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CRISIS PREPAREDNESS REPORT

Key Findings and Recommendations from the Analysis of Stakeholder Feedback, HCPS Threat Assessment, and Discipline Data

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared by

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JUNE 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors of this report and the chairs of the HCPS Safety and Security Workgroup would like to extend their appreciation to Dr. Sean Bulson, Superintendent of Schools, and Dr. Eric Davis, Chief of Administration, for prioritizing the work around enhancing school safety and providing the opportunity to work on this Crisis Preparedness Report. Under their leadership and guidance, HCPS staff is working tirelessly to ensure its schools and offices are safe, secure, and healthy environments for all students, teachers, staff, and visitors.

HCPS thanks everyone who contributed to this research report and provided their valuable feedback and comments on the report. A special thank you to HCPS staff, internal and external researchers (Hanover Research), and all stakeholders in the HCPS Safety and Security Work Group who provided leadership, valuable input, and feedback and helped with research, survey design, data collection, analysis, and review.

- **Yakoubou Ousmanou**¸ *Manager of Research and Program Evaluation, Lead Researcher of this report*
- **Dr. Stacey Gerringer**, *Principal, Abingdon Elementary School, Chair of Safety and Security Work Group*
- **Donoven Brooks**, *HCPS Chief, Department of Safety & Security, Chair of Safety and Security Work Group*
- **Dr. Peter Carpenter,** *Director, Department of Organizational Development, facilitated all trainings*
- **Faith Buxton,** *Teacher Specialist, worked on discipline data*
- **Matthew Payne,** *Application Development Team Leader, designed electronic critical incident report form*
- **Mary Beth Stapleton**, *Manager of Family and Community Partnerships, facilitated Parent Advisory Council*
- **Lindsay Bilodeau**, *Communications Specialist, assisted with the edits of this research report*
- **Stephanie Wall**, *Graphic Design/Technical Specialist, helped with the design/layout of this report.*
- **Melissa McKay**, *Assistant Principal Havre de Grace Middle/High, helped with revisions of Quick Guide*
- **Paul Single**, *Assistant Principal, Roye-Williams Elementary, helped with revisions of Quick Guide*
- **Daniel Hanzelik**, *Assistant Principal, Joppatowne High, helped with revisions of Quick Guide*
- **Deborah Geppi**, *Assistant Principal, Homestead-Wakefield Elementary, helped with revisions of Quick Guide*

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- **Dr. Paula Stanton**, *Supervisor of Equity and Cultural Proficiency*
- **Jeffrey Winfield**, *Supervisor of Fine Arts*

- All members of the **HCPS Safety and Security Stakeholder Groups** (List of all names are provided in Appendix C)
    - Operational Principal Advisory Group
    - Law Enforcement
    - Parent Advisory Council
    - Business Partners
    - Superintendent's Student Advisory Council
    - Teacher Leaders
    - Board of Education of Harford County
    - Safety and Security Liaisons
    - Other groups (including administrative assistants, etc.)

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) is engaging its stakeholders (students, parents, staff, and community members) in meaningful dialogue about safety and security in all schools and offices. As part of this evaluation, HCPS administered the ***HCPS Safety and Security Crisis Preparedness Survey*** and conducted a ***Threat Assessment Data Collection***. The HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation worked with the Department of Safety and Security and others to analyze the results.

As defined in the HCPS Strategic Plan, Goal 4 for the Board of Education of Harford County is to *"Provide safe, secure, and healthy learning environments conducive to effective teaching and learning, creativity, and innovation."* In February and March 2022, the co-chairs of the HCPS Safety and Security Work Group, Dr. Stacey Gerringer and Mr. Donoven Brooks, hosted a series of focus groups/stakeholder meetings with internal and external partners to gather input for updating and improving HCPS safety and security procedures after the post-pandemic school reopening. Most of the focus group meetings were recorded for review and analysis. At the end of each meeting, a short survey was administered to collect participants' perceptions of the current state of safety and crisis preparedness in the district as well as suggestions for improvement. The purpose of the survey was to help formulate answers to the research questions listed below and to help establish clear recommendations to ensure HCPS will continue to provide safe and secure environments post COVID-19 lockdown.

The HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation partnered with internal and external researchers to analyze and synthesize the results of these efforts. HCPS will use the insights to update its safety and crisis preparedness policies and practices.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Through an analysis of open-ended responses, this report addresses the following research questions:

- **How do internal and external HCPS stakeholders perceive safety, security, and crisis preparedness at the district?**
- **What recommendations do internal and external HCPS stakeholders have for improving security, and crisis preparedness at the district?**
- **What were the most common types of threat assessments conducted during the 2021-2022 school year at HCPS?**[1]
- **What were the most dangerous types of offenses and incidents (including drug-related offenses) that occurred during the past five years in HCPS schools?**[1]

METHODOLOGY

This document presents findings from an analysis of open-ended responses to HCPS' Safety and Crisis Preparedness Survey and focus groups. The survey received approximately 923 open-ended responses after data cleaning by a team of researchers. To keep the findings as salient as possible for HCPS' future decision-making about safety and crisis preparedness, researchers removed blank responses and invalid responses from each response pool. However, researchers retained and counted responses such as "unsure" and "none," as these responses may represent meaningful data about stakeholder experiences and perceptions. Themes were developed using cleaned, relevant response content only.

Researchers manually coded the open-ended responses to identify the topics most frequently discussed by respondents and analyzed the open-ended responses by first coding responses based on core themes that emerged within the data and refining those themes, or codes, as analysis progressed. Researchers also identified occasional sub-themes that emerged in the main themes and counted the number of times each theme and sub-theme is coded to a response and calculated the frequency thereof. To note, themes are not mutually exclusive, so calculated percentages may sum to over 100 percent due to survey responses that apply to more than one theme. For detailed coding information, please contact the HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation to learn more about the data supplement. Findings should be interpreted as a reflection of the sample, which may not necessarily align with the perceptions of the population as a whole.

[1] The third and fourth objectives are addressed in the appendices. Both appendices represent a separate analysis conducted by HCPS' Office of Research and Program Evaluation, which researchers later integrated into this report.

Researchers also reviewed the video recordings from the *Business Advisory Committee and Law Enforcement Partners* focus group meetings as well as the "chat" responses within the *Parent Advisory Committee* meeting notes. Researchers did not systematically code these supplemental focus group meeting materials. Instead, the materials were used to glean greater context and additional qualitative insights that are woven into the narrative of the open-ended coding analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETINGS

1. **Increase the frequency of safety training and critical incident drills at HCPS schools.** Respondents highlight the lapse in physical drills and training since the COVID-19 pandemic; subsequently, stakeholders in all groups feel under-prepared to respond to a critical incident, particularly active assailants and non-weather-related incidents. HCPS could establish annual training and refresher courses specifically designed for staff and/or students to better prepare each group for critical incidents.

2. **Work with law enforcement partners to establish a unified command structure.** Respondents generally agree HCPS should streamline its critical incident response protocols to quickly inform and involve necessary agencies and stakeholders.

3. **Establish prevention training for parents, students, and staff.** Threatening or aggressive student behavior, social media misuse, and bullying are all cited issues and contribute to perceptions of unsafety among stakeholders. Respondents express a desire to be better prepared to de-escalate aggressive behavior (online and in person) and help improve the safety of HCPS schools.

THREAT ASSESSMENT DATA ANALYSIS

A. **Create an electronic reporting tool for all stakeholders (students, staff, parents, community, etc.) to anonymously report, at any time of day, any potential threat or suspicious activity that may impact daily school operation.** This reporting system should be modeled after the Department of Homeland Security's "if you see something, say something" campaign.

B. **Conduct threat assessments regularly and keep a log to ensure that schools and offices are prepared to deal with actual threats.** The logs should be available for review by appropriate offices (Safety and Security, Student Services, Executives, etc.) to deploy the support and resources needed.

DISCIPLINE DATA ANALYSIS

C. **Administrators should receive annual/periodic refresher training on COMAR offense code definition and severity.** This training should help facilitate a common understanding of behavior cases and the appropriate code to be used. One of goals of this refresher training is to ensure **offense codes are being recorded with fidelity**.

D. **Ensure that school administrators (principals, assistant principals, etc.) are accurately reflecting referable actions in disciplinary codes.** (Ex. smacking a staff member is an attack on staff and not a disruption). Administrators need to accurately reflect reporting to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to make changes (if patterns are occurring).

E. **Consistent review of discipline data by school level team** to help identify and address any behavioral patterns will allow schools to plan and inform decision making to provide safe, secure, and healthy learning environments.

KEY FINDINGS: STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETINGS

While nearly one-third of respondents generally feel safe at HCPS schools, the majority of stakeholders highlight concerns with safety procedures and behavior. Sixty-two percent of respondents identify various issues with safety procedures. The range of topics stakeholders identify include a *lack of policy enforcement* (28%), *unsafe physical environment* (23%), *threats of critical incidents* (16%), and an overall *lack of school preparedness* for critical incidents (14%). **Thirty-seven percent of respondents also identify concerning behavior that makes them feel unsafe.** Respondents discuss both aggressive *parent* (8%) and *teacher* (6%) *behaviors*, but they overwhelmingly identify *student behavior* (30%) as the most concerning, such as the prevalence of student bullying and physical fighting, cyberbullying and social media usage/misuse, violent and threatening language, and disregard for teacher authority.

Almost two thirds of all respondents (63%) believe HCPS is prepared to respond to a critical incident; however, nearly all respondents also identify various areas of improvement for HCPS's current crisis preparedness. Respondents tend to indicate approval of HCPS's safety plans and crisis protocols currently in place. In order for these plans to be implemented effectively, however, **respondents highlight a need for increased training and drills** to improve school stakeholders' overall awareness of the current protocols. Following disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic and a lapse in physical training and drills, stakeholders from all groups tend to share feelings of being under-prepared for a critical incident. Additionally, stakeholders believe more proactive, easy-to-understand communication from HCPS about safety plans will assist both parents and staff in supporting the district in their crisis preparedness.

Similarly, respondents highlight the need for frequent training that helps stakeholders both prepare for and prevent critical incidents. More than half of respondents (56%) consider preparation training to be most important currently. Many advocate for annual training and frequent refreshers of content for students and staff, particularly around Active Assailant Critical Response Training (ACRT) and non-weather-related incidents. Additionally, 24 percent of respondents give prevention training suggestions. Training topics include de-escalation and bullying prevention as well as mental health and trauma-informed practices to support staff and students stop or prevent physical fights, bullying, and workplace violence.

- Additionally, while respondents understand the privacy restrictions of certain safety protocols to avoid vulnerabilities, many instead advocate for clear communication about most safety procedures *and* the proper stakeholder response to a critical incident. Parents especially require clear communication about critical incident procedures so they do not endanger their student further (e.g., trying to pick up student during a lockdown). Therefore, many respondents also advocate for parents and community members to participate in both preparation and prevention training.

Respondents list various preferences for communication methods during a critical incident. Email and text messages are among the most preferred modes of communication during a critical incident; however, other methods respondents mention include a mass messaging system (e.g., Blackboard Connect), radio and walkie-talkie messages, social media posts, and website updates. Notably, several school-based stakeholders (e.g., students, staff) mention issues with relying on loudspeaker announcements for emergency communications because classroom or hallway noise often overpowers the loudspeaker. Some stakeholders also do not recommend using social media to share emergency notifications, as the prevalence of misinformation online can further aggravate a situation.

Respondents suggest HCPS create cohesive systems that encompass both the communication and collaboration required to respond to critical incidents. Fifty-eight percent of respondents highlight a need to create a comprehensive *communication system*, which must include both the mode and content of communications. Suggestions include establishing a mass notification system

as well as ensuring consistent messaging from all involved agencies so that communication comes from one "common voice." Additionally, 37 percent of respondents suggest HCPS organize *personnel systems*, or organizational structures, that establish roles and responsibilities for individuals coordinating responses to critical incidents. These systems must incorporate a clear roadmap for whom to call as well as the roles and responsibilities of each team member once the call is received. Many respondents call for HCPS to establish a designated office to manage critical incident coordination with involved agencies, either formally or informally as part of the Incident Command Structure (ICS).

When asked for suggestions for how HCPS should approach the reunification process, respondents nearly equally value the *preparation* and *response* stages of the process. Respondents explain that clear communication of the reunification process (including designated pickup sites) should be given *before* a critical incident occurs to reduce confusion. At the same time, respondents highlight the importance for clear, effective communication *during* the reunification process to keep all stakeholders informed and to enforce an overall accountability to the process. Finally, respondents also emphasize the importance of having proper resources (e.g., food, water) and supports (e.g., mental health counselors) during and following the reunification process.

OPEN-ENDED SAFETY AND SECURITY SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS

This section of the report provides the analysis of open-ended responses from the survey. All responses are quoted verbatim with minor modifications for clarity if needed. Researchers only reported themes with over 10% response frequency rates.

QUESTION 1

Please describe what (if anything) makes you feel unsafe in our schools.

Respondents most frequently have concerns with safety measures and various stakeholders' behavior. Sixty-two percent of respondents identify various issues with safety procedures. The range of topics stakeholders identify include a *lack of policy enforcement* (28%), *unsafe physical environment* (23%), *threats of critical incidents* (16%), and an overall *lack of school preparedness* (14%). **Law Enforcement Members** and some **School-Based Staff Members** especially highlight issues with inconsistent policy enforcement across schools, such as allowing visitors entry without requiring them to follow the safety check-in procedures. Many respondents also seek improved physical security measures and better preparedness, particularly camera coverage and knowledge of lockdown procedures. Finally, **HCPS Students** and **Parents/Guardians** tend to be the most fearful of the threat of an active assailant or critical incident.

Thirty-seven percent of respondents also identify concerning behavior that makes them feel unsafe. Respondents discuss both aggressive *parent* (8%) and *teacher* (6%) *behaviors*, but they overwhelmingly *identify student behavior* (30%) as the most concerning. **HCPS Students, Parents/Guardians** (including the **HCPS Parent Advisory Council (PAC)),** and **School-Based Staff Members** are the stakeholder groups most concerned with student behavior, including the prevalence of student bullying and physical fighting, cyberbullying and social media usage, violent and threatening language, and disregard for teacher authority.

SPOTLIGHT: INSIGHTS FROM MARCH STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETINGS

Many participants in the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) express concerns over student behavior, as well. Participants appear to maintain similar concerns about student bullying and school violence. Additionally, many individuals highlight the negative—and often dangerous—effects that social media can have on student and school safety. These concerns have seemingly remained consistent before and after COVID-19 disruptions.

> *"My concerns are similar pre- and post-COVID: bullying and physical fights." – PAC Member*

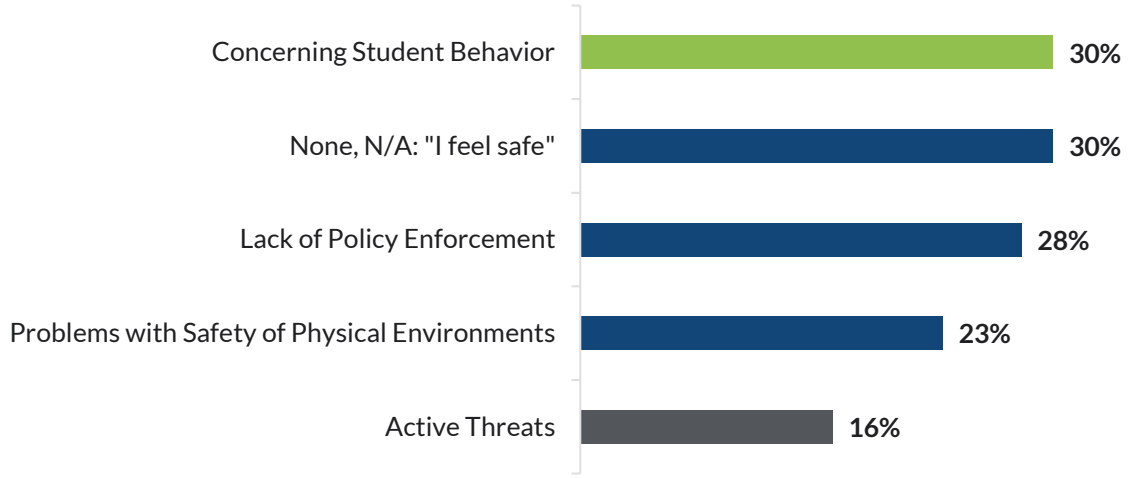
> *"Physical safety is one thing…but cell phones are directly linked to bullying and the subsequent negative impact on mental safety." – PAC Member*

> *"I call it the "mean girl syndrome." Which has really, in my opinion, been exacerbated through these last two years. The viciousness with which these young girls attack verbally other girls with regard to their physical appearance, to what they might be wearing, name-calling. And these particular situations were not on social media, these were on the school bus or in the classroom." – BAC Member*

Notably, 30 percent (28 responses) of the survey respondents do not elaborate on anything that makes them feel unsafe. Some respondents write simple "N/A" or "none" responses, but others specifically mention they feel safe at HCPS schools.

The chart below highlights the top five, most frequently discussed themes and sub-themes for stakeholder survey responses to this question. Researchers excluded miscellaneous responses to highlight the most salient concerns, but researchers did include responses that report no concerns.

Theme Frequency: Top 5 Themes Regarding Perceptions of Safety



Note: This figure indicates the five most frequently mentioned themes of the 93 coded responses. Percentages sum to greater than 100%, because some coded responses reference more than one theme.

Theme Frequency: Top 5 Themes Regarding Perceptions of Safety

Please describe what (if anything) makes you feel unsafe in our schools?

Theme/Sub-Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Concerning Student Behavior	*"In all honesty I cannot say that I feel safe at school. Majority of the students are incredibly violent and have proven that it doesn't take much to push them over the edge."* – *HCPS Student*	*"The kids indicate there are fights between students multiple times per week and sometimes the adults have trouble breaking them up. Most of these fights end up recorded and on tik tok or passed between students."* – *Parent Advisory Committee Member*
None, N/A, "I feel safe"	*"I don't feel unsafe, however I'd like to see more cameras throughout the building in order to eliminate 'blind spots'"* – *School-Based Staff Member*	*"I have a general feeling of safety in our school. If we have anything to work on, I believe we should reiterate to all staff that they need to be aware of who is in the building and that they should not be afraid to ask if they have stopped at the office to sign in."* – *Clerical*
Lack of Policy Enforcement	*"Consistent enforcement of security-related policies throughout the entire system regardless of what school you are in is a must. Unfortunately, based on appearance it appears that this is not a uniform practice throughout the county."* – *Law Enforcement Member*	*"Behavior of students being left undiscussed as well as consequences/discipline of said actions being left undiscussed."* – *HCPS Student* *"When students take it upon themselves to open exterior doors for the school."* – *Assistant Principal*
Problems with Safety of Physical Environments	*"Windows in and at the door that have no coverings. Having no real place to "hide" in my room that isn't seen from the door. It is stressful thinking about what I would do if something happened in the building."* – *HCPS Teacher*	*"It is difficult for us to hear and see visitors with our current camera system. The camera is behind them so we are unable to see their face or hear unless they are close to the box"* – *School-Based Staff Member*

Theme/Sub-Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Active Threats	*"It is not unusual for kids to threat to bring in weapons. My kids were begging for the school to conduct the active shooter training because they felt like they didn't know what to do if something happened."* – *PAC Member*	*"Social media postings that are difficult to identify origin, mention specific or vague details about potential incidents at schools. Students reporting to adults ideation related to self harm or suicide. These plans can include being carried out in school buildings. The physical layout of the building is something more students are looking at as ways to carry out self harm."* – *HCPS Principal*

QUESTION 2

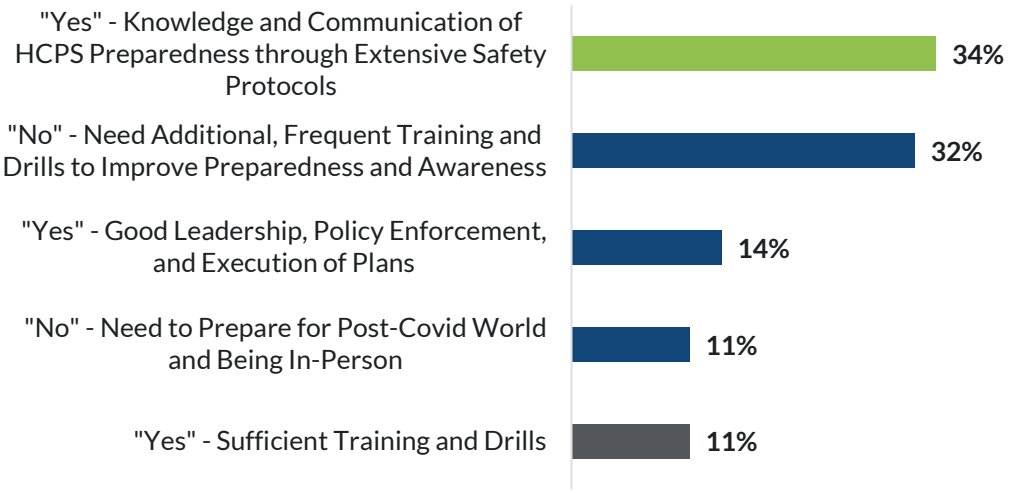
Do you believe HCPS is prepared to respond to a critical incident? [Yes/No]
Please explain your thinking for this question.

Nearly two-thirds of all respondents (63%) indicate they believe HCPS is prepared to respond to a critical incident. Among respondents who answer "yes" to this survey question, 34 percent of respondents agree that HCPS has communicated its safety plans and crisis preparedness protocols with them. Many indicate that they approve of the protocols and find the plans to be comprehensive. Additionally, 15 percent of respondents find the HCPS leadership and partners to be successful in executing the plans. Finally, several respondents highlight the *sufficient training and drills* (11%) and *resources in schools* (9%), such as School Resource Officers (SROs). *Prior experience of threats* (5%) can indicate both experiences with positive protocol implementation and areas of improvement.

Thirty-seven percent of respondents, on the other hand, believe HCPS could improve their crisis preparedness. Respondents suggest a range of improvements, including more frequent training and drills, increased protocol awareness among school stakeholders, better communication with parents, and evaluated individual school plans. Nearly one-third of all respondents (30%) call for increased training and drills with all necessary stakeholders. Notably, members from nearly all stakeholder groups cite this as a priority for HCPS to improve its preparedness to respond to a critical incident. For example, many respondents indicate that they or their co-workers or classmates have not undergone recent Active Assailant Critical Response Training (ACRT). Eight percent of respondents—including **HCPS Parents, Students,** and **Teachers**—specifically call attention to the student body's lack of preparedness for critical incidents, either due to minimal training or student misconduct. Some respondents (11%) attribute the decline in frequent critical incident training to school interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many desire the return to critical incident training beyond weather related drills or fire drills.

In the graph below, researchers excluded respondents who reported no concerns and miscellaneous responses to highlight the most salient concerns.

Theme Frequency: Top 5 Themes Regarding Perceptions of HCPS's Preparedness for Critical Incidents



Note: This figure indicates the top five percentages of the 93 coded responses that mention a particular topic. Percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top 5 Themes Regarding Perceptions of HCPS's Preparedness for Critical Incidents

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Knowledge and Communication of HCPS Preparedness through Extensive Safety Protocols and Plans	*"I feel the administers and teachers had a clear plan that they could explain to me and that they genuinely cared about the students. It made me feel like my kids were in good hands. Also they were very good about updating us right away."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian*	*"I'm more confident in answering "yes" after viewing Dr. Gerringer's presentation. I think parents across the board would have more confidence in the system if they knew just how much planning went into it (e.g., the tabletop exercises and whatnot). I believe the meeting revealed that parents are less concerned with active shooters and fire drills and more concerned with incidents like bullying, cyber-bullying, fights, and exposure to things on the internet."* – *PAC Member*
Need Additional, Frequent Training and Drills to Improve Preparedness and Awareness	*"Expectations about staff roles and protocols are not clear-the recent trainings were not helpful and, if anything left more questions. No time to share these expectations and to run both staff and students through scenarios. Students and staff are ok with weather and evacuation drills but are not prepared for a major incident."* – *School-Based Staff Member*	*"The last training we had for a critical incident was four years ago. The amount of staff turnover in that time has been significant."* – *School-Based Staff Member*
Good Leadership, Policy Enforcement, and Execution of Plans	*"I have been lucky to be in school environments where incidents were handled swiftly and adequately."* – *Clerical Staff*	*"We work hand and hand with information and video footage and communication with students who let us know if something negative is going to happen."* – *HCPS Safety and Security Staff*
Need to Prepare for Post-Covid World and Being In-Person	*"Relying on past/pre-covid planning makes HCPS ready for most critical incidents, but due to lack of updates on training for new staff or staff now at new buildings, there could be some gaps in understanding of plans."* – *HCPS Principal*	*"Due to covid we haven't had a single drill all quarter, my younger sister started 6th grade in 2020 meaning in the event of a critical incident my sister would have no idea what to do along with all the other 6th and 7th graders. This also applies to freshmen, children who recently moved to Harford County. This is bound to cause chaos in the event of a critical incident which is extremely dangerous especially when it comes to children."* – *HCPS Student*

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Sufficient Training and Drills	*"We've been trained and have drills. That's the best we can do until something happens."* – *Clerical Staff*	*"I believe the ACERT training was great at giving faculty/staff an inside perspective of what a potential school shooting could look like and what're some good process and procedures to follow."* – *School-Based Staff Member*

QUESTION 3

What will make HCPS better prepared to respond to a critical incident?

Fifty-six percent of respondents—from all stakeholder groups—explain that increased, regularly-scheduled preparedness training would improve HCPS's preparedness. Many advocate for annual training and refreshers of content, particularly around ACRT and non-weather-related incidents. Relatedly, 18 percent of these same respondents specifically cite the need to better prepare students for critical incidents. Understanding that active threat drills can be distressing to students, respondents nonetheless believe in the importance of preparing students for these threats and ensuring students take training seriously.

Thirty-one percent of respondents also call for HCPS to enhance communication around crisis preparedness. **Assistant Principals** and **School-Based Staff Members** ask for proactive communication around safety plans; moreover, several respondents request HCPS to create easy-to-understand guidelines or "cheat-sheets" for staff to follow in an emergency. **HCPS Parents/Guardians** similarly believe that HCPS should inform parents of crisis preparedness plans through simple terminology and proactive dissemination of the protocols.

Seventeen percent of respondents advocate for more frequent evaluation or reviews of protocols. Respondents suggest HCPS review things such as clearly identifying roles and responsibilities, establishing individual school-based plans, and incorporating feedback into plan updates. Other themes identified include *fostering better partnerships with law enforcement* (8%), *addressing post-COVID-19 consequences* (6%), *increasing mental health supports* (5%), and *increasing staff coverage* (3%).

SPOTLIGHT: MARCH STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETINGS

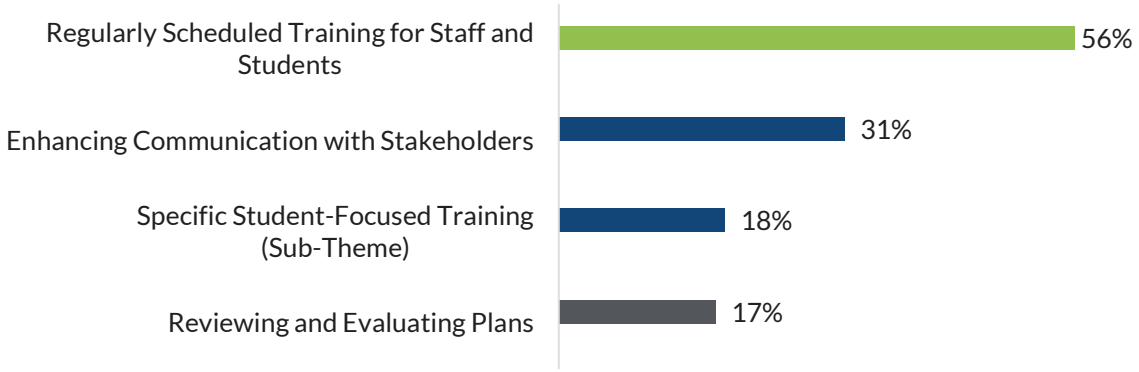
During their stakeholder group meeting, Law Enforcement Members stress the importance of working together with the district and school administration to handle critical incidents. Law Enforcement Members encourage HCPS to establish stakeholder meetings with School Resource Officers (SROs), particularly to ensure that school personnel understand when to report incidents to the SROs. Most important, the Law Enforcement Members identify a lack of consistency in policy enforcement across various schools, which can have a dramatic impact on their ability to properly address concerning incidents. By advocating for joint meetings with school and district personnel, Law Enforcement Members seek to improve their own and HCPS' overall preparedness for responding to critical incidents.

> *"**Unfortunately, each school runs independently of the others in the school system**; every principal has their kingdom and they run it how they want, there's no standardization. **I think if you standardize practices and procedures across the board, it would go a long way in preparedness for critical incidents.** Then there'll be that known factor that if this happens, the school should react this way. So responding law enforcement, EMS, fire, they all know what that response of the school system is going to be."*

> ***I think what we're looking for is something just like a town hall meeting, preferably in the near future, just to give us the opportunity to explain our position to the administrators of the schools**. And then to field any questions they would have regarding timely notification of incidents. **We're just afraid that one of these times, one of these incidents, especially the ORE we're encountering, they're going to grow legs, and it's going to blow up in our faces**….We're just looking for a meeting to make them aware of the SRO in their buildings, and [the situations] where law enforcement needs to step in—problem solved."*

> *"**I want to give kudos to some schools, because some schools do a phenomenal job with this**. I think what we're really seeing is the inconsistency, there's not any sort of standardized process across the entire school system on **when to report, how to report, what to report."***

Theme Frequency: Top 4 Themes Regarding Improvements to HCPS's Preparation for Critical Incidents



Note: This figure indicates the top three percentages of the 93 coded responses that mention a particular topic. Total percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top 4 Themes Regarding Improvements to HCPS's Preparation for Critical Incidents

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Regularly Scheduled Training for Staff and Students	*"We need to have a course for any new staff member to learn all of HCPS incident plans. The refresher that schools do at the beginning of the year is not enough."* – *School-Based Staff Member*	*"Regularly scheduled training should be considered on an annual basis."* – *Law Enforcement Member*

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
	"Some realistic training with various scenarios." *– HCPS Business Advisory Committee Member*	*"Staff Professional Development that is building specific."* *– Assistant Principal*
Enhancing Communication with Stakeholders	*"Enhanced communication with stakeholders and fostering an environment for open dialogue on issues in common will lead to better decision making for everyone involved: administrators, law enforcement, parents, teachers, students, and community."* *– Law Enforcement Member*	*"I don't know about preparedness, but I do believe HCPS can improve communications with the parents. I would like to know when a drill is conducted in the school. While I understand that you may not always be able to notify parents in advance, we can be notified as it is happening (via an alert system). I do not like that my 1st notice of a drill is when my elementary student comes home from school to tell me that he was hiding under a desk."* *– HCPS Parent/Guardian*
Specific Student-Focused Training	*"Teach the students too!"* *– HCPS Student*	*"Better information for the students in addition to drills. Better communication with parents via a mass text and email to keep us informed."* *– HCPS Parent/Guardian*
Reviewing and Evaluating Plans	*"The plan itself is fairly intimidating for anyone who has not prepared it. If there could be some sort of 1-page outline or brochure for classroom-based staff to reference I believe it may ease some anxiety around the idea of a critical incident."* *– Assistant Principal*	*"I feel school-based plans can be more intentional and specific to each building."* *– Assistant Principal* *"More regular review of plans with staff."* *– School-Based Staff Member*

QUESTION 4

What training do you think HCPS needs to ensure you feel safe?

Respondents highlight two main approaches to critical incident training: *preparation* and *prevention*. More than half of respondents (56%) consider preparation training to be most important currently. Of all the reported training topics, 30 percent of respondents—particularly **HCPS Students, Law Enforcement Members,** and **Assistant Principals**—highlight the need to focus on emergency situation and active assailant training. Sixteen percent of respondents also indicate that the frequency of training is as important as the training content itself. **Law Enforcement Members, Assistant Principals,** and **HCPS Teachers** in particular note that annual training and frequent reinforcement is crucial for better protocol implementation. Additional training topics include school building-specific training (6%) and scenario-based training (2%).

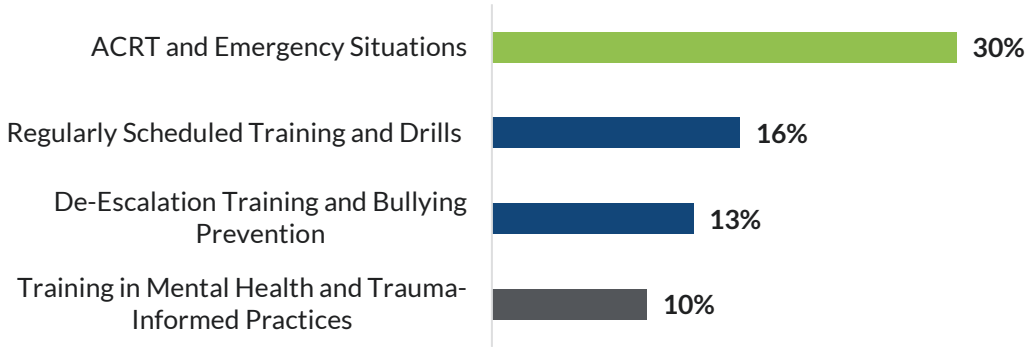
Twenty-four percent of respondents give prevention training suggestions. Training topics include de-escalation and bullying prevention (13%) and mental health and trauma-informed practices (10%). Of all stakeholder groups, **HCPS Parents/Guardians** most often mention the need for these two types of trainings. Parents/guardians hope that de-escalation training (e.g., bystander intervention) and mental health training would support staff and students stop or prevent physical fights, bullying, and workplace violence. Additionally, 9 percent of respondents suggest holding joint meetings between law enforcement and school stakeholders to increase understanding between the parties.

SPOTLIGHT: March Stakeholder Group Meetings

Some participants in the PAC meeting express similar concerns about the lack of training and drills around critical incidents. These parents/guardians particularly request active shooter drills to prepare their students as well as de-escalation trainings to encourage staff and students to stop bullying and fighting.

> *"Neither my middle or high schooler has had any sort of active shooter drill or talks this school year. Especially concerning for my 6th grader who is in a new school.*
>
> *"I wonder if there could be a training for teachers on how to intervene with these situations. I'm sure many feel helpless when they want to step in but aren't sure how to do so."*
>
> *"Children need social media training and what to do about situations like this if their families are not monitoring or teaching them."*

Theme Frequency: Top 4 Themes Regarding Types of Critical Incident Training



Note: This figure indicates the top four percentages of the 93 coded responses that mention a particular sub-topic. Total percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top 4 Sub-Themes Regarding Types of Critical Incident Training

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
ACRT and Emergency Situation Training	*"More in-depth fire, shooter, and full evacuation drills.."* – *HCPS Student*	*"I would like HCPS to give additional training in HOW to practice/teach our youngest learners (Pre-K-5) in the area of Run Hide Fight"* – *Assistant Principal*
Regularly Scheduled Training and Drills	*"Drills, after reviewing procedures, need to be scheduled during times when it is not "perfect" with all kids in the classroom."* – *HCPS Teacher*	*"Continued training regarding in all types of incident responses because there is a huge turn over in building staff county wide."* – *Clerical Staff*
De-Escalation Training and Bullying Prevention	*"HCPS could use a training for what to do in the case of a fight and how to make sure that the students are all safe and to train the staff to know what to do in the case of a student being hurt."* – *HCPS Student*	*"De-escalation strategies to use with angry adults for administrators."* – *Assistant Principal* *"How to handle technology use and social media incidents. Showing students how to respond to different situations."* – *HCPS Business Advisory Committee Member*
Training in Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Practices	*"Training for guidance counselors on how to deal with students after/during a critical incident."* – *HCPS Student*	*"Work with law enforcement and mental health professionals to develop effective methods for dealing with critical incidents, but also how to deescalate and prevent behavior-based incidents through mental health intervention. This should be for EVERYONE, not just SROs. Teachers should know when to intervene and bring counselors in to work with students early in the cycle."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian*

QUESTION 5

What training does HCPS need to ensure students, staff, and parents/guardians feel safe?

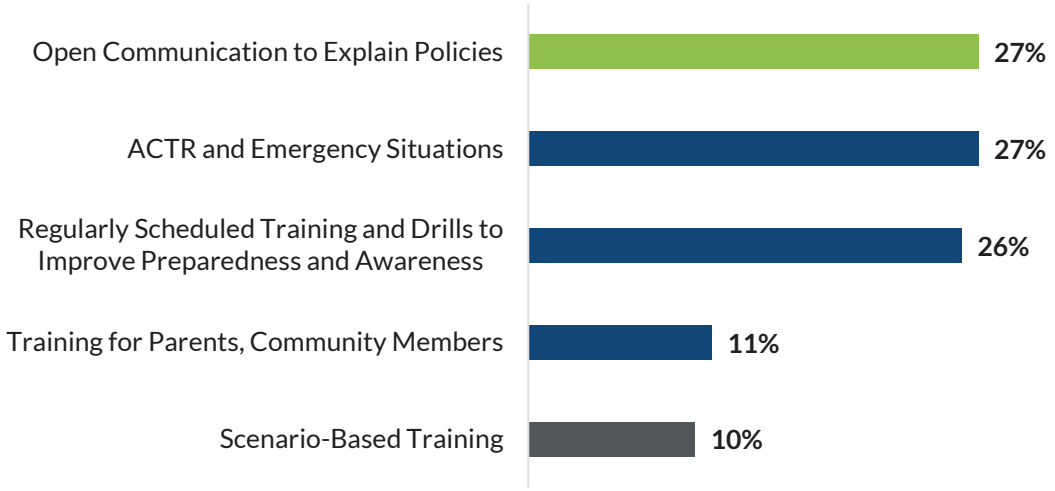
Over one-quarter of respondents (26%) maintain the idea from Question 4 that continued and frequent training and drills is vitally important for perceptions of safety. Twenty-seven percent of respondents—mainly **HCPS Students, Parents/Guardians, School-Based Staff Members,** and **Assistant Principals**—specifically indicate *active threat training* (e.g., shooting, fire, lockdown, Run/Hide/Fight) as most important.

Notably, 27 percent of respondents from various stakeholder groups believe enhancing communication protocols and systems with all stakeholders will improve perceptions of safety. While respondents understand the privacy restrictions of certain safety protocols to avoid vulnerabilities, many instead advocate for clear communication about most safety procedures *and* the proper stakeholder response to a critical incident. Parents especially require clear communication about critical incident procedures so they do not endanger their student further (e.g., trying to pick up student during a lockdown). Thus, 11 percent of respondents—half of whom are **Assistant Principals**—specifically recommend that parents and community members take part in safety training. Topics include social media, evacuation, and reunification training. Some respondents also recommend creating a family handbook that parents could use to reinforce certain procedures at home with their students.

Other highlighted training topics include *scenario-based training* (10%), *mental health training* (9%), and *training specific to individual school sites* (4%).

In the graph below, researchers excluded respondents who reported no concerns and miscellaneous responses to highlight the most salient concerns.

Theme Frequency: Top 5 Themes Regarding Training to Improve Stakeholder Perceptions of Safety



Note: This figure indicates the top five percentages of the 93 coded responses that mention a particular topic. Total percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top 5 Themes Regarding Training to Improve Stakeholder Perceptions of Safety

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Open Communication to Explain Policies to Students, Parents	*"More community-based meetings/platforms to inform everyone of what events, protocols, issues and progress are taking place in their areas pertaining to school safety and security."* – *HCPS School Safety and Security Member*	*"Communication to parents about plans for critical incidents. For example, in the event of a school-wide evacuation, parents will flock to most schools to get their children which may add to the chaos. Expectations for parents need to be clearly communicated with all stakeholders."* – *Assistant Principal*
Active Threat Training (ACRT) and Emergency Situations	*"Providing explicit directions on how to conduct run/hide/fight drills that are age appropriate and can realistically be implemented within the school day."* – *Assistant Principal*	*"What do and where to go when not in a class during a problem or intruder."* – *School-Based Staff Member*
Regularly Scheduled Training and Drills to Improve Preparedness and Awareness	*"More routine training to keep everybody up to date and more alert to situations."* – *Central Office Staff Member*	*"Continued lockdown drills as a way to practice within the schools."* – *Law Enforcement Member*
Training for Parents, Community Members	*"I recommend a county wide drill be done with law enforcement and community members. The drill should be done unannounced with the selected school administration to simulate an actual happening. This drill can be with one school to establish guidelines and procedures."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian*	*"Training for parents about social media and the side effects for our students."* – *Assistant Principal* *"Annual ACRT training for all. Reunification for all, especially parents. Explanation of various drills for parents, including bus drills."* – *Assistant Principal*

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Scenario-Based Training (e.g., role play)	*"This is a hard one to execute due to alleged organizations feeling students are traumatized by certain trainings. With that said, willing participants (students and parents) should be invited to scenario-based training. These students and parents potentially have an opportunity to assist stakeholders in the event of a critical incident such as keeping people calm and ensuring proper evacuation."* *– Law Enforcement Member*	*"I think the tabletop idea would be good to do with schools. Possibly involving people from central office-transportation, operations, safety and security, communications, and law enforcement in these demonstrations so there is a realistic feel of all the parties that would be involved if a real incident occurs."* *– School-Based Staff Member* *"Active situations to see how adults truly react."* *– Student*

QUESTION 6

What type of communication do you think HCPS should use during critical incidents?

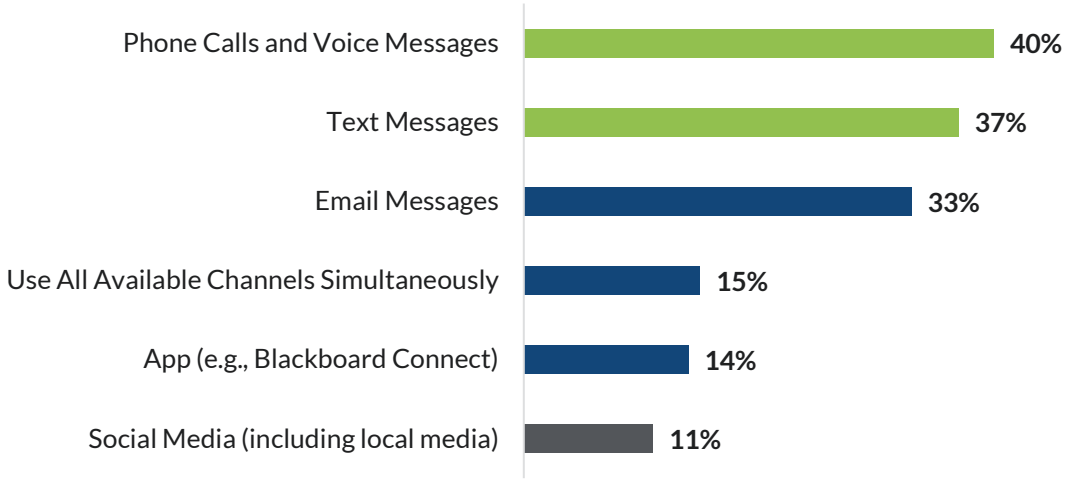
Most respondents (76%) answer this question with specific forms of communication they recommend HCPS use during a critical incident. Fifteen percent of respondents indicate that HCPS should use all modes of communication possible to meet families' needs. However, other respondents indicate specific modes of communication should be used instead of others. The three modes of communication HCPS should use are *phone calls* (40%), *text messaging* (37%), and *email* (33%). No discernable trends exist between stakeholder preferences with these communication modes; nearly all groups recommend the use of phone calls, texts, and email. Fourteen percent of respondents—many of whom are **Assistant Principals**—also mention using school apps such as Dojo or Blackboard Connect to send communications.

Other modes that some respondents mention include social media (11%), radio or walkie-talkie communications, and posts to the HCPS website (3%). Notably, significantly fewer respondents recommend social media as a proper communication tool for critical incidents than other traditional modes of communication. Indeed, no respondents from the **HCPS Students, Assistant Principals,** or **Clerical** stakeholder groups mention social media in their responses.

Respondents also express more general recommendations about communication methods. Eleven percent of respondents stress that communications—in whatever medium they are delivered—must be clear, concise, and not overwhelming to stakeholders. Eleven percent of respondents also desire a more efficient, streamlined communication system (such as emergency response systems or centralized communications). Among many other recommendations, some respondents (3%) indicate that announcements given over school loudspeakers are not the ideal form of communication because they can be hard to hear over classroom or hallway noise.

In the graph below, researchers focused on the responses with higher response rate frequencies coded under the *Specific Modes of Communication* theme and excluded responses from the *General Recommendations for Communication Methods* theme. Researchers also excluded respondents who reported no concerns and miscellaneous responses to highlight the most salient concerns.

Theme Frequency: Top Themes Regarding Preferred Types of Communication During Critical Incidents



Note: This figure indicates the top six percentages of the 93 coded responses that mention a particular topic. Total percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top Themes Regarding Preferred Types of Communication During Critical Incidents

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Phone Calls and Voice Messages	*"Calls to parents, radios with teachers so that an announcement is not the only way to relay information."* – *HCPS Student* *"A mass call and then individual based on school effected."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian*	*"Phone calls to keep parents/guardians aware of what is going on."* – *Clerical* *"Phone and email. NOT social media."* – *HCPS Teacher*
Text Messages	*"Our school uses the loudspeaker, but we can't always hear the announcement because of noise...it would be great to get the info by text message on our cells too, or even emails."* – *HCPS Teacher*	*"Absolutely TEXT and a FAST ONE. Secondary is email. Third a paper sent home in children's folders if it was something minor."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian*
Email Messages	*"Email and Rollout Calls"* – *HCPS Safety and Security* *"Text/email."* – *PAC Member*	*"To staff - I think it depends on the situation. Email might be effective IF staff have email on their phones and the phone is available. Computer access most likely will not be available, depending on the situation."* – *Assistant Principal*
Use All Available Channels Simultaneously (e.g., multi-mode mass communication)	*"All calls, Facebook messages, email, texts-whatever forms are available so that parents and staff feel connected."* – *HCPS Teacher*	*"Any and all sources.... Email, text, phone, news...etc."* – *School Safety and Security Member*
App (e.g., Dojo, Connect 5)	*"Connect 5 (depending on the incident, it could include phone, email, or both) and social media postings depending on the incident. Use of communication should be to inform, not incite more of a disturbance."* – *HCPS Principal*	*"Blackboard Connect. If significant enough it could also be communicated via the county communication phone system."* – *Assistant Principal*
Social Media (including local media)	*"The same as for 2-hour delays…text, call, social media page."* – *PAC Member*	*"Social media posts and text messages only, phone calls are often ignored."* – *School-Based Staff Member*

QUESTION 7

Describe how HCPS can facilitate its communication to ensure all agencies work together to respond to a critical incident.

Respondents identify a need to create cohesive systems that include the various agencies involved in responding to critical incidents, including communication systems and organizational structures. Fifty-eight percent of respondents highlight a need to create comprehensive *communication systems*, which must include both the mode and content of communications. For example, communicating details about a critical incident may require fast and widespread modes of communication, as 19 percent of respondents note. In this way, many respondents advocate for a mass notification system wherein stakeholders could quickly read important information. In terms of the content of communication, 24 percent respondents also highlight the importance of issuing consistent and clear messaging from all involved agencies so that communication comes from one "common voice." Finally, 20 percent of respondents suggest holding regular meetings to explain policies to parents, staff, and community partners.

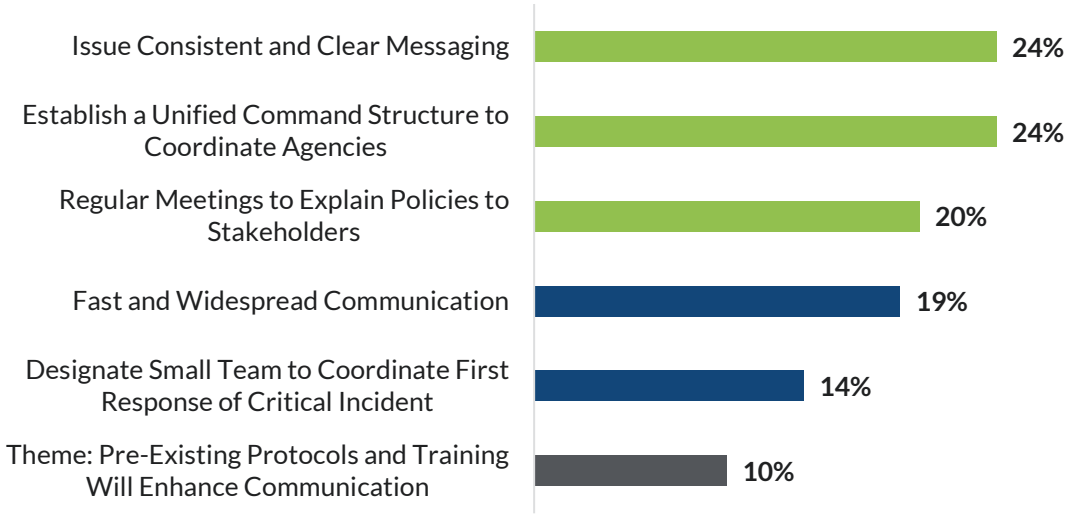
Many respondents (37%) also suggest HCPS organize *personnel systems*, or organizational structures, that establish roles and responsibilities for individuals coordinating responses to critical incidents. These systems must incorporate a clear roadmap for whom to call as well as the roles and responsibilities of each team member once the call is received. Many respondents (24%), such as **Law Enforcement Members** and **School-Based Staff Members,** call for HCPS to become a formal part of the unified command structure under the Incident Command System (ICS) model.

Within this larger call for a unified system is also the call for designating an individual or an office to manage critical incident coordination. Fourteen percent of respondents suggest better management so as to clear up confusion about the main point of contact when a situation arises. Many of the respondents who desire a unified system also speak to the importance of working together among agencies to issue common messaging.

Ten percent of respondents believe the pre-existing protocols and training will enhance communication among agencies, particularly through scenario-based training.

In the graph below, researchers excluded respondents who reported no concerns and miscellaneous responses to highlight the most salient concerns.

Theme Frequency: Top 6 Themes Regarding HCPS's Facilitation of Communication Among Agencies



Note: This figure indicates the top six percentages of the 92 coded responses that mention a particular topic. Total percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top 6 Themes Regarding Perceptions of HCPS's Preparedness for Critical Incidents

Theme/Sub-Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Issue Consistent and Clear Messaging	*"Be sure that all vested parties have the same information and message. Ensure that all communication that goes out is consistent. Make sure that schools have the correct information since they will field the majority of the phone calls."* – *School-Based Staff Member*	*"Having a clear and consistent message is most important. All schools (or each level) should have similar verbiage."* – *HCPS Teacher*
Establish a Unified Command Structure to Coordinate Agencies	*"During a critical incident, HCPS should be part of a unified command structure under the Incident Command System (ICS) model and all communication from all partners should be coordinated and united."* – *Law Enforcement Member*	*"One central command getting information to local leaders and to the community as appropriate."* *"Allow emergency management professionals to "take over" all HCPS communications during critical incidents. This would ensue that one "voice" is communicating all information, reducing the chance of any confusing mixed-messages."* – *School-Based Staff Members*
Regular Meetings to Explain Policies to Stakeholders	*"Perhaps there could be routinely scheduled all agency meetings to ensure there is sharing of ideas, active collaboration and efficient use of resources between the agencies. There can be a task force formed with members of the various agencies to work together to simulate critical incident exercises that force the agencies to practice how they would communicate and collaborate during a crisis."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian*	*"Open meeting with parents, staff, and stakeholders to explain the expectations from each discipline."* – *Law Enforcement Member* *"As long as all are in the loop, including the assistant principals, that would be helpful. A lot of times, we are left off of communication and we need to be in the know due to the fact that we cover the buildings when the principals are out."* – *Assistant Principal*
Fast and Widespread Communication (e.g., Multi-Mode Mass Communication System)	*"Coded levels for events so communication is quick and meaningful." – HCPS Parent/Guardian* *"Use on communication system that everyone has access to at all times"* – *HCPS Student*	*"Parents can sign up for text messages at their individual school in the beginning of the year. If i can get texts from stores and blogs....I can get texts from HCPS." – HCPS Parent/Guardian*
Designate Small Team to Coordinate First Response	*"Each organization can be assigned a lead contact in an umbrella type roster phone chain." – School Safety and Security Member* *"I think the fact that the principal knows the staff and students is a huge help when it comes to communicating in a critical incident." – HCPS Teacher*	*"Have a point person at the scene communicating with a point person at central office in order to relay information to needed agencies."* – *Assistant Principal* *"I feel that it might be beneficial if there was a specific position for a person to be the critical incident communicator. To alleviate staff of that burden because they are actually dealing with the incident and keep students safe."* – *HCPS Parent Guardian*
Theme: Pre-Existing Protocols Will Enhance Communication	*"Keep using the standard practices we have in place now."* – *School-Based Staff Member*	*"Making sure all involved or affected are completely aware of the situation and assure that there is a plan in place before hand."* – *HCPS Student*

QUESTION 8

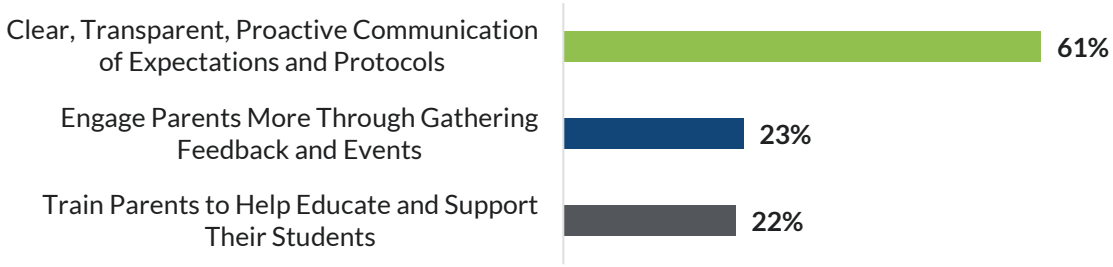
Describe how HCPS can work with parents to ensure our schools are safe.

When asked how HCPS can work with parents to ensure schools are safe, respondents overwhelmingly identify communication as the top method. Sixty-one percent of stakeholders from all groups perceive clear, transparent, and proactive communication is the best way to collaborate with parents. Interestingly, **HCPS Parents/Guardians, HCPS Principals,** and **Law Enforcement Members** emphasize the importance of open communication and transparency because it fosters trust with the district and therefore trust in its safety protocols. Most of the other stakeholders focus on how open communication can both inform parents of the safety procedures and their expected responsibilities. **Assistant Principals, School-Based Staff Members, HCPS Students,** and **HCPS Teachers** especially emphasize the need to increase parent awareness of the specific safety plans so they know both what their child is going through as well as how to support the school. **Assistant Principals** also focus on the importance of conveying the consequences of not following the safety procedures.

Other topics respondents highlight parent education and engagement. Twenty-three percent of respondents find it important to gather parent feedback and engage parents more in the safety plan development and/or communication. Twenty-two percent of stakeholders also think HCPS can provide further trainings and education to parents, particularly so parents can pass the safety education along to their students. Eight percent of respondents recommend offering more individualized support to parents and students as well as consistently enforcing policies (8%).

In the graph below, researchers excluded respondents who reported no concerns and miscellaneous responses to highlight the most salient concerns.

Theme Frequency: Top 3 Themes Regarding HCPS' and Parents' Efforts to Make Schools Safe



Note: This figure indicates the top three percentages of the 92 coded responses that mention a particular topic. Total percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top 3 Themes Regarding HCPS' and Parents' Efforts to Make Schools Safe

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Clear, Transparent, Proactive Communication of Expectations and Protocols	*"Communicate the plan so that everyone knows what to do in the event of a critical incident." – HCPS Teacher*	*"Parents should be provided with education about what efforts and initiatives schools are participating in order to maintain safety. Parents need to be made aware of how communication will filter out in the event of a crisis and what their next steps should be." – Assistant Principal*

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Engage Parents More Through Gathering Feedback and Events	*"ASK. Send these surveys out to parents by each school and ask parents to engage with their children before answering to gauge what the children's concerns are as well. Parents just want to know what's going on especially when our older children are texting us they are locked down and we have no idea why."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian*	*"To ensure schools are safe, parents may have ideas that we may not have thought of. I suggest taking in information from the parents, also notifying parents of HCPS's expectations of when the parents are in the school building."* – *Central Office Staff Member* *"Have A COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT NIGHT at a set school in that community"* – *HCPS Safety and Security*
Train Parents to Help Educate and Support Their Students	*"Cyber awareness training for parents. We don't always know what signs to look for in our own children or in their interactions with others."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian* *"Send periodically tips on crime prevention to discuss with their students."* – *Law Enforcement Member*	*"Give parents specific talking points to discuss with their children. Emphasize appropriate school behavior and provide students with SEL resources so that they know how to handle emotional responses appropriately. Additionally, the need to listen to teacher directions in the event that something does happen, and not encourage them to call/reach out to their parents in the event of an emergency."* – *HCPS Teacher*

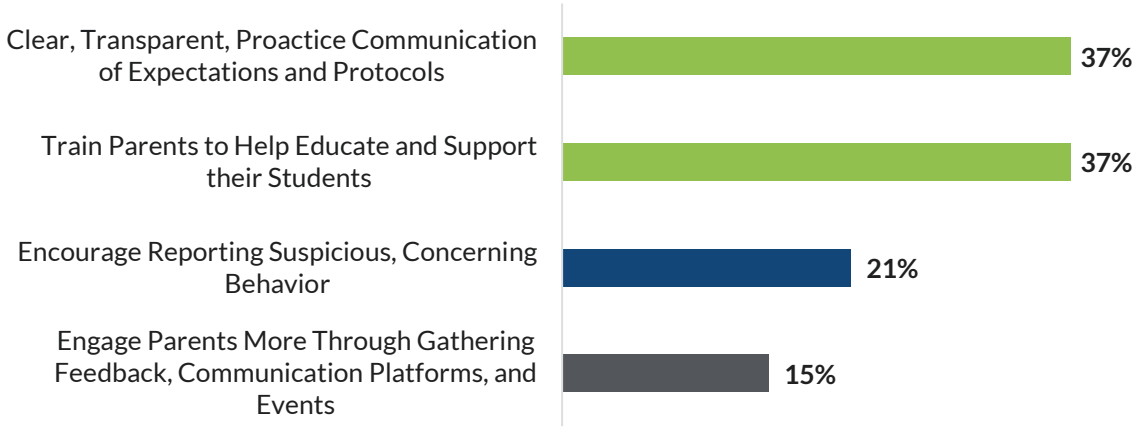
QUESTION 9

Describe how HCPS can work with parents to prevent critical incidents in schools.

Much like the previous question, clear communication of expectations still ranks as a high priority for respondents (37%). However, **respondents also identify parent education and training as an equally important initiative to prevent critical incidents.** Thirty-seven percent of respondents believe bolstering parents' understanding of risk factors or warning signs can better prepare parents to identify potential concerning behavior or threats in their children. Additionally, 21 percent of respondents believe HCPS should work to encourage parents to (confidentially) report concerning student behavior to the school so all parties can work to address the student's needs.

Other suggestions respondents have for HCPS include offering more supports to parents (8%) to promote their collaboration with HCPS, such as childcare or mental health services. Additionally, respondents encourage HCPS to bolster their staff training (6%) and policy enforcement (6%) to prevent or respond to bullying issues with students.

Theme Frequency: Top Themes Regarding HCPS Collaboration with Parents to Prevent Critical Incidents



Note: This figure indicates the top three percentages of the 89 coded responses that mention a particular topic. Total percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top Themes Regarding HCPS Collaboration with Parents to Prevent Critical Incidents

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Clear, Transparent, Proactive Communication of Expectations and Protocols	*"Provide communication with what is taking placed in, or at, school to promote safe environments."* – *Assistant Principal*	*"Consistent and clear communication as needed using a variety of methods (call, text, email, backpack handouts)."* – *Clerical*
Train Parents to Help Educate and Support Their Students	*"Reinforce with parents and ask for buy in and open dialogue."* – *Board of Education Member* *"Maybe Inform every parent what to tell to their child like what drills are in place if you were ever in an emergency and to never cause a critical incident and list why."* – *HCPS Student*	*"Keep giving parents/guardians tips and tricks to check in on the children to ensure we are aware of what is going on."* – *Clerical* *"Communication with them and resources to provide them to identify issues prior to incidents occurring i.e. QPR training etc."* – *HCPS Principal*
Encourage Reporting Suspicious, Concerning Behavior	*"Publicizing public safety campaigns; "If you see something, say something;" warning signs to look out for; how to report, what to report, and who to report to, etc.; involving parents and students in safety trainings; presentations to PTSAs, etc."* – *Law Enforcement Member*	*"Maybe have an ability for students, parents and teachers be able to report incidents anonymously."* – *Parent Advisory Group Member* *"Call meetings quicker with parents to alert them that their child was identified for unsafe behaviors"* – *HCPS Business Advisory Committee Member*
Engage Parents More Through Gathering Feedback, Communication Platforms, and Events	*"Make sure that parents feel empowered to share community concerns with school leaders."* – *School-Based Staff Member*	*"The more you know and understand, the better. Parents can be a part of our training. Some times, their ideas are better."* – *Assistant Principal*

QUESTION 10

How can HCPS approach reunifying families after a critical incident?

Respondents generally categorize the reunification process in three main stages: **Preparation, Response,** and **Recovery.** Forty-eight percent of respondents give answers that speak to the importance of preparing ahead of an incident, while 45 percent of respondents focus on the various steps HCPS should take during the reunification process itself. Finally, 24 percent of respondents encourage HCPS to focus on recovering after a critical incident and reflecting upon the reunification process to make improvements.

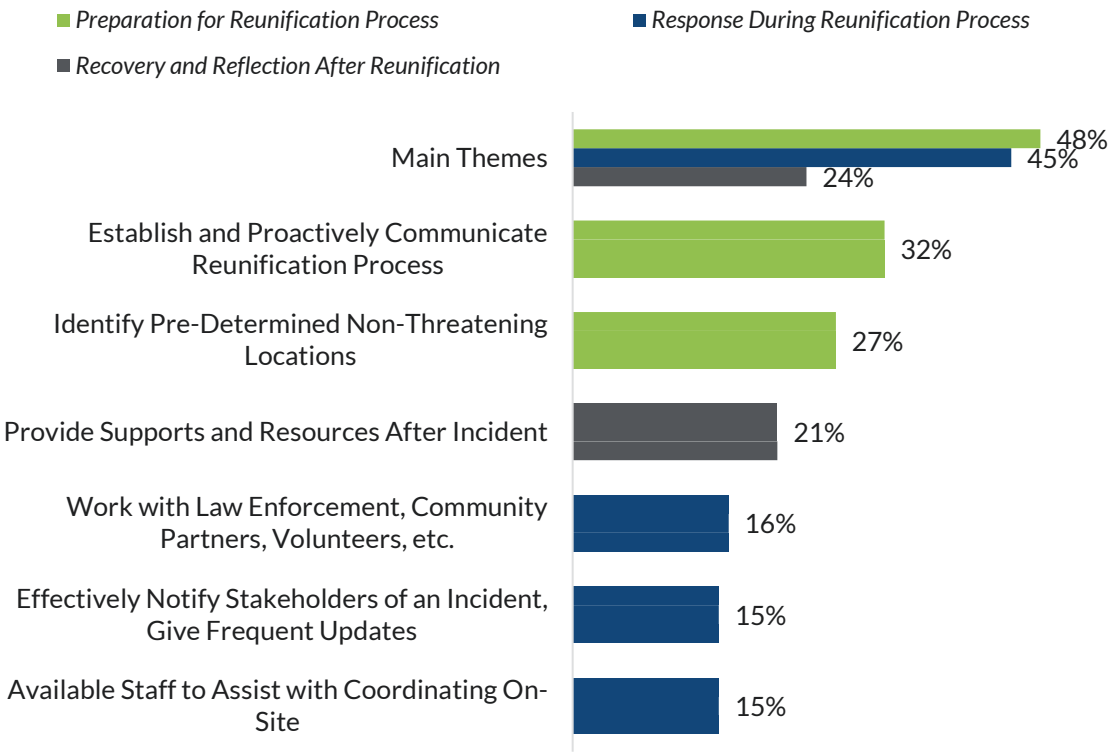
Related to the **Preparation** theme, 32 percent of respondents explain that clear communication of the reunification process (including designated pickup sites) must be given ***before*** a critical incident occurs. **Assistant Principals, School-Based Staff Members,** and **HCPS Teachers** especially believe this will assist with reducing confusion during the incident itself and ensure better accountability to the reunification process. Sixteen percent of respondents also agree that working with community partners and law enforcement will strengthen a reunification plan. Twenty-six percent of respondents remark on the importance of pre-determining a safe, open reunification site. **Law Enforcement, HCPS Students, Assistant Principals,** and **School-Based Staff Members** frequently give this suggestion. Some respondents think there should be regional sites, while most others think school-by-school designations are best.

During the reunification process (**Response** theme), several respondents (15%) mention the need for effective communication, notifications, and updates to parents, especially. HCPS should enforce an overall accountability to the process, including assigning responsibilities to staff members, having enough staff members on-site to coordinate students and parents, and identification checks of students and parents (14-15%).

Following the critical incident and reunification process (**Recovery** theme), 21 percent of respondents believe HCPS must provide necessary supports and resources during and after a critical incident and reunification process. This includes basic needs at the reunification site, such as food, water, or clothes, but also mental health supports for students, staff, and parents to process the event. Finally, about 8 percent of respondents also mention that HCPS should hold a post-crisis event or opportunity to interview and gather feedback from stakeholders about the overall process.

In the graph below, researchers excluded respondents who reported no concerns and miscellaneous responses to highlight the most salient concerns.

Theme Frequency: Top 6 Themes Regarding HCPS's Approach to the Reunification Process



Note: This figure indicates the top six percentages of the 93 coded responses that mention a particular topic. Total percentages sum to greater than 100% as some coded responses referenced more than one topic.

Theme Frequency: Top 6 Themes Regarding Perceptions of HCPS's Preparedness for Critical Incidents

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Establish and Proactively Communicate Reunification Process	*"Have a plan that parents are aware of before a critical incident happens. There are reunification locations, but I'm not sure that parents know what it is for their school."* – *HCPS Teacher*	*"There should be a clear plan regarding reunification that is share upon all staff and school community members. It would seem that walkie and cell phone communication will be needed."* – *Clerical*
Identify Pre-Determined Non-Threatening Locations	*"Identifying community locations for every school area and make those areas known to the public. Then a system-wide process can be identify and immediately implemented no matter which school(s) or areas if effects. Every location will have its own designed plan, instead of each student having to develop their own. This will also cut down on parents coming to the school in the event of an incident."* – *Assistant Principal* *"Work with law enforcement, have a designated but classified area that students are sent to prevent crowding."* – *HCPS Student*	*"Each school is different and plans developed to reunify will vary. But there should be a plan set up by each school that is shared each year with caregivers prior to the start of the year. That is available to the caregivers on the schools website for viewing at any time. My children have specific directions from me on what to do if they have to run in a situation while at school and where we will meet if that happens. That will vary family to family, school to school."* – *HCPS Parent/Guardian* *"In a non-threatening environment. Can you partner with a local restaurant or business close by that people know and like?"* – *HCPS Business Advisory Committee*

Theme	*Sample Responses*	
Provide Supports and Resources (e.g., mental health, care in delivering news)	*"Having an abundance of support for adults and children. Families would need to feel safe and heard, so it would be important to give families a chance to share their thoughts. They would need to see that HCPS is responding at a county level, not just a school level. As a parent and a teacher, I would want to know that my students and children could access a counselor at any time and that they could be excused from work. As a teacher, I would want my voice to be heard as well."* *– HCPS Teacher* *"Provide as much support through services and do wellness checks."* *– HCPS Safety and Security Member*	*"Bring families together in a forum that allows them to ask questions about the incident and get clear answers, opposed to relying on the gossip mill. Also, depending on how severe the incident, families should be offered access to counselors at the forum and potentially longer."* *– HCPS Teacher* *"Relocating of students and staff to an initial debriefing site where they are safe and can be processed and interviewed by law enforcement and connected with crisis response resources (food/clothing/meds: sometimes people run out of their shoes in flight and, or exit without a coat in winter, or flee without their timely medication, etc.), as well as mental health, and critical incident stress debriefing."* *– Law Enforcement Member*
Work with Law Enforcement, Community Partners, External Support, Volunteers	*"Each incident has to be handled as to the specifics involved at that time and location. Reunification has to be a structured process. HCPS has to involve stakeholders to further this discussion which may include everything from procurement of reliable resources as well as defining locations throughout the county that may be utilized."* *– Law Enforcement Member*	*"I have reviewed several companies who train to reunify families. There will need to be many volunteers. These volunteers will need to be highly trained so that there are no hiccups, no misidentified parents, misidentified students, lost students, etc. It will take time to have these concepts in order."* *– Central Office Staff Member*
Effectively Notify Stakeholders of an Incident and Give Frequent Updates	*"Honest, transparent, and frequent information is the first step in alleviated anxiety. I would be more than happy to come get my child in the event of a critical incident, even if that were from an alternative site (i.e. activity center, old gym, police station, etc.). I want my kids to be safe first and foremost."* *– PAC Member*	*"Text messages. most folks appreciate the convenience of a quick text rather than answering a phone call or checking emails."* *– School-Based Staff Member* *"Parents would need to be notified via email and phone of the reunification location and details, as well as requiring ID to pick up their child."* *– HCPS Teacher*
Available Staff To Assist with Coordinating On-Site (e.g., with ID checks)	*"Having a staff member from the school at the reunification point. Familiar faces are helpful in an emergency."* *– Assistant Principal*	*"Setting up area where parents are told to report and having enough staff available to check IDs, retrieve students, and keep the line moving."* *– Clerical*

APPENDIX A: THREAT ASSESSMENTS, 2021-2022

INTRODUCTION

The HCPS Office of Safety and Security collaborated with all schools to capture the 2021-2022 Threat Assessment data. The Office of Researched and Program Evaluation provided counts and visualizations of all threat assessments performed through mid-March of the 2021-2022 school year and incorporated them into this report as an appendix.

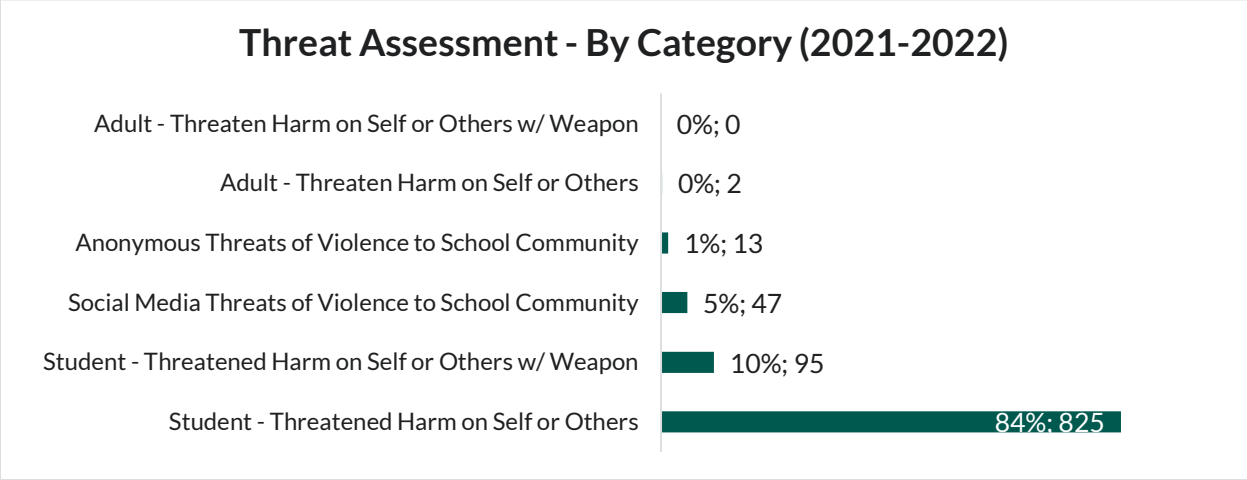
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the threat assessment data analysis, the Office of Research and Program Evaluation recommends the following for HCPS.

- **HCPS should create an electronic reporting tool for all stakeholders (students, staff, parents, community, etc.) to anonymously report, at any time of day, any potential threat or suspicious activity that may impact daily school operation.** This reporting system should be modeled after the Department of Homeland Security's "if you see something, say something" campaign.

- **Conduct threat assessments regularly and keep a log to ensure that schools and offices are prepared to deal with actual threats.** The logs should be available for review by appropriate offices (Safety and Security, Student Services, Executive Directors, etc.) to deploy the support and resources needed.

FINDINGS



INCIDENTS INVOLVING STUDENTS

SCHOOL LEVEL	STUDENT - THREATENED TO HARM THEMSELVES OR OTHERS	STUDENT - THREATENED TO HARM THEMSELVES OR OTHERS W/ WEAPON
Elementary	303	38
Middle	303	39
High	215	18
Combined	4	0
Total	825	95

Incidents Involving Adults

School Level	Adult - Threatened To Harm Themselves or Others	Adult - Threatened To Harm Themselves or Others w/ Weapon
Elementary	1	0
Middle	0	0
High	1	0
Combined	0	0
Total	**2**	**0**

Other Incidents

School Level	Anonymous Threats of Violence	Social Media Threats of Violence
Elementary	2	3
Middle	6	14
High	5	30
Combined	0	0
Total	**13**	**47**

APPENDIX B: DISCIPLINE DATA ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

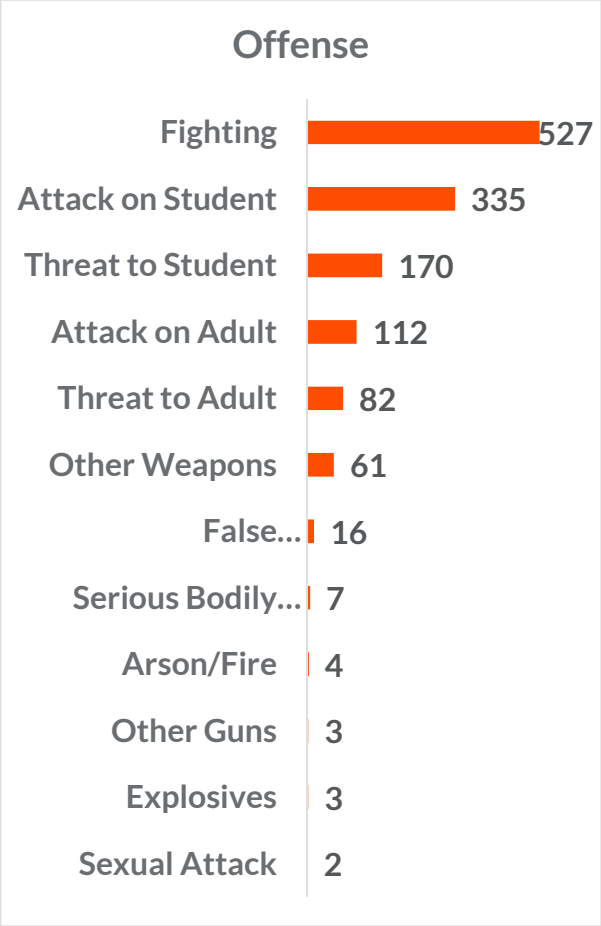
The graphical representations below reflect Harford County Public Schools 5-year out of school suspension (OSS) trend data utilizing an unduplicated student count from 2018-2022. An unduplicated student count is when a student is only counted one time regardless of the total number 0SS incidents. For example, John, a white student, gets suspended three times throughout the school year but is only counted one time in the federal race graph. The unduplicated student count by month is unique as it will show repeat offenders throughout the year but will not repeat by month. For example, John was suspended five times throughout the school year; once in October, twice in November and twice in January. He would be represented on the graph once in October, once in November and once in January.

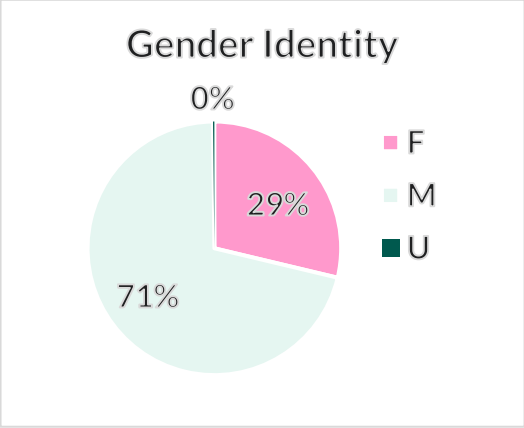
It is important to keep in mind school years 2018 and 2019 were traditional school years (Sept-June). School year 2020 was the start of the pandemic and students were only in school, in-person, part of the year (Sept-mid March). School year 2021 was the mostly virtual school year. The 2022 current school year data was collected from September to mid-March.

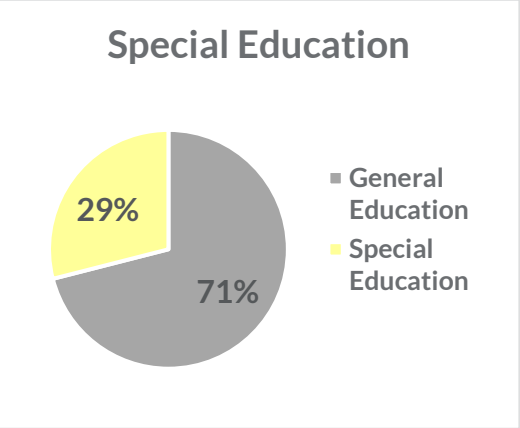
The varying time frames in which the data was collected requires consideration of the reliability and validity when comparing for trend data. 2021's virtual school year data would lack reliability and validity in comparison to all other school years and should be viewed independently due to the small sample size. It is best to compare traditional school years 2018 with 2019 (Sept-June). Similarly, it is best to compare school year 2020 with current school year 2022 as they evaluate similar time frames (Sept-mid March) because this data would be more reliable and valid. However, a reevaluation of the current 2022 school year upon its completion (Sept-June) is recommended for comparison with traditional school years 2018 and 2019 as it will provide the most accurate longitudinal data.

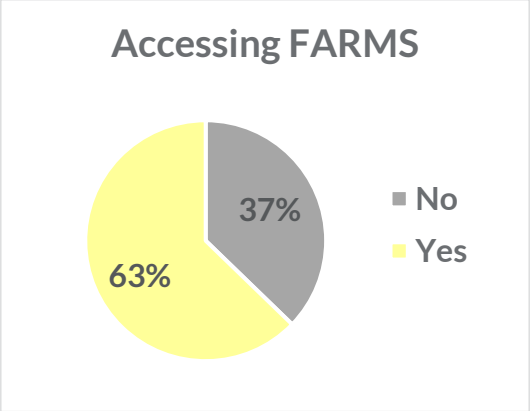
2018 UNDUPLICATED STUDENT OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSION (OSS): DANGEROUS OFFENSES

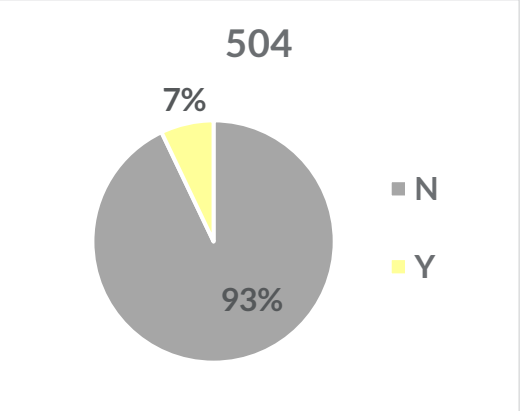
Dangerous offenses may include threat toward student or adult, attack of student or adult, fighting, serious bodily injury, sexual attack, other weapons, other guns, possession of firearm, explosives, false alarm/bomb threat, arson/fire.

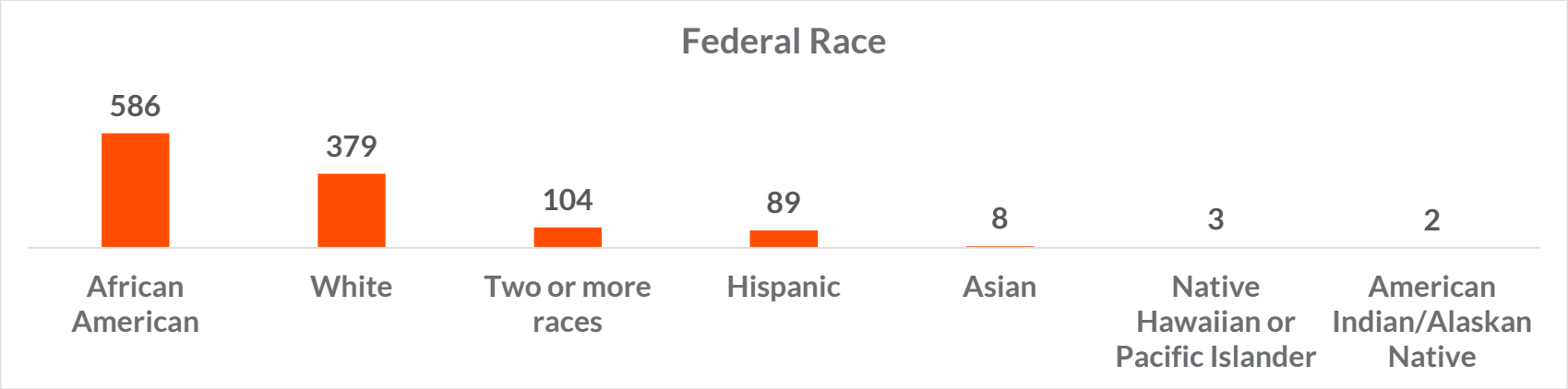











Federal Race
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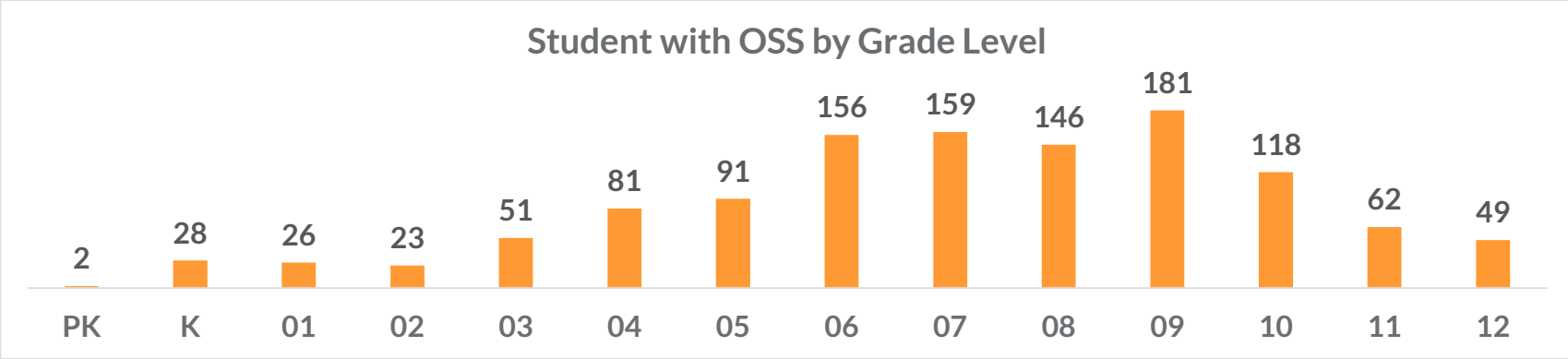
89
8
3
2
African American
White
Two or more races
Hispanic
Asian
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
American Indian/Alaskan Native


Student with OSS by Grade Level
2
28
26
23
51
81
91
156
159
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K
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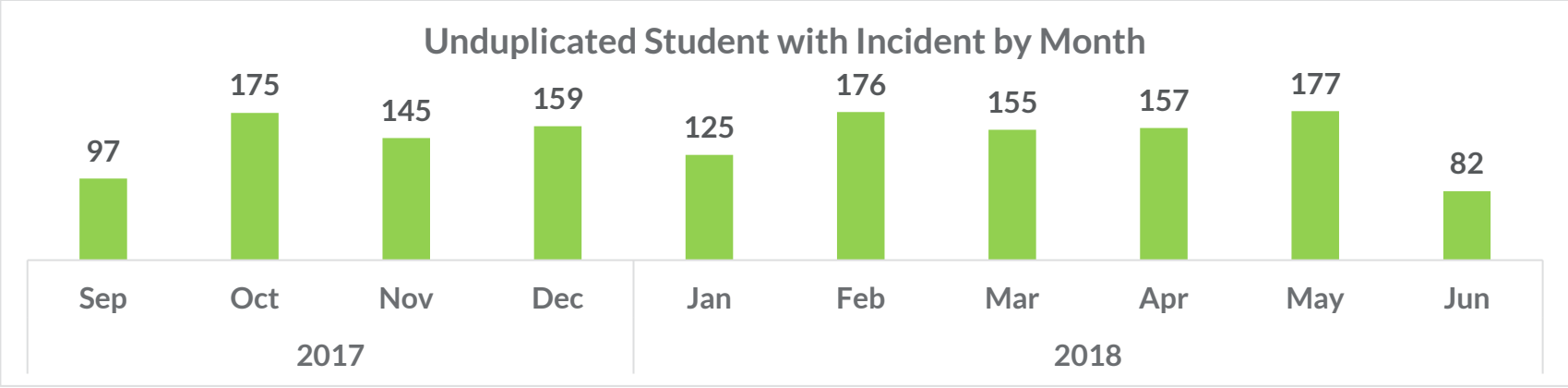
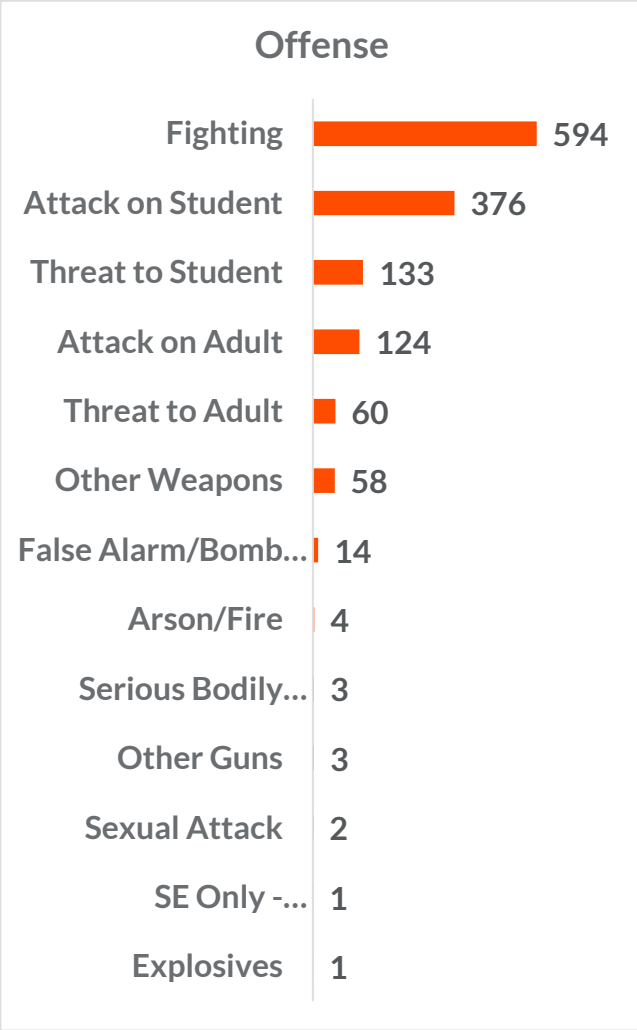
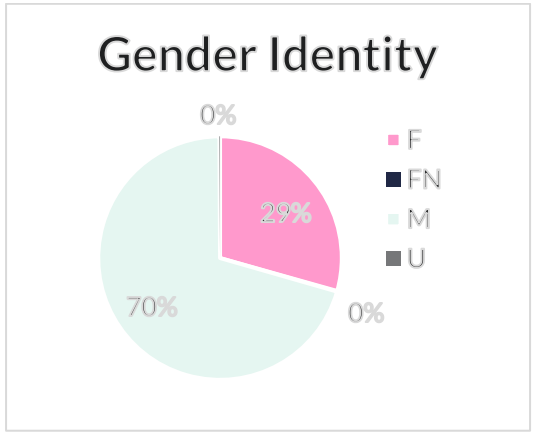
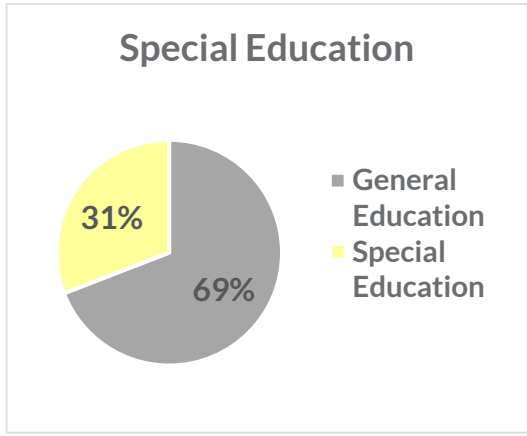
09
10
11
12

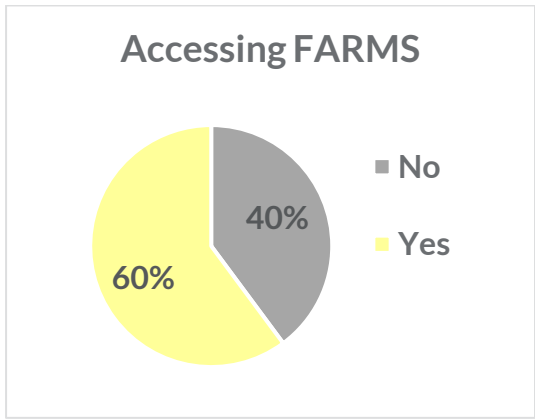

Unduplicated Student with Incident by Month
97
175
145
159
125
176
155
157
177
82
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
Jan
Feb
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
2017
2018

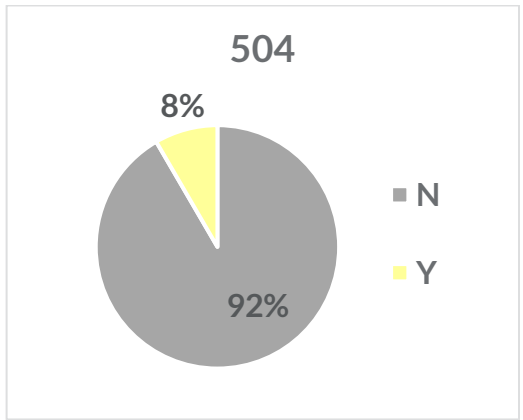
2019 UNDUPLICATED STUDENT OSS: DANGEROUS OFFENSES

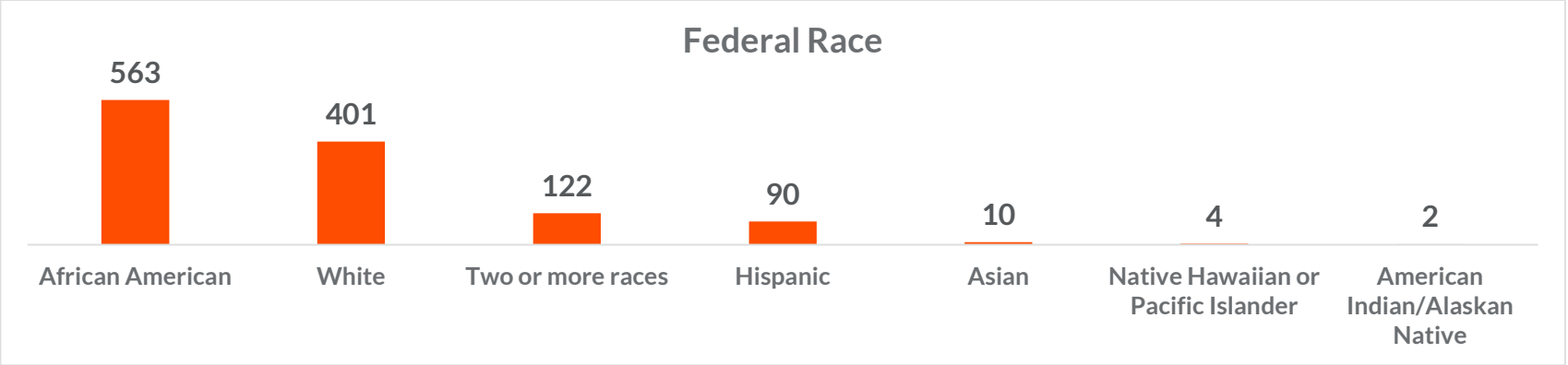








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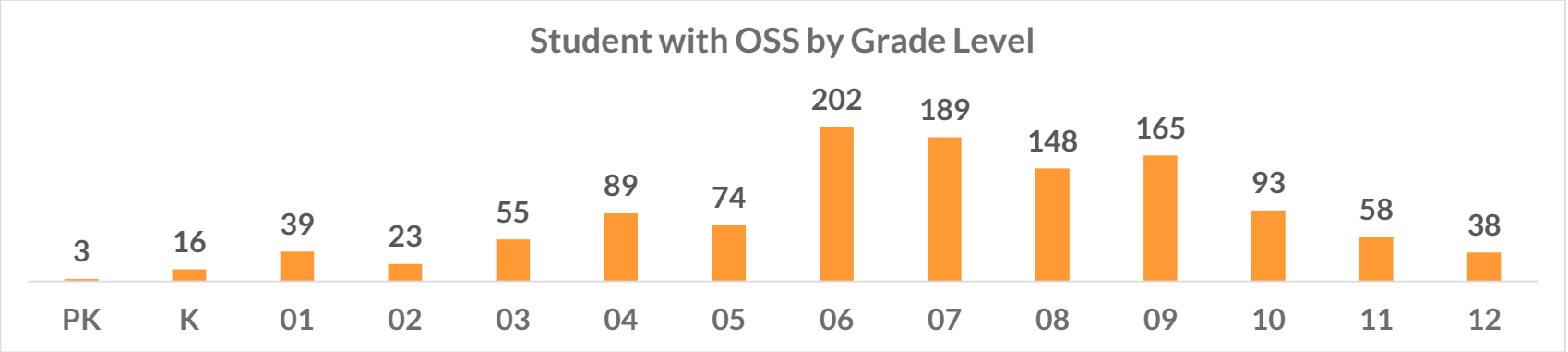
122
90
10
4
2
African American
White
Two or more races
Hispanic
Asian
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
American Indian/Alaskan Native


Student with OSS by Grade Level
3
16
39
23
55
89
74
202
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58
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K
01
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03
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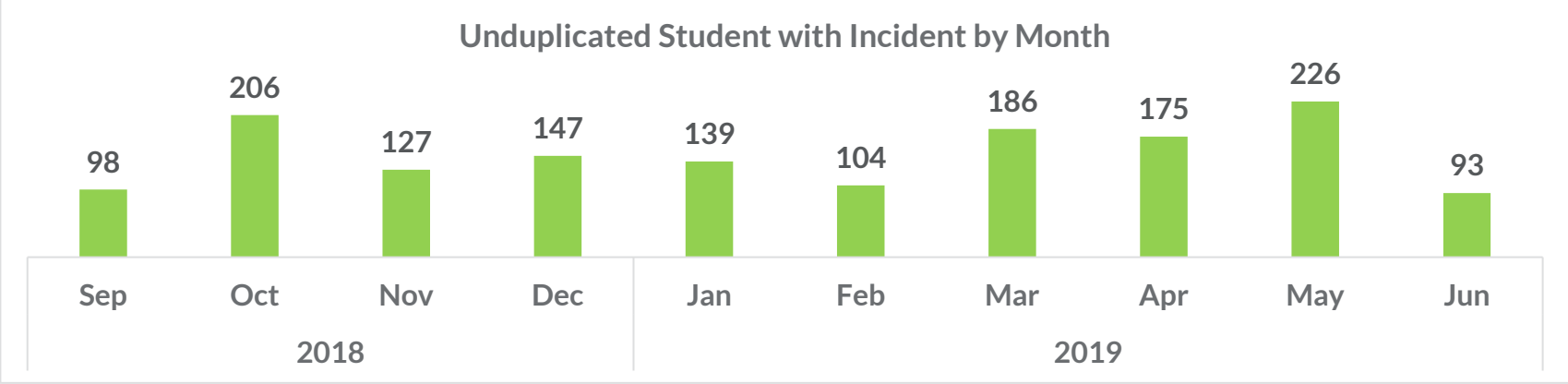
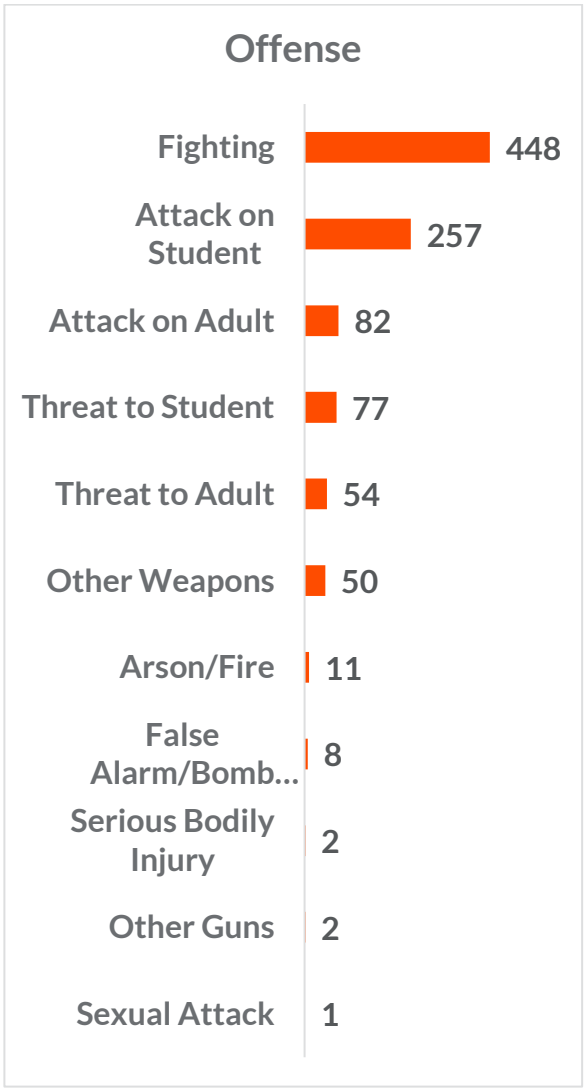
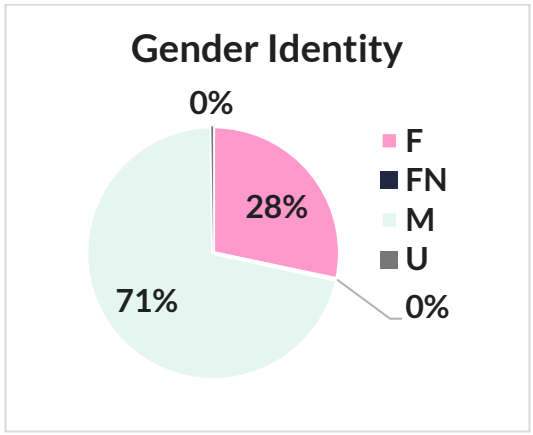
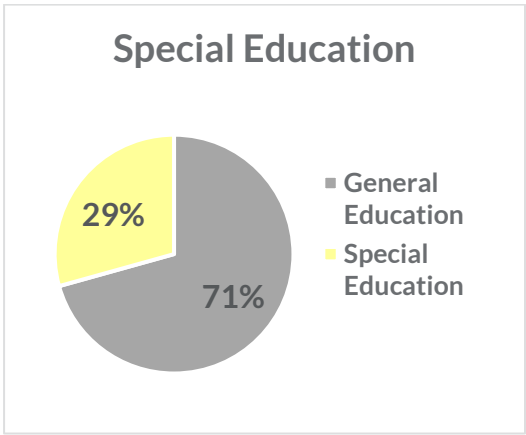
09
10
11
12

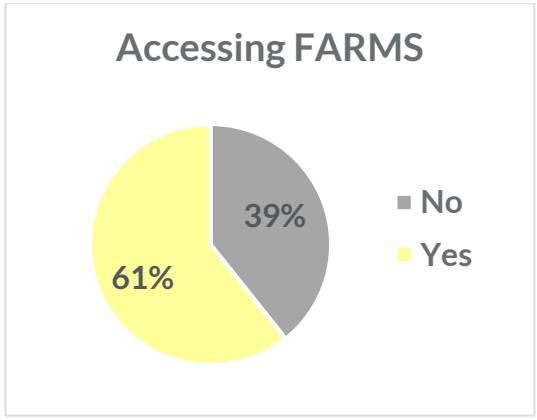

Unduplicated Student with Incident by Month
98
206
127
147
139
104
186
175
226
93
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
Jan
Feb
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
2018
2019

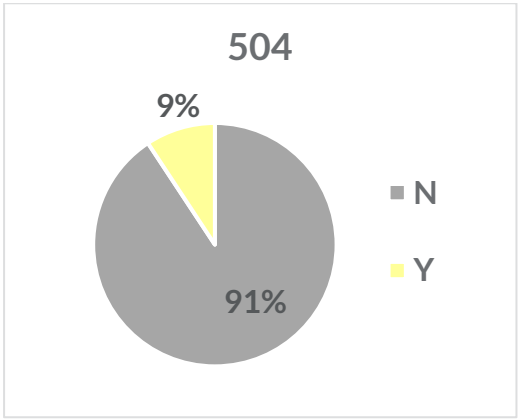
2020 UNDUPLICATED STUDENT OSS: DANGEROUS OFFENSES (MID-MARCH PANDEMIC)

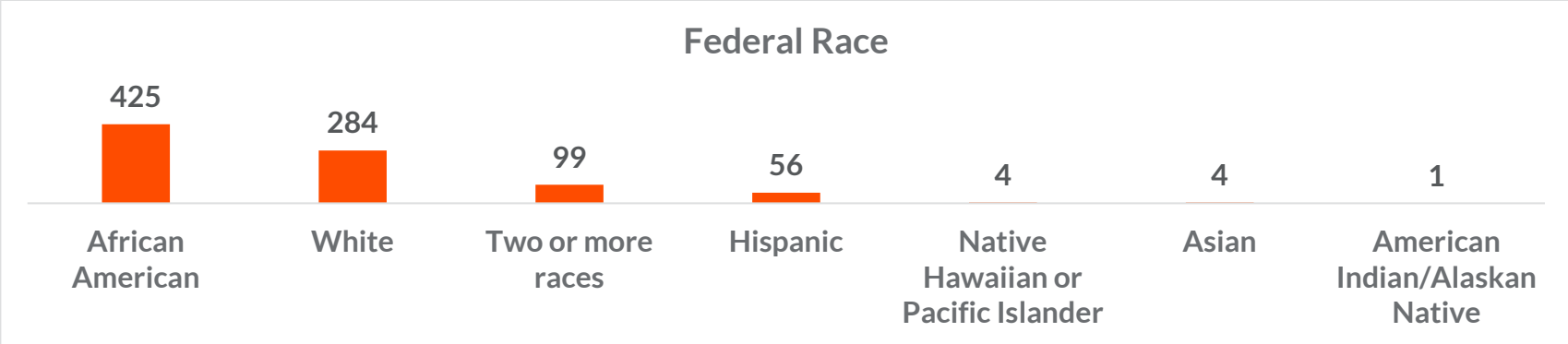











Federal Race
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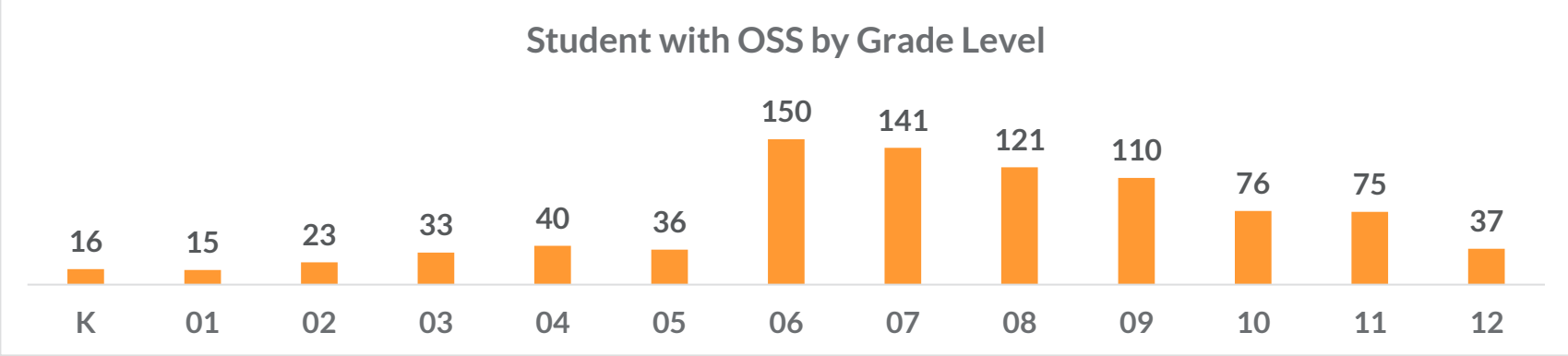
284
99
56
4
4
1
African American
White
Two or more races
Hispanic
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
Asian
American Indian/Alaskan Native


Student with OSS by Grade Level
16
15
23
33
40
36
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141
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110
76
75
37
K
01
02
03
04
05
06
07
08
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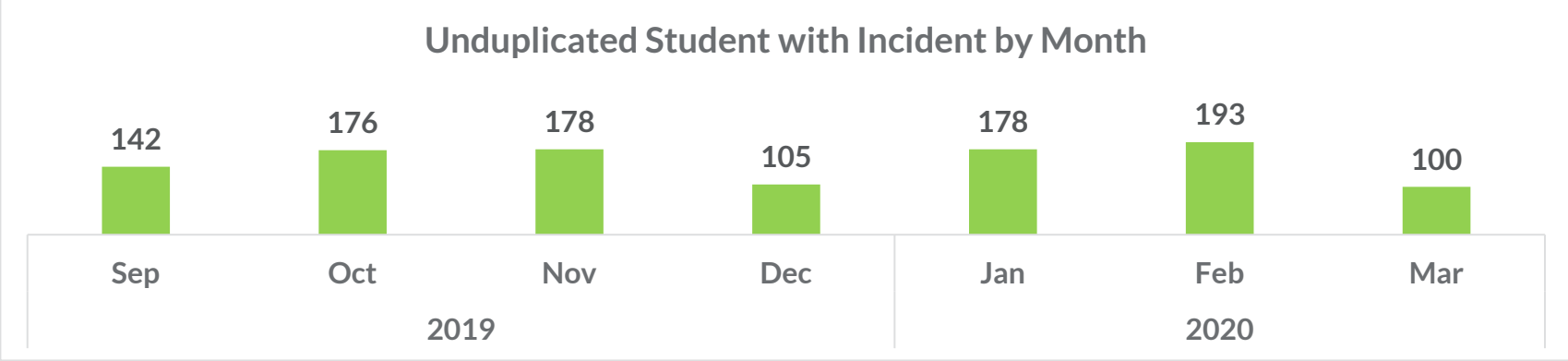
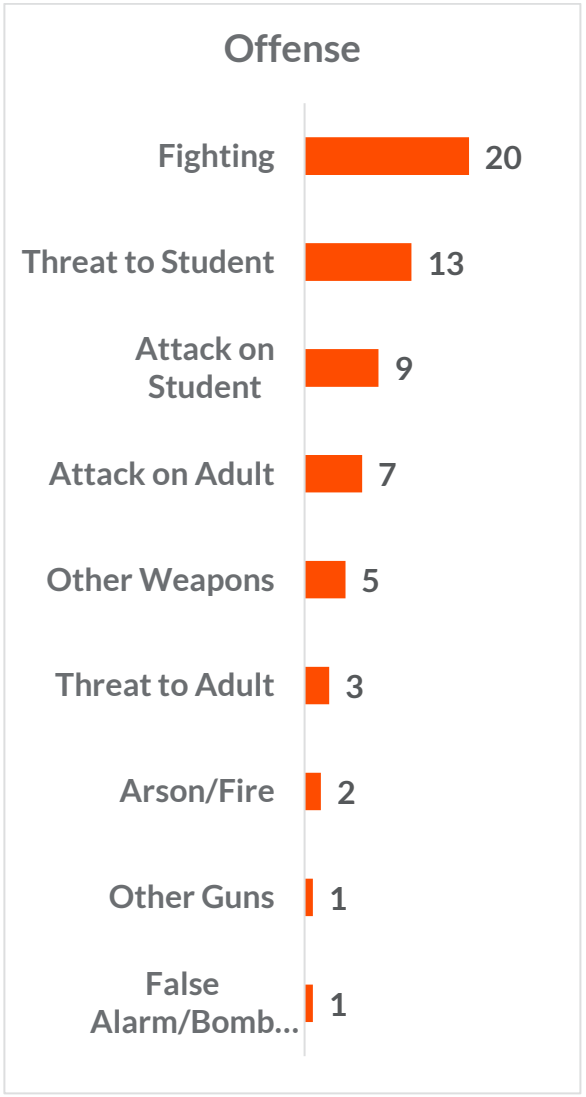
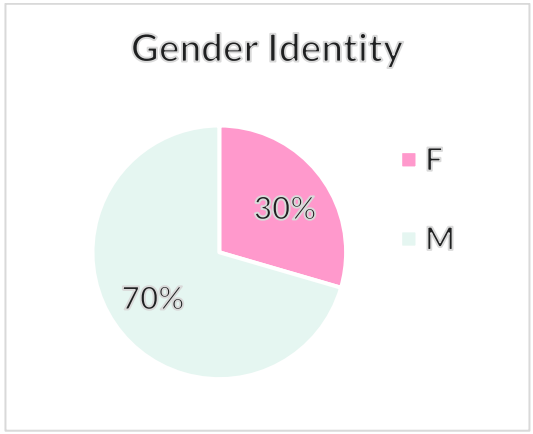
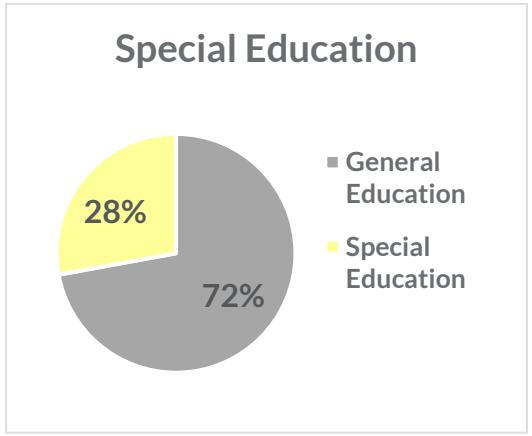
10
11
12

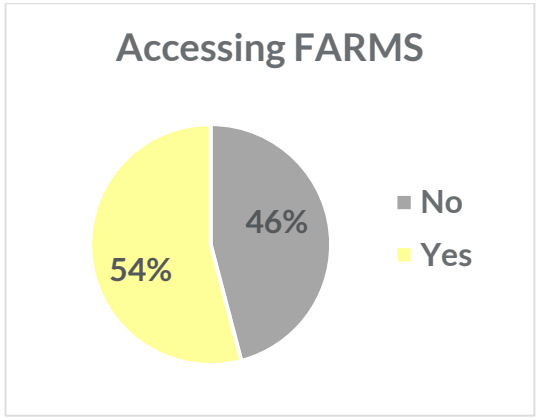

Unduplicated Student with Incident by Month
142
176
178
105
178
193
100
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
Jan
Feb
Mar
2019
2020

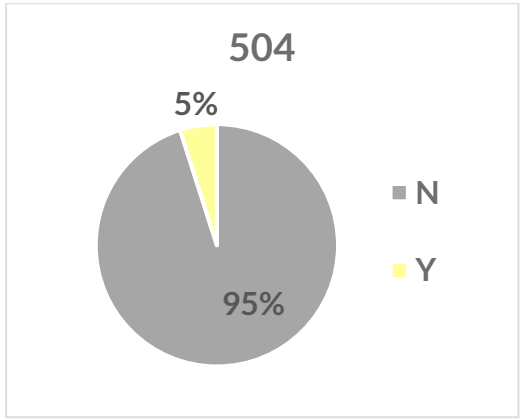
2021 UNDUPLICATED STUDENT OSS: DANGEROUS OFFENSES (VIRTUAL YEAR)

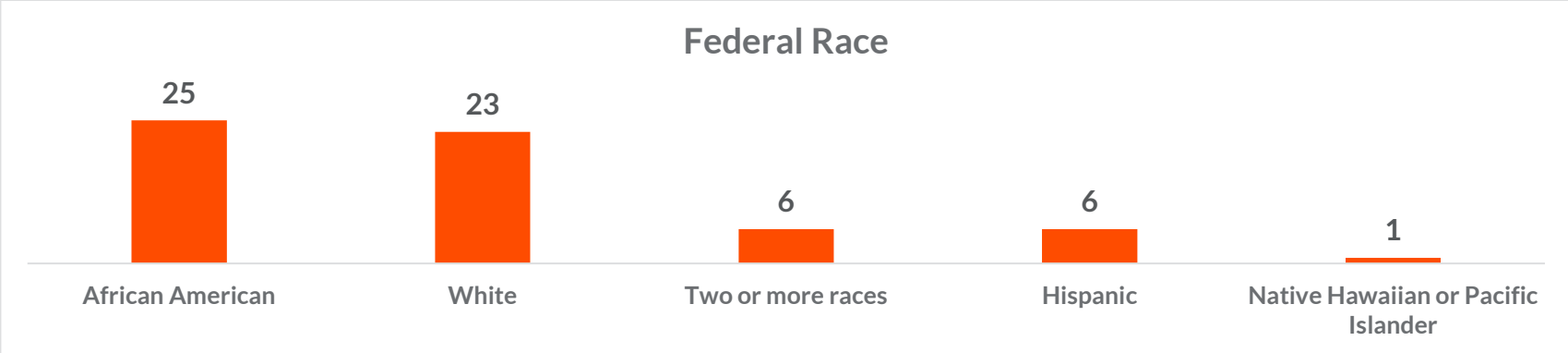


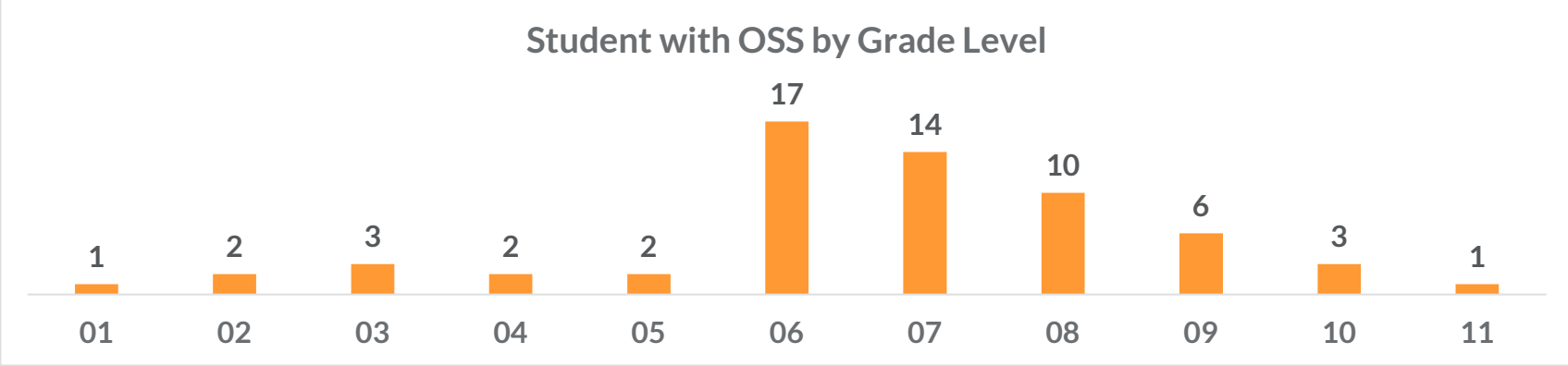









Federal Race
25
23
6
6
1
African American
White
Two or more races
Hispanic
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander


Student with OSS by Grade Level
1
2
3
2
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14
10
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3
1
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02
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09
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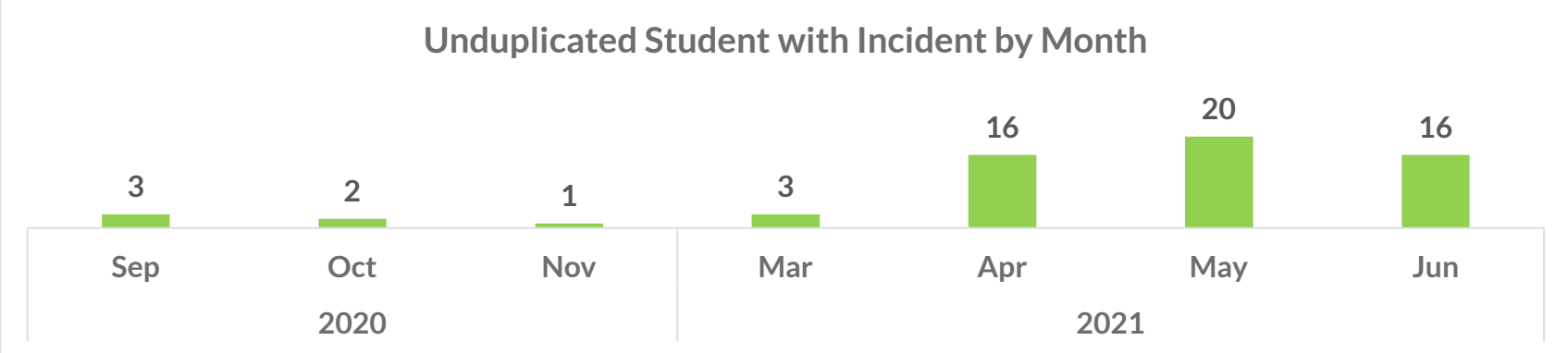
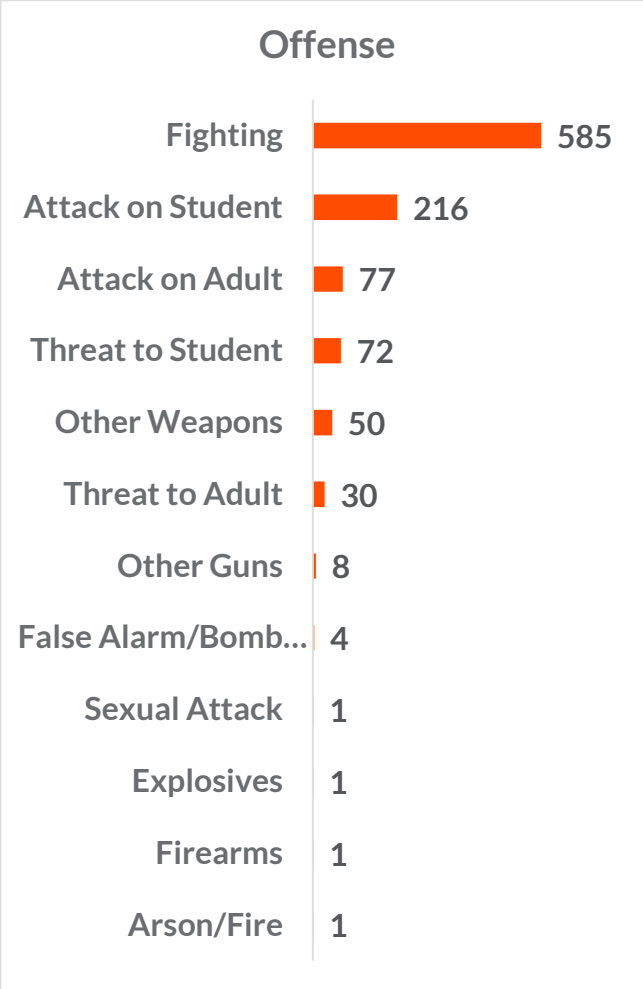
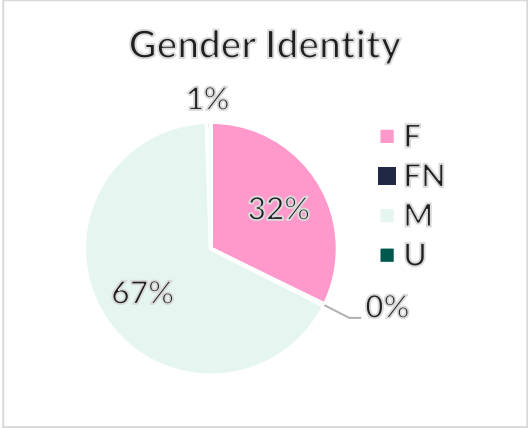
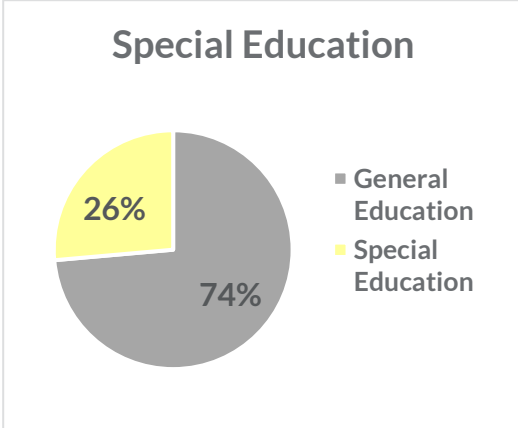
11

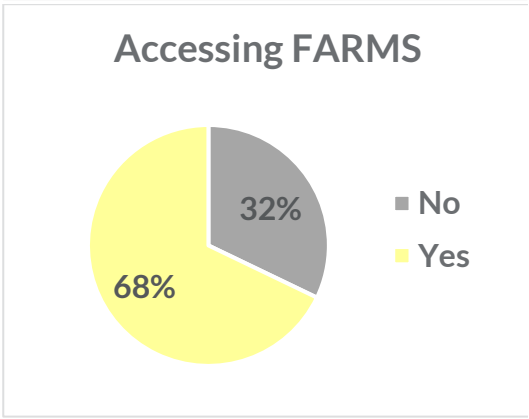

Unduplicated Student with Incident by Month
3
2
1
3
16
20
16
Sep
Oct
Nov
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
2020
2021

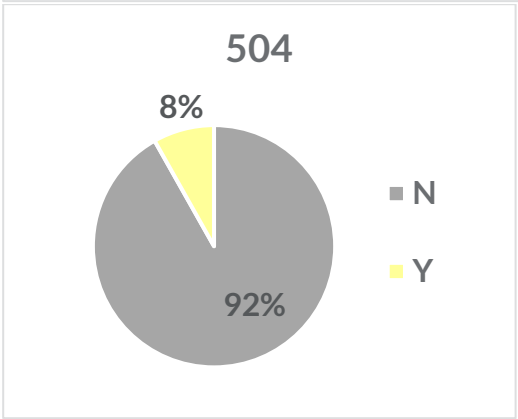
2022 UNDUPLICATED STUDENT OSS: DANGEROUS OFFENSES (THROUGH MARCH 22)

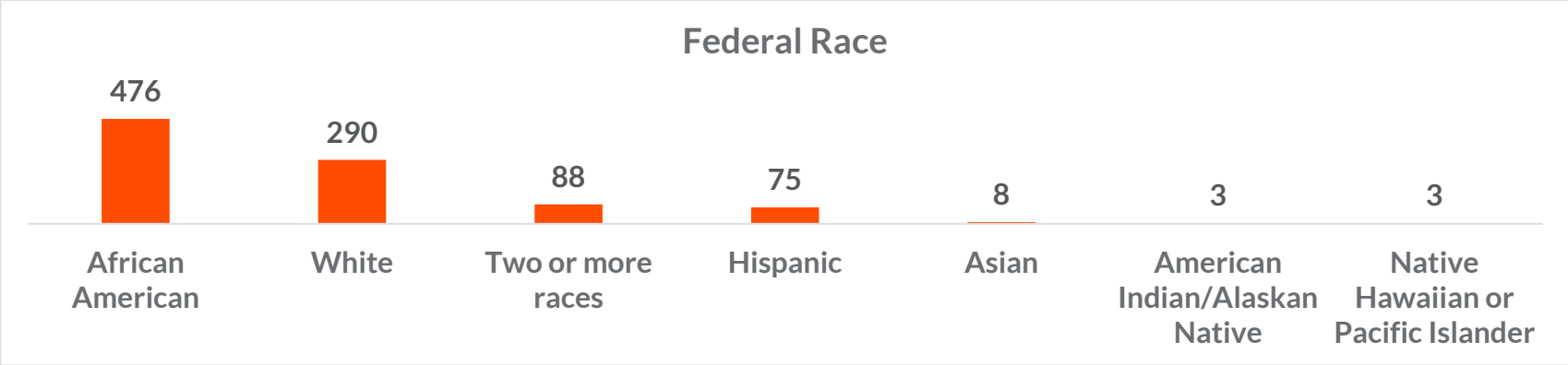


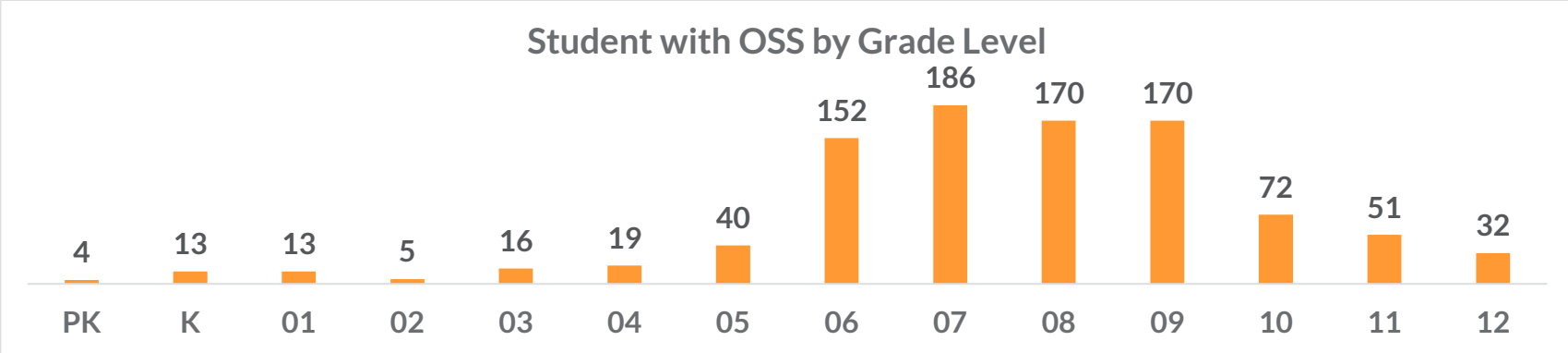


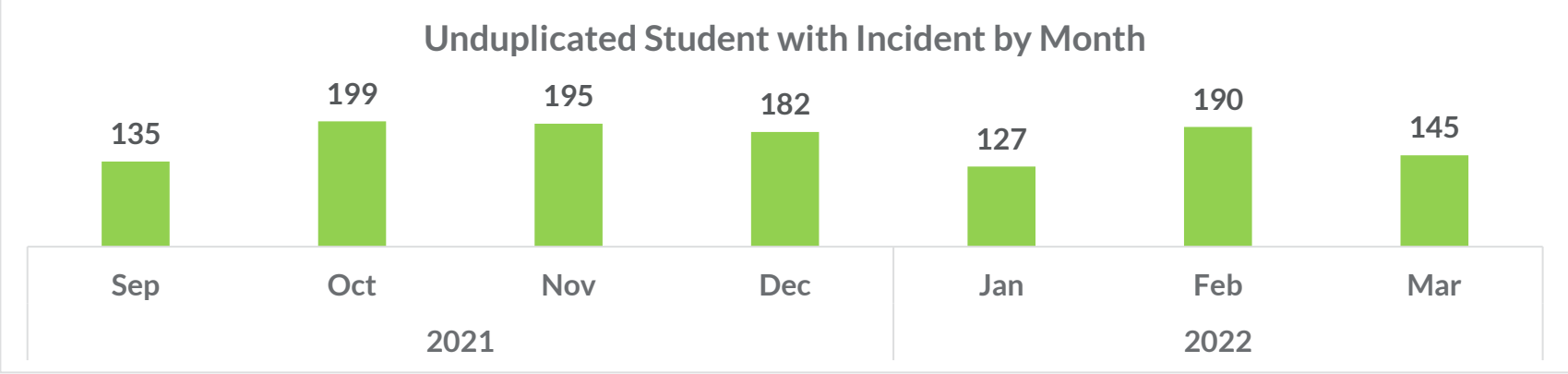




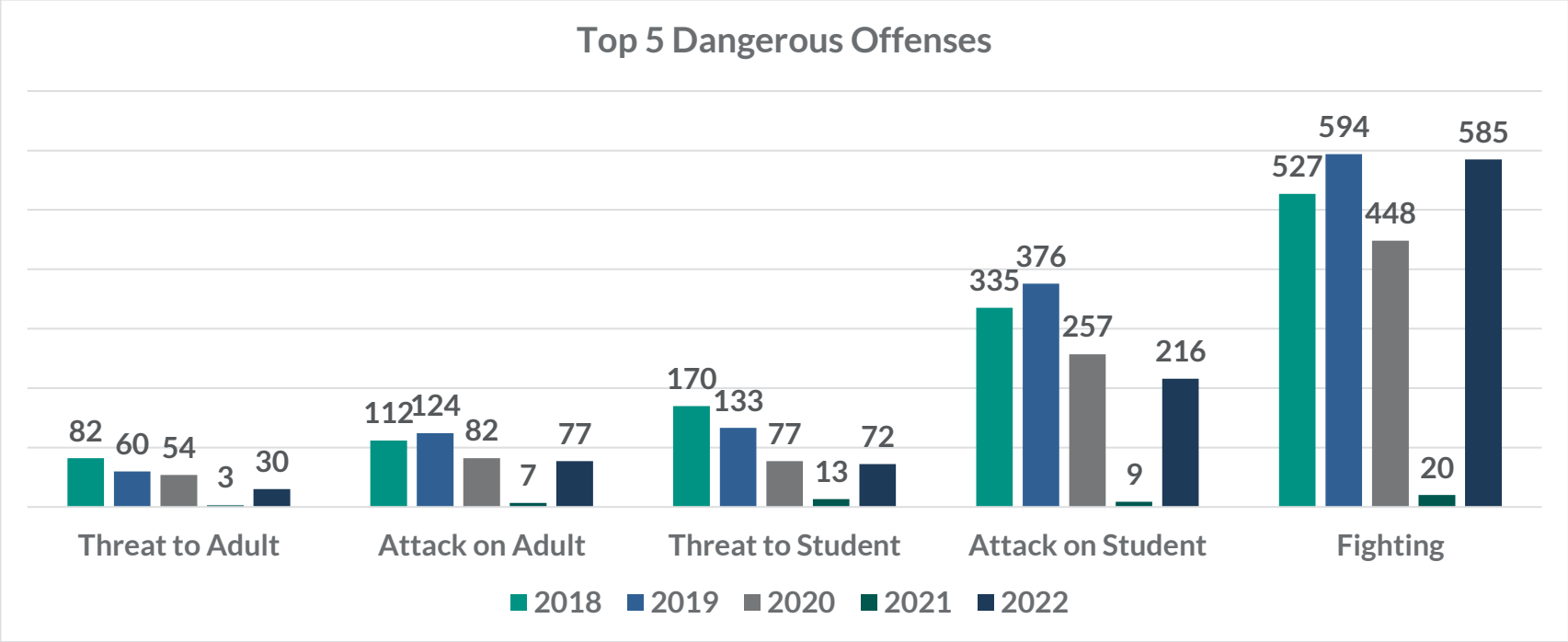


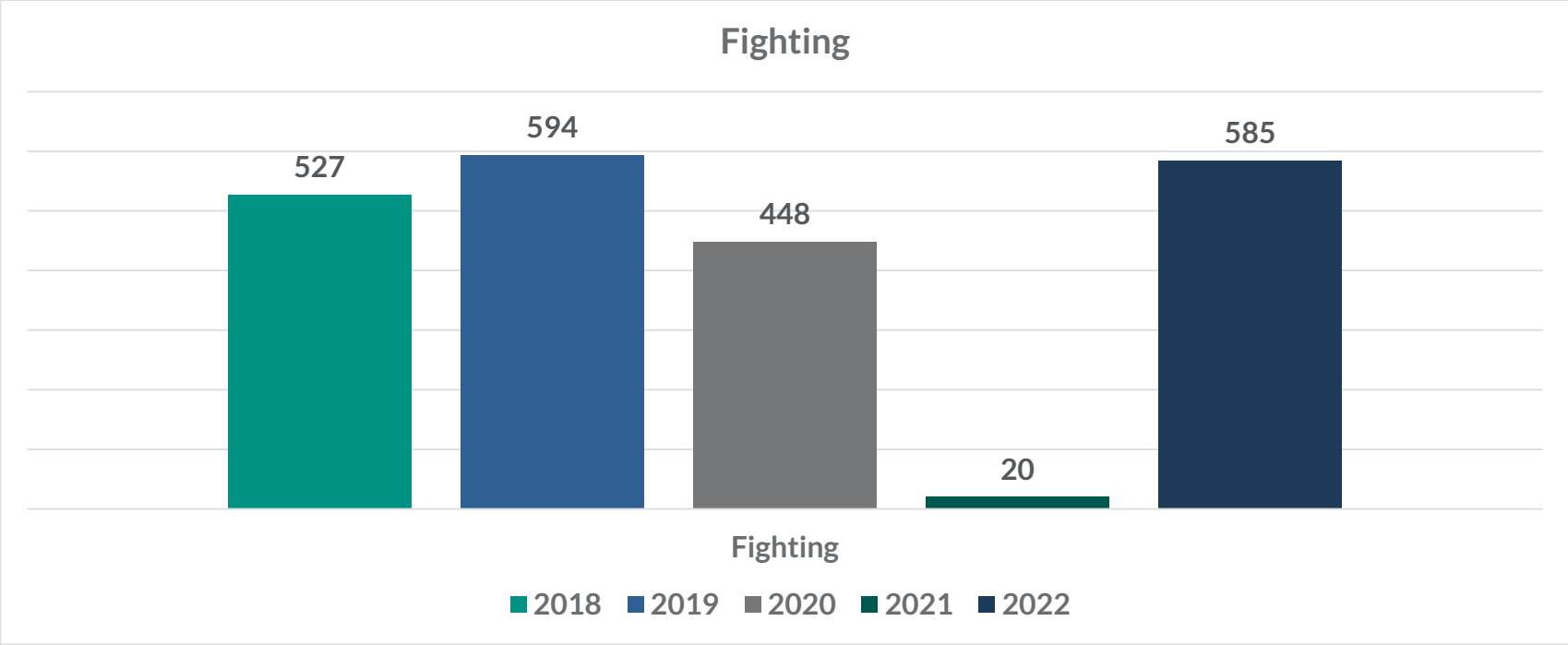

Federal Race
476
290
88
75
8
3
3
African American
White
Two or more races
Hispanic
Asian
American Indian/Alaskan Native
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

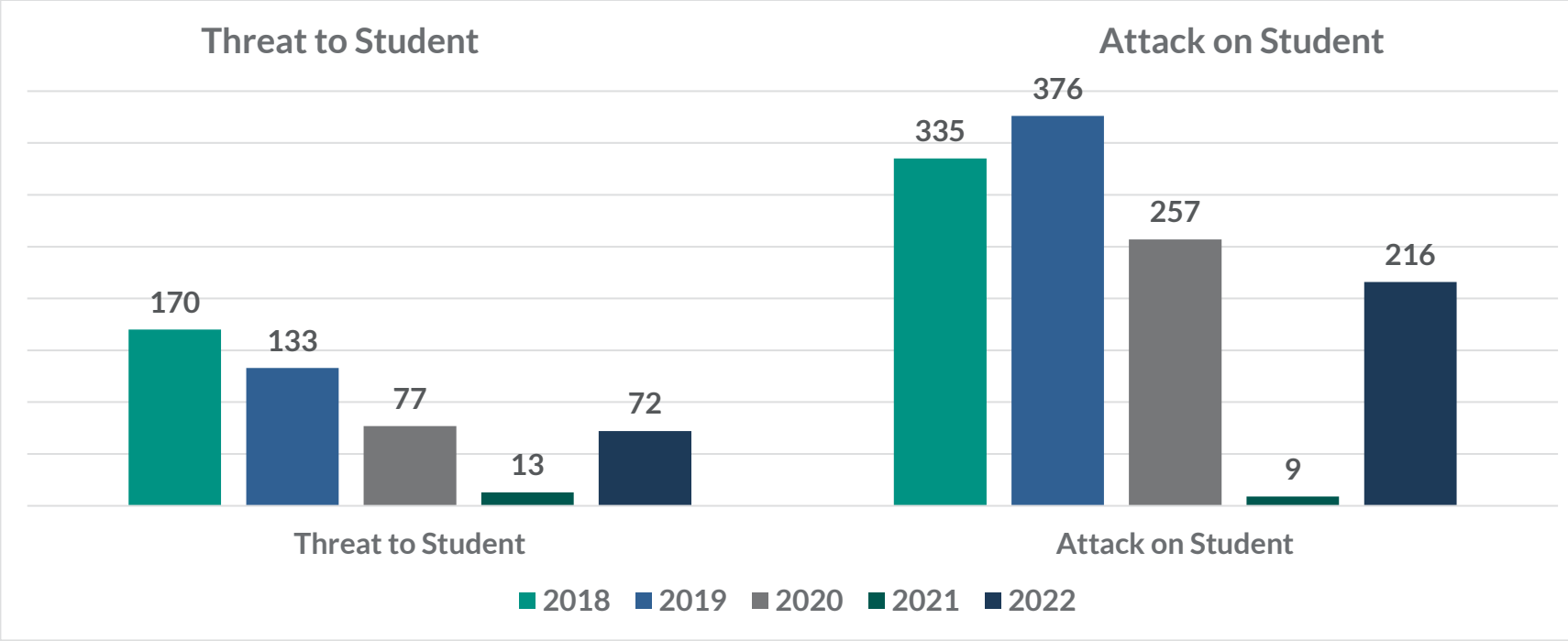

Student with OSS by Grade Level
4
13
13
5
16
19
40
152
186
170
170
72
51
32
PK
K
01
02
03
04
05
06
07
08
09
10
11
12

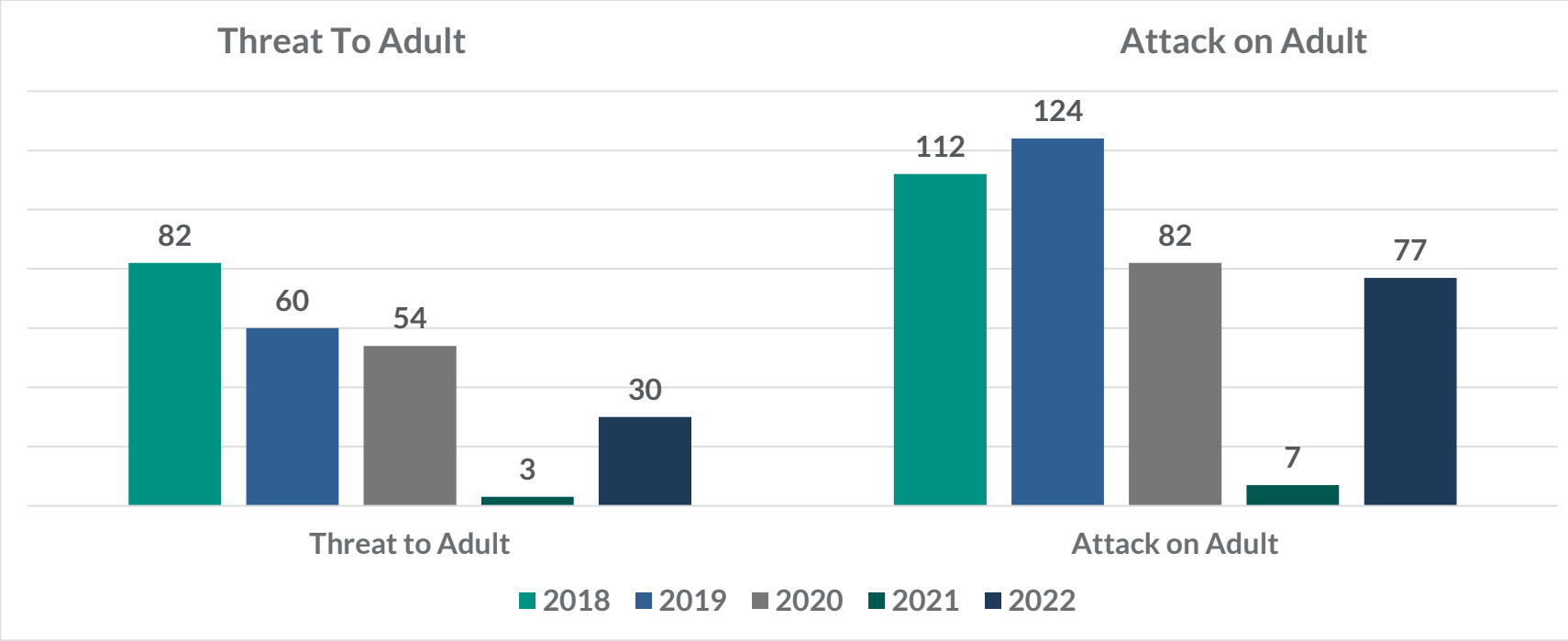

Unduplicated Student with Incident by Month
135
199
195
182
127
190
145
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
Jan
Feb
Mar
2021
2022

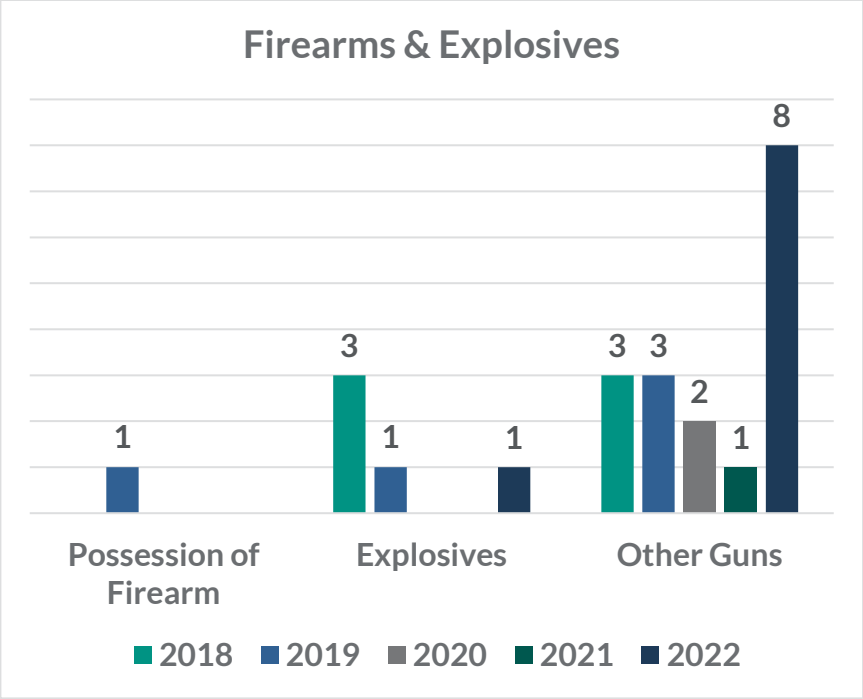
5-YEAR (2018-2022) TREND SUMMARY OF UNDUPLICATED STUDENT OSS: DANGEROUS OFFENSES

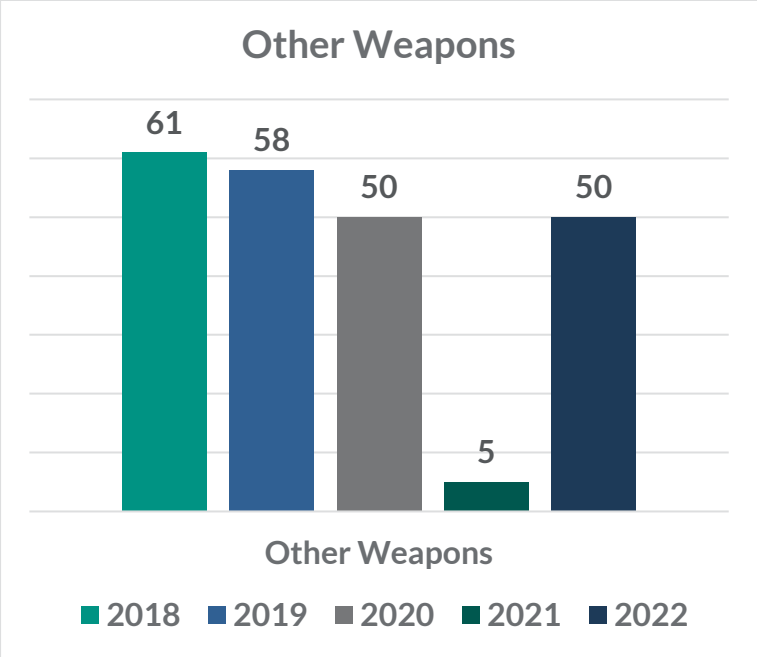


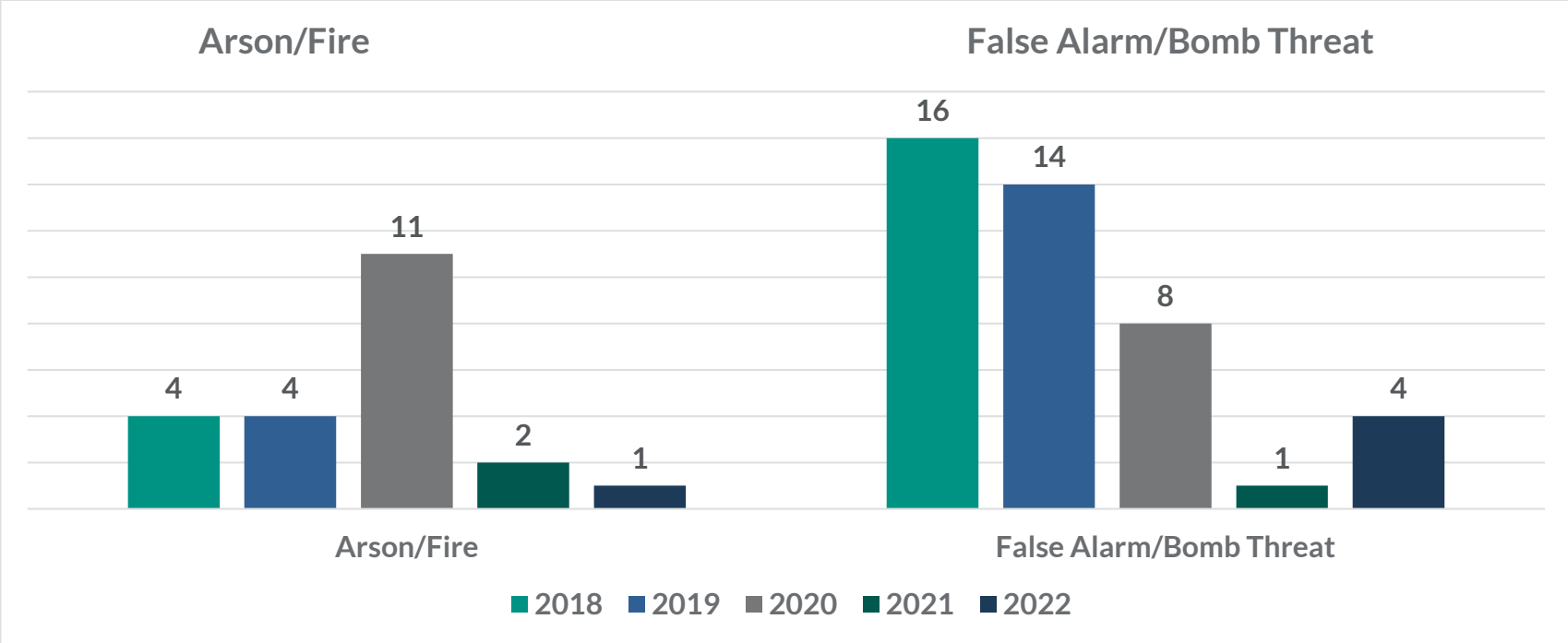

Fighting
527
594
448
20
585
Fighting
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022

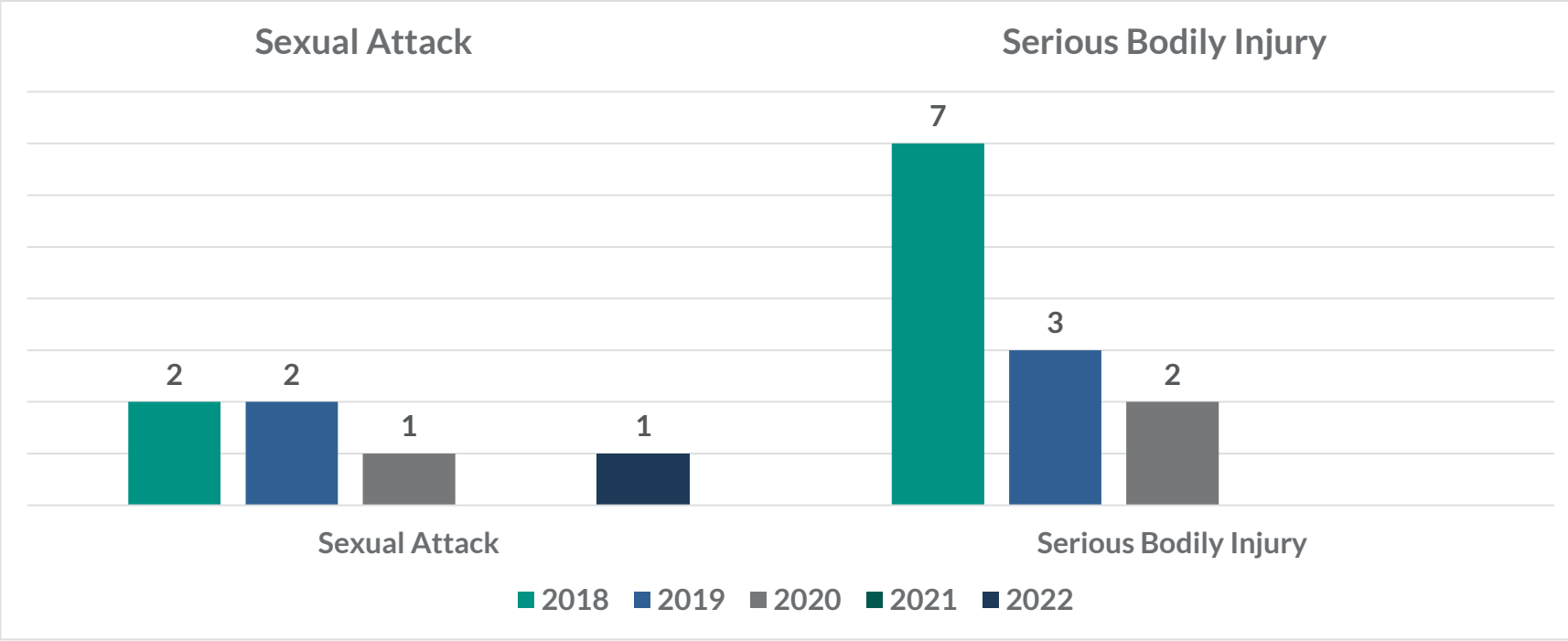

Threat to Student
Attack on Student
170
133
77
13
72
335
376
257
9
216
Threat to Student
Attack on Student
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022


Threat To Adult
Attack on Adult
82
60
54
3
30
112
124
82
7
77
Threat to Adult
Attack on Adult
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022


Firearms & Explosives
1
3
1
1
3
3
2
1
8
Possession of Firearm
Explosives
Other Guns
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022


Other Weapons
61
58
50
5
50
Other Weapons
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022


Arson/Fire
False Alarm/Bomb Threat
4
4
11
2
1
16
14
8
1
4
Arson/Fire
False Alarm/Bomb Threat
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022


Sexual Attack
Serious Bodily Injury
2
2
1
1
7
3
2
Sexual Attack
Serious Bodily Injury
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022

APPENDIX C: HCPS SAFETY AND SECURITY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

LIST OF MEMBERS

Parent Advisory Council (PAC)

Omowumi Alo
Crystal Chadwick
Kaleena Cyrulik
LaShea Davis-Williams
Rachel Delaughter
Darlene Dockins
Heidi Dombrock
Melissa Frasqueri
Kristy Gizinski
Denise Graham
Christina Hadding
Cynthia Hopkins
Leo Jones
Jessica Lamoureux
Gretel Meinhardt
Mary Mickens
Rebecca Miller
Gillian Miller
Lauren Neubauer
Andrew Ondish
Jason Porrovicchio
Brandi Reick
Joseph "Ben" Reynolds
John Robinson, Jr.
Monica Rotolo
Jerrelle Santana
Matthew Schautz
Heather Sewell
Mary (Elyse) Spurlin
Eric Stewart
Geri Strother
Tracie Ulmes
Kayla Watson
Andrea Wilson
Amber Wolff
Katie York

Business Advisory Council Partners

Elizabeth Mink
Deborah Judd
MaryBeth Stapleton
Brian Claffee
Claudine Adams
Cathy Dermott
David Johnson
Jack Graham
John B. Sampson
Kimberlee Hyde
Kiren Patel
Kyle Nemec
Jimmy Lien
Lisa Snodgrass
Madrice Guy
Monica Worrell
Pastor Carol Taylor
Sharon B. Jacobs
Sherry Hussung
Connie Hess
Lissett Johnson
Lindsay Bilodeau
Stephanie Wall
Eric Davis

Safety Security Liaison Group

Kevin Smith
Andrea Rice
Brooks Kimbrough
Zeno Jones
Michael Reeves
Donald (DJ) Ravadge
Dwayne Howell
Donoven Brooks

Law Enforcement Group

Capt. Joe Alton
Capt. John Bowman
Chief Moore
Cpl. Ken Terry
Kayhia Hendren
Lt. Veto Mentzell
Ofc. Jason Neidig
Sgt. Brian O'Neil
Patrick Spicer
Donoven Brooks

Operational Principal Advisory Group

Joseph Collins
Robert Deleva
James Johnson
Deborah Judd
Greg Komondor
Benjamin Richardson
Heather Skopak
Thomas Smith
Pamela Zeigler
Natalie Holloway
Eric Davis

Teacher Leaders

Kelly Ackley
Kerrie Bauer
Lauren Byrd
Kimberly Perouty
Sarah Scholl
Stephanie Wall
Karen Gonzalez
Jennifer Knoll
Erin Ragan
Melissa Van Ruiten
Elizabeth White

Superintendent's Student Advisory Council

Aiden Knapp
Carah Palmer
Michaela Blackburn
Dakota Bakke
Rashad Thomas
Jackson Doherty
Essence Mgboji
Alex Ridolfi
Jaylynn Ludd
Lisette Ahlijah
Jenna Fisher
Ana Sans
Salem Ortiz
Sara King
Taylor Deminds
Margaret Gotfredon
Anita Hooshangi