

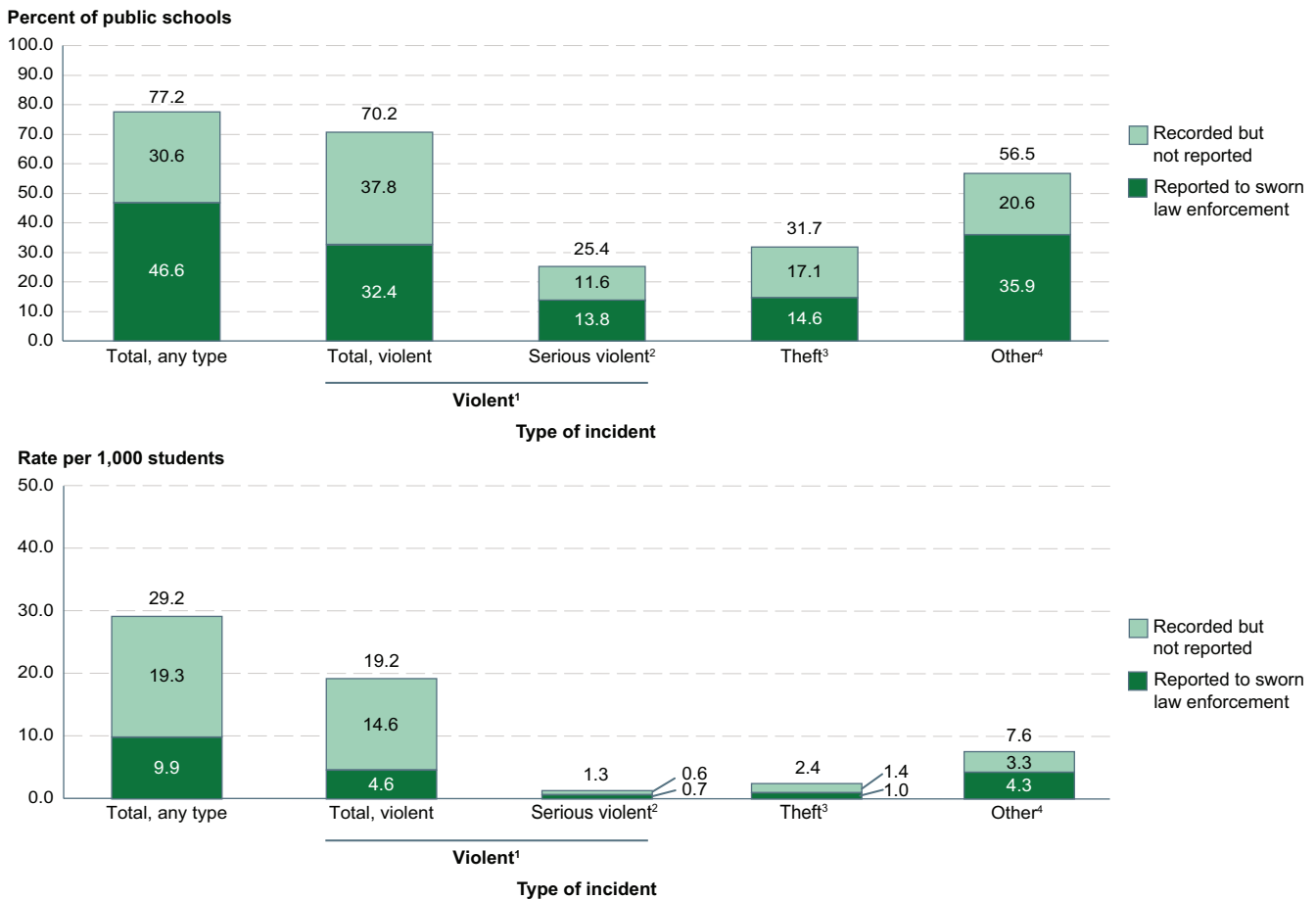
## Criminal Incidents Recorded by Public Schools and Those Reported to Sworn Law Enforcement

*Lower percentages of public schools in 2019–20 than in 2009–10 recorded one or more incidents of crime (77 vs. 85 percent) and reported one or more incidents of crime to sworn law enforcement (47 vs. 60 percent).*

The School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) asked public school principals to provide the number of incidents of crime that occurred at their school.<sup>1</sup> The most recent SSOCS data available are from the 2019-20 collection.<sup>2</sup> Incidents of crime include violent incidents,<sup>3</sup> serious violent incidents,<sup>4</sup> thefts of items valued at \$10 or greater without personal confrontation, and other incidents.<sup>5</sup> Public school principals were also asked to

provide the number of such incidents they reported to sworn law enforcement. This indicator presents the percentage of public schools that recorded one or more of these specified incidents, the total number of incidents recorded, and the rate of incidents per 1,000 students. These statistics are also presented for incidents that were reported to sworn law enforcement.

**Figure 1. Percentage of public schools recording one or more incidents of crime at school and rate of incidents per 1,000 students, by type of incident and whether the incident was reported to sworn law enforcement: School year 2019–20**



<sup>1</sup> "Violent incidents" include "serious violent" incidents (see footnote 2) as well as physical attacks or fights without a weapon and threat of physical attacks without a weapon.

<sup>2</sup> "Serious violent" incidents include rape or attempted rape, sexual assault other than rape, physical attacks or fights with a weapon, threat of physical attacks with a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.

<sup>3</sup> Theft or larceny is taking things worth over \$10 without personal confrontation.

<sup>4</sup> "Other incidents" include possession of a firearm or explosive device; possession of a knife or sharp object; distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs or alcohol; inappropriate distribution, possession, or use of prescription drugs; and vandalism.

NOTE: The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019–20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when interpreting 2019–20 estimates. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming). Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. "At school" was defined as including activities that happen in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities. Respondents were instructed to include incidents that occurred before, during, and after normal school hours or when school activities or events were in session. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding and because schools that recorded or reported more than one type of crime incident were counted only once in the total percentage of schools recording or reporting incidents.

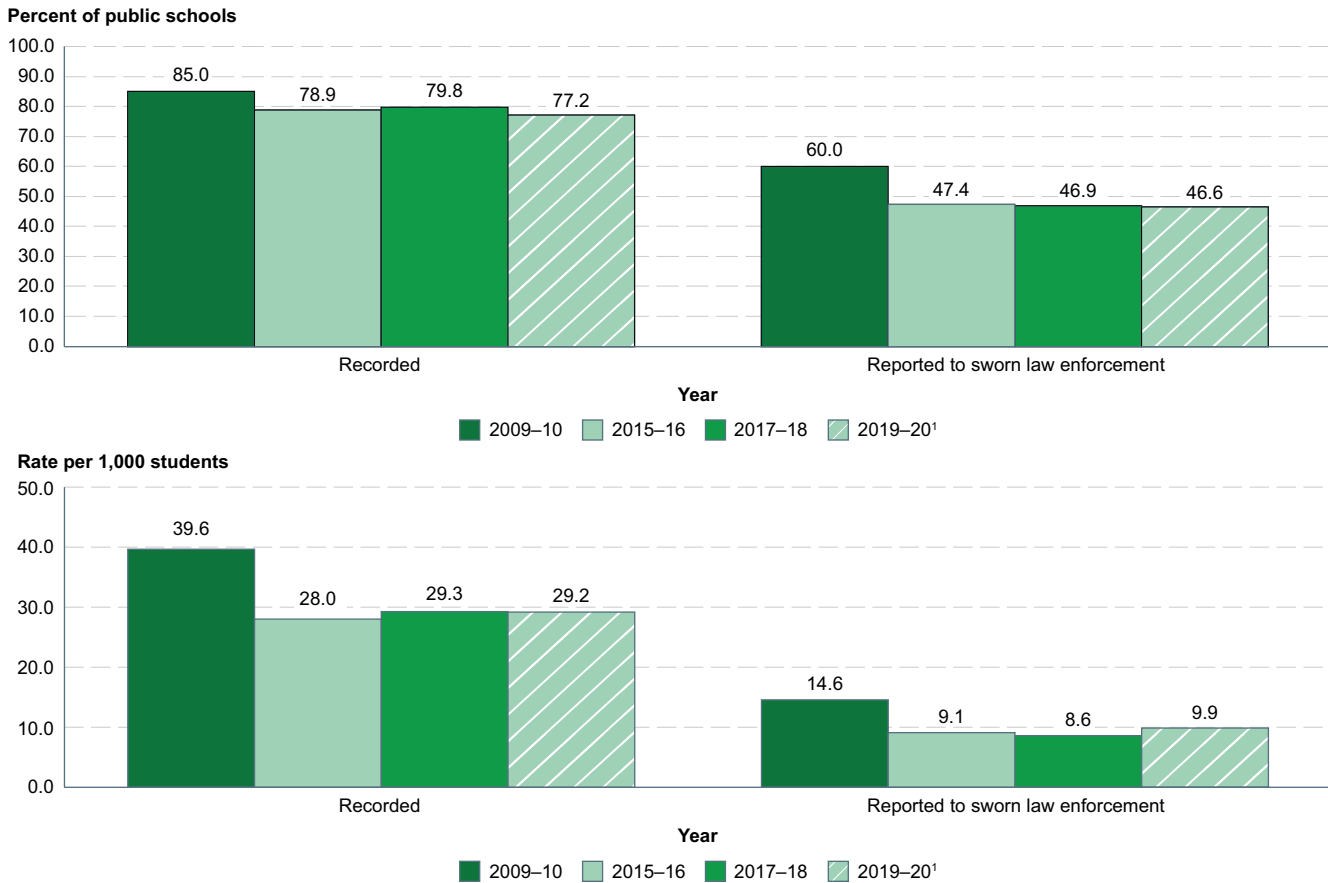
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 229.10 and 229.20.

During the 2019-20 school year, 77 percent of public schools recorded that one or more incidents of crime had taken place, amounting to 1.4 million incidents. This translates to a rate of 29 incidents per 1,000 students enrolled in 2019-20. Not all recorded incidents of crime were reported to sworn law enforcement. In 2019-20, some 47 percent of schools reported one or more incidents of crime to sworn law enforcement, amounting to 482,400 incidents, or 10 incidents per 1,000 students enrolled.

In 2019-20, across all types of incidents, the percentage of public schools that recorded one or more incidents was higher than the percentage that reported one or

more incidents to sworn law enforcement. For example, 70 percent of public schools recorded one or more violent incidents, whereas 32 percent reported one or more incidents to sworn law enforcement. The same was true for serious violent incidents (25 vs. 14 percent), thefts (32 vs. 15 percent), and other incidents (57 vs. 36 percent). In terms of rates, public schools recorded 19 violent incidents per 1,000 students and reported 5 violent incidents per 1,000 students to sworn law enforcement. There were 2 thefts per 1,000 students recorded, compared with 1 theft per 1,000 students reported. There were 8 other incidents per 1,000 students recorded, compared with 4 other incidents per 1,000 students reported.

**Figure 2. Percentage of public schools recording one or more incidents of crime at school, percentage reporting incidents to sworn law enforcement, and rate of incidents per 1,000 students: Selected years, 2009–10 through 2019–20**

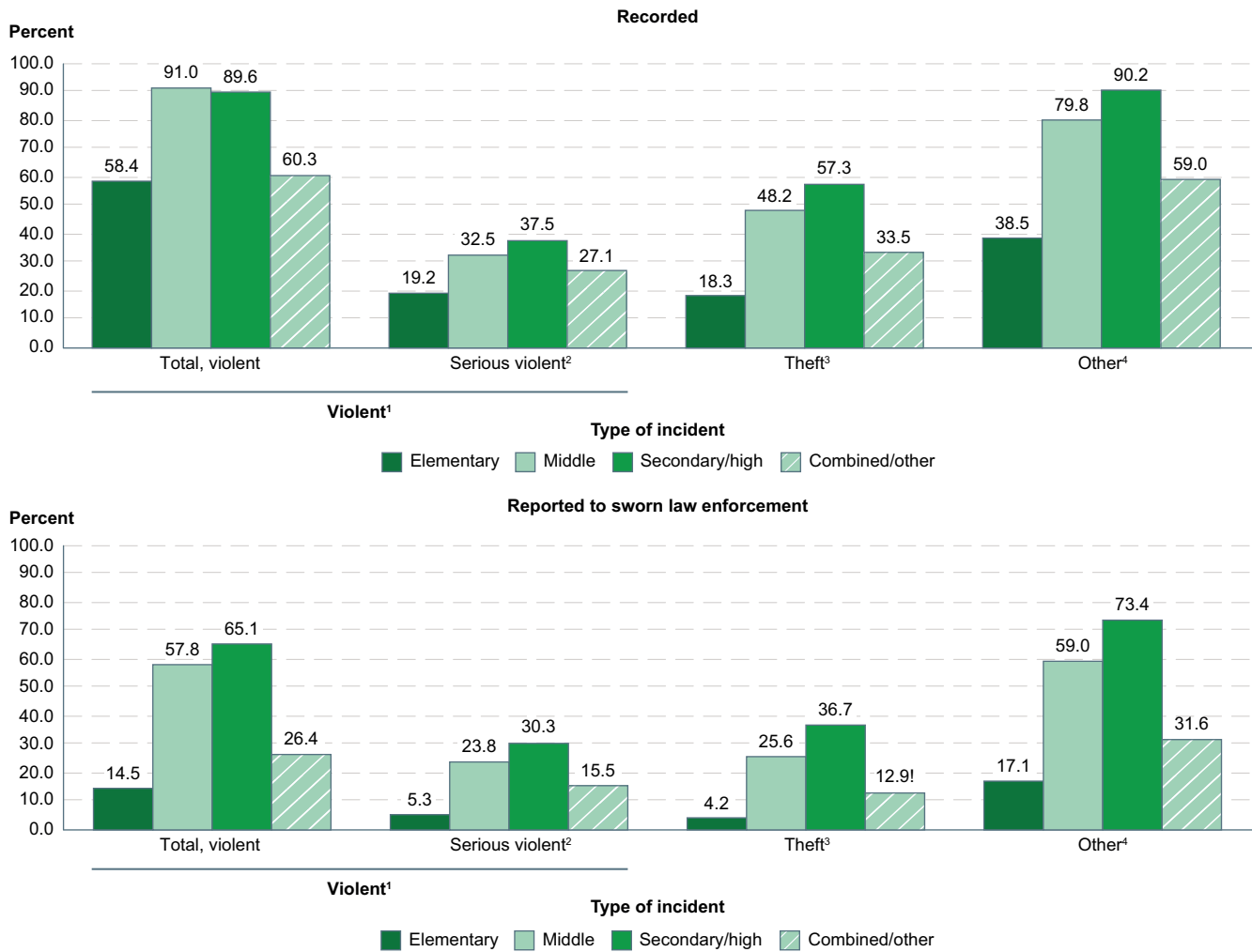


<sup>1</sup> The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019–20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when comparing 2019–20 estimates with those from earlier years. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming). NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. “At school” was defined as including activities that happen in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities. Respondents were instructed to include incidents that occurred before, during, and after normal school hours or when school activities or events were in session. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 229.10 and 229.20.

Lower percentages of public schools in 2019–20 than in 2009–10 recorded one or more incidents of crime (77 vs. 85 percent) and reported one or more incidents of crime to sworn law enforcement (47 vs. 60 percent). The same pattern can be observed for the rates of incidents per 1,000 students recorded by schools and reported to sworn law enforcement. Specifically, schools recorded an average of 29 incidents per 1,000 students in 2019–20, compared with 40 incidents per 1,000 students in 2009–10. Schools reported to sworn law enforcement an average of 10 incidents per 1,000 students in 2019–20, compared with 15 incidents per 1,000 students in 2009–10. More recently, there was no measurable difference between 2017–18 and 2019–20 in the percentages of public schools recording or reporting to sworn law enforcement one or more incidents of crime. Similarly, there was no measurable difference between these two years in the rate of incidents recorded by schools. However, the rate of incidents reported to sworn law enforcement was higher in 2019–20 than in 2017–18 (10 vs. 9 incidents per 1,000 students).

Although there were no measurable differences between 2017–18 and 2019–20 in the total percentages of public schools that recorded and reported any incidents of crime, there were some measurable differences between these two years for specific types of crimes. For instance, the percentage of schools that recorded serious violent incidents was higher in 2019–20 than in 2017–18 (25 vs. 21 percent). This increase was mostly driven by the increase in the percentages of schools that recorded incidents of physical attack or fight with a weapon (9 vs. 3 percent) and robbery without a weapon (6 vs. 3 percent). In addition, there was no measurable difference between 2019–20 and 2017–18 in the percentage of public schools recording incidents in the combined group of “other incidents.” Within this group, however, the percentage of schools recording incidents of possession of a knife or sharp object was lower in 2019–20 than in 2017–18 (32 vs. 38 percent), while the percentage of schools recording incidents of distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs was higher in 2019–20 than in 2017–18 (28 vs. 25 percent).

**Figure 3. Percentage of public schools recording one or more incidents of crime at school and percentage reporting incidents to sworn law enforcement, by school level: School year 2019–20**



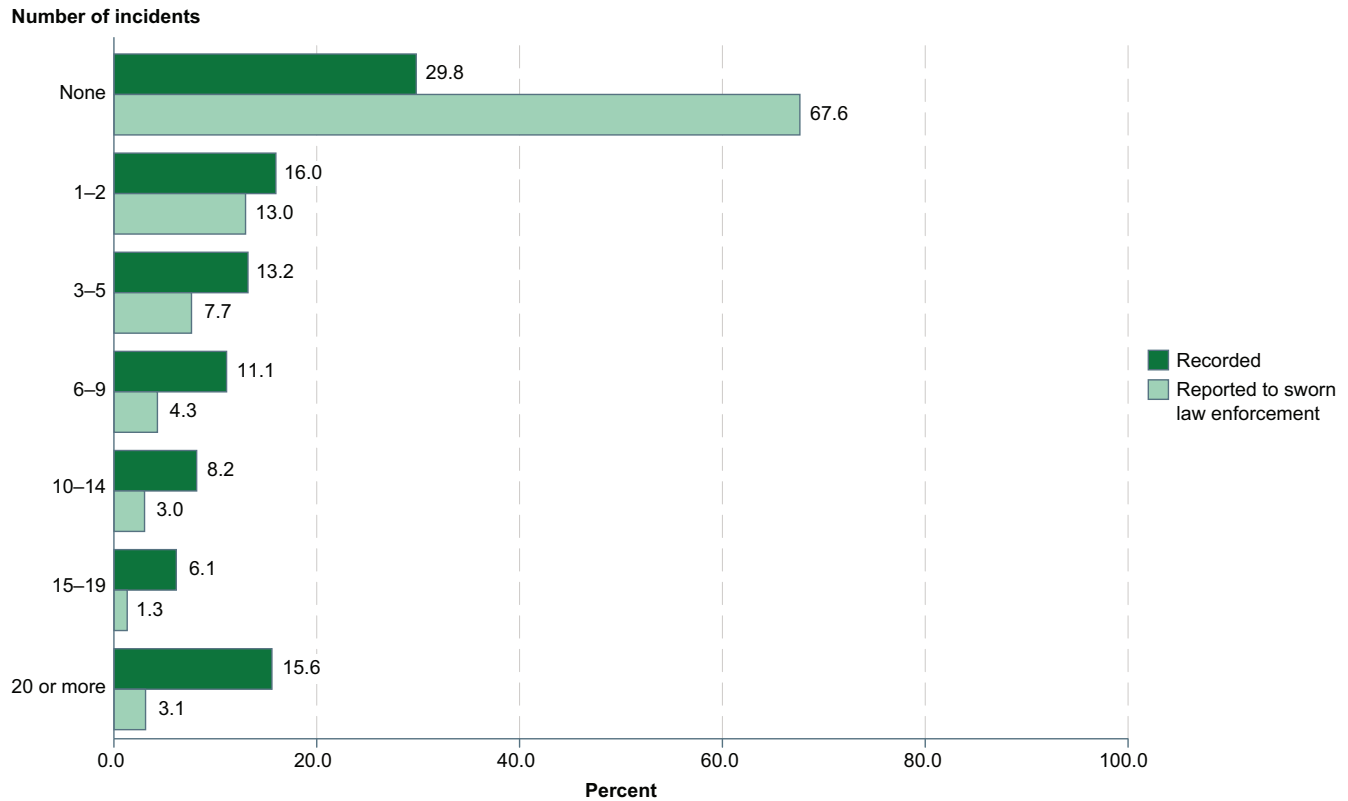
<sup>1</sup> "Violent incidents" include "serious violent" incidents (see footnote 2) as well as physical attacks or fights without a weapon and threat of physical attacks without a weapon.  
<sup>2</sup> "Serious violent" incidents include rape or attempted rape, sexual assault other than rape, physical attacks or fights with a weapon, threat of physical attacks with a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.  
<sup>3</sup> Theft or larceny is taking things worth over \$10 without personal confrontation.  
<sup>4</sup> "Other incidents" include possession of a firearm or explosive device; possession of a knife or sharp object; distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs or alcohol; inappropriate distribution, possession, or use of prescription drugs; and vandalism.  
 NOTE: The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019–20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when interpreting 2019–20 estimates. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming). Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. "At school" was defined as including activities that happen in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities. Respondents were instructed to include incidents that occurred before, during, and after normal school hours or when school activities or events were in session. Elementary schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades K through 4 than in higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 5 through 8 than in higher or lower grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools include all other combinations of grades, including K–12 schools.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 229.30 and 229.40.

In 2019–20, lower percentages of elementary schools than of middle schools and secondary/high schools recorded incidents of violent crime, serious violent crime, theft, and other crimes.<sup>6</sup> For instance, 58 percent of elementary schools recorded violent incidents, compared with 91 percent of middle schools and 90 percent of secondary/high schools.

incidents of violent crime, serious violent crime, theft, and other crimes to sworn law enforcement. In addition, the percentages were lower for middle schools than for secondary/high schools. For instance, 15 percent of elementary schools, 58 percent of middle schools, and 65 percent of secondary/high schools reported violent incidents to sworn law enforcement.

In 2019–20, lower percentages of elementary schools than of middle schools and secondary/high schools reported

**Figure 4. Percentage of public schools recording violent incidents and reporting violent incidents to sworn law enforcement, by number of incidents: School year 2019–20**



NOTE: The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019–20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when interpreting 2019–20 estimates. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming). Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. “Violent incidents” include rape or attempted rape, sexual assault other than rape, physical attacks or fights with a weapon, threat of physical attacks with a weapon, robbery with or without a weapon, physical attacks or fights without a weapon, and threat of physical attacks without a weapon. “At school” was defined for respondents as including activities that happen in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities. Respondents were instructed to include incidents that occurred before, during, or after normal school hours or when school activities or events were in session. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 229.50.

Public schools can also be categorized by the frequency of violent incidents recorded and reported. In 2019–20, about 30 percent of schools did not record any violent incidents, whereas 16 percent of schools recorded 20 or more violent incidents. Sixty-eight percent of schools did not report any violent incidents to sworn law enforcement, whereas 3 percent of schools reported 20 or more violent incidents to sworn law enforcement.

The percentage of public schools recording and reporting violent crimes at high frequency varied by school characteristics. For instance, a higher percentage of schools in cities recorded 20 or more violent incidents

in 2019–20 (24 percent), compared with schools in suburban areas (16 percent), towns (13 percent), and rural areas (8 percent). In addition, the percentage of schools recording 20 or more violent incidents was higher for those in suburban areas than in rural areas. The percentage of schools that recorded 20 or more violent incidents in 2019–20 was generally lower for schools where a smaller percentage of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL).<sup>7</sup> For instance, 8 percent of schools where 0 to 25 percent of the students were eligible for FRPL recorded 20 or more violent incidents, compared with 23 percent of schools where 76 percent or more of the students were eligible.

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> “At school” was defined for respondents as including activities that happen in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities. Respondents were instructed to include incidents that occurred before, during, or after normal school hours or when school activities or events were in session.

<sup>2</sup> The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019-20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when interpreting 2019-20 estimates and when making comparisons to those from earlier years. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019-20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> “Violent incidents” include serious violent incidents (see footnote 4) as well as physical attacks or fights without a weapon and threat of physical attacks without a weapon.

<sup>4</sup> “Serious violent incidents” include rape or attempted rape, sexual assault other than rape, physical attacks or fights with a

weapon, threat of physical attacks with a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.

<sup>5</sup> “Other incidents” include possession of a firearm or explosive device; possession of a knife or sharp object; distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs or alcohol; inappropriate distribution, possession, or use of prescription drugs; and vandalism.

<sup>6</sup> Elementary schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades K through 4 than in higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 5 through 8 than in higher or lower grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools, which are omitted from this discussion, include all other combinations of grades, including K-12 schools.

<sup>7</sup> The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) programs is a proxy measure for school poverty. For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCES blog post “[Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)”

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 229.10, 229.20, 229.30, 229.40, and 229.50

**Related indicators and resources:** [Incidence of Victimization at School and Away From School](#); [Marijuana Use and Illegal Drug Availability](#); [Physical Fights on School Property and Anywhere](#); [Prevalence of Victimization at School](#); [Students Carrying Weapons and Students’ Access to Firearms](#); [Students’ Use of Alcohol](#)

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**Glossary:** At school; Crime; Incident; Locale codes; Public school or institution; Serious violent incidents (Fast Response Survey System and School Survey on Crime and Safety); Theft/larceny (School Survey on Crime and Safety); Violent incidents (Fast Response Survey System and School Survey on Crime and Safety)