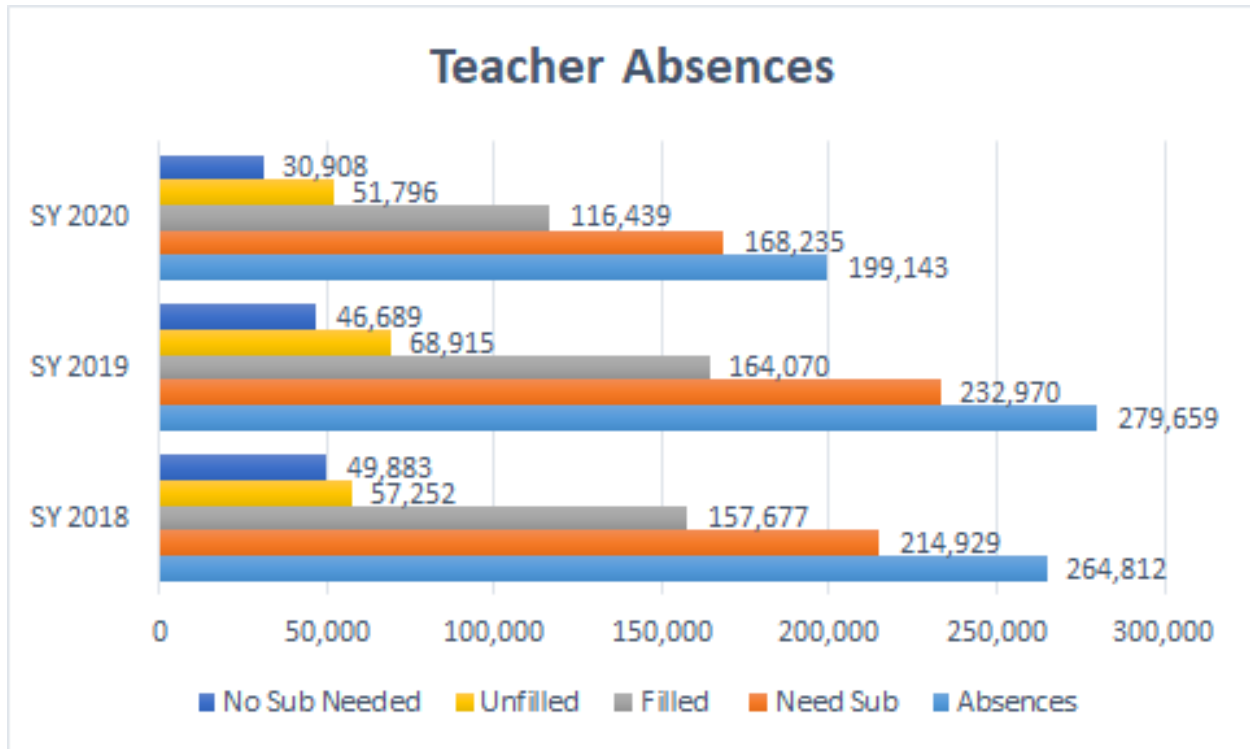
Data Source: Provided by the Substitute Teacher Office from the substitute request portal