


# PRESS CONFERENCE: SCHOOL SAFETY

Friday, March 1, 2024 | 11:00 a.m.

# High-Level Timeline

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- X** **01.2023** WCPS Chief Safety & Academic Officer begins work to reexamine and strengthen MOU with law enforcement partners
  - X** **08.2023** New MOU with Worcester County Sheriff's Office Adopted by the Board of Education
  - X** **09.2023** Just 12 Days into the School Year, law enforcement officials send joint letter expressing grave concern regarding school safety
  - X** **10.2023 - 02.2024** Board of Education works collaboratively with law enforcement officials through a School Safety Task Force
  - X** **02.2024** Law enforcement officials call a press conference on school safety

# Let's set the record straight.

School systems do not report crime; law enforcement does. **The data attributed to WCPS here is student disciplinary referrals, not crime.**

A student disciplinary referral is simply when a student is referred to school administration for violating school rules or policies. Referrals can result in disciplinary actions according to our Guidelines for Safe & Supportive Schools (formerly the Code of Conduct).

A crime is a violation of the law, which can result in legal consequences.

## WORCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### CRIME DATA

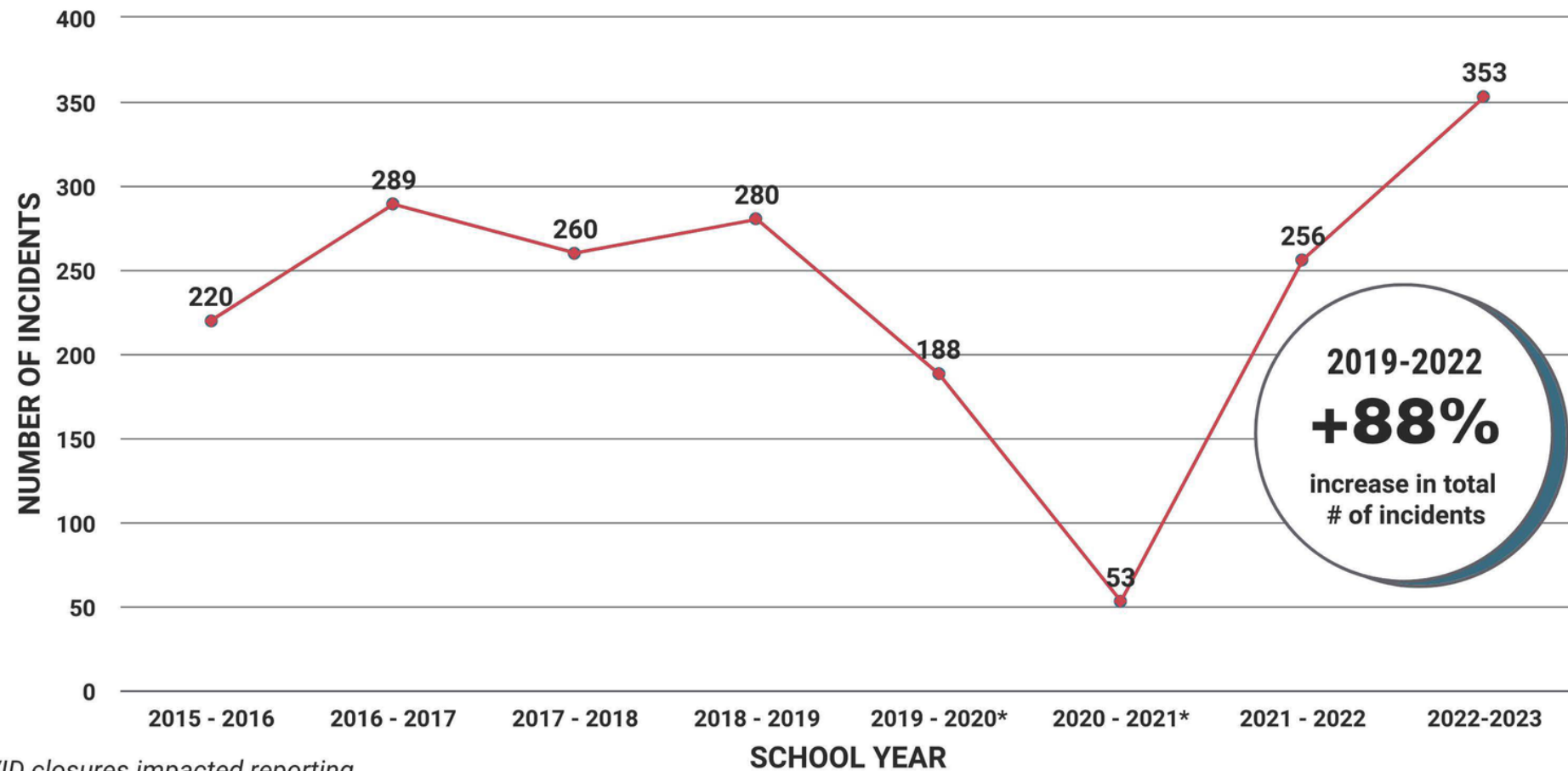
YEAR	PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON STAFF	PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON STUDENT	VERBAL THREATS AGAINST TEACHER	VERBAL THREATS AGAINST STUDENT	FIGHTING	FIREARMS	ARSON/FIRE	TOTALS
2015-2016	7	90	9	38	76	0	0	220
2016-2017	26	111	13	42	97	0	0	289
2017-2018	14	101	14	48	83	0	0	260
2018 - 2019	15	132	13	42	78	0	0	280
2019 - 2020*	8	95	4	34	41	0	6	188
2020 - 2021*	2	20	4	6	21	0	0	53
2021 - 2022	5	140	9	24	78	0	0	256
2022 - 2023	26	159	12	45	111	0	0	353

\*COVID closures impacted reporting

Source: Chief Safety & Academic Officer, Worcester County Public Schools

# Addressing Flawed Data

## WORCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2015-2022 ~~CRIME DATA~~



### INCIDENTS INCLUDE:

- Physical Attacks on Staff
- Physical Attacks on Student
- Verbal Threats against Teacher
- Verbal Threats against Student
- Fighting
- Firearms
- Arson/Fire

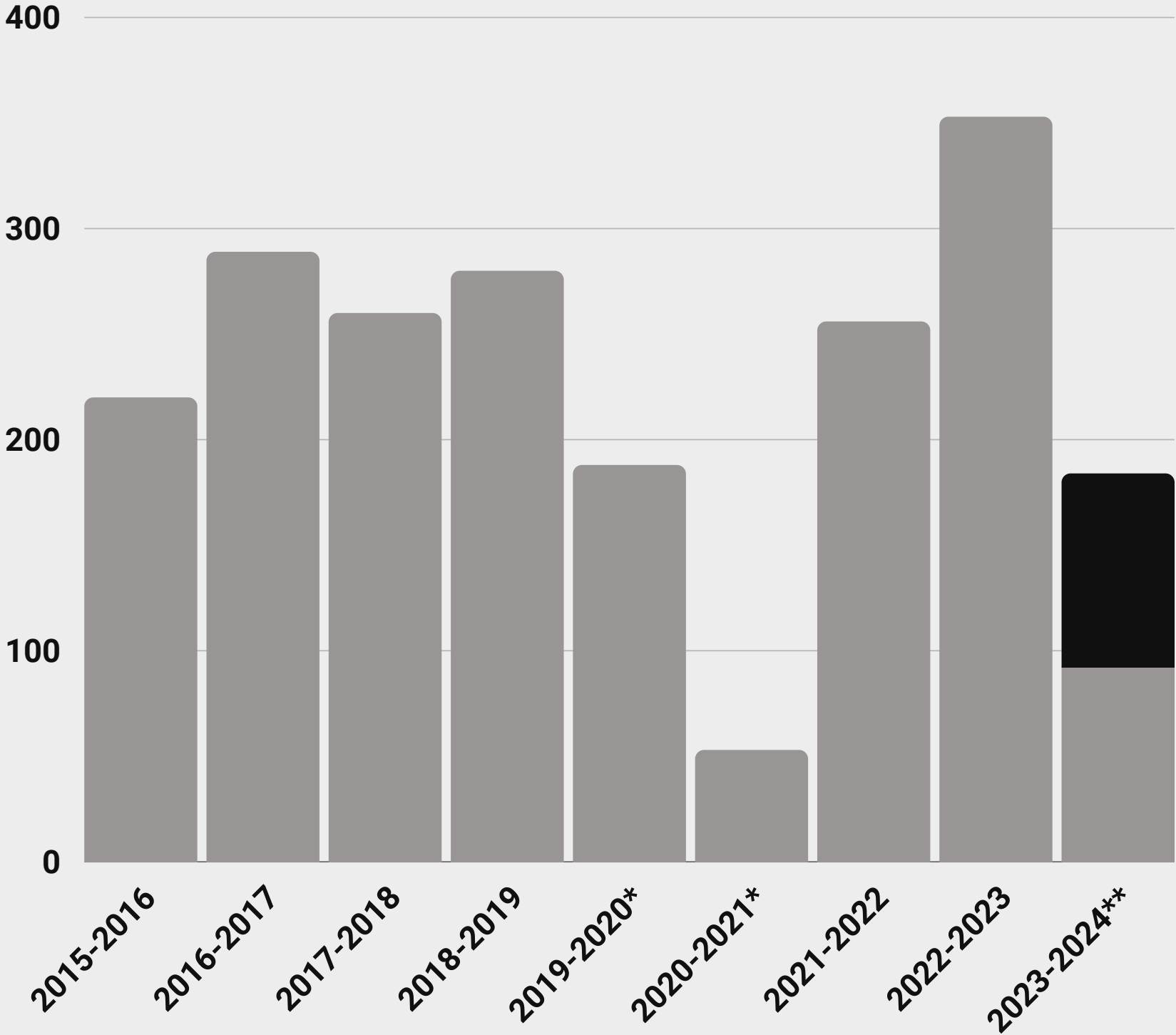
Source: Chief Safety & Academic Officer, Worcester County Public Schools

Again, this chart depicts student referrals, not crime, and **omits the provided current year data that predicts the lowest referrals on record for 23-24.**

The call-out of increasing incidents is calculated using the 2019-2020 school year, during which **schools were closed for fourth months during the pandemic.**

Additionally, law enforcement insinuates here that all of these categories are represented in the data; however, there are **no firearm referrals** in this data, and only one year that included Arson/fire referral data (2019-2020).

# WCPS STUDENT REFERRAL DATA



\*Data impacted by COVID

\*\*Six-month data doubled to predict school year trend.

# Accuracy. Transparency.

## WCPS Student Referral Data

*Let's note:*

- In 22-23, the school system placed a renewed focus on reporting, leading to this year-to-year increase.
- Current year data through January was doubled (black) to illustrate the predicted outcome for the year.

## ~~CRIME~~ IMPACT ON STUDENTS 2019-2022

**67%**



increase in PHYSICAL  
ATTACKS on students

**171%**



increase in FIGHTS at  
school

**32%**



increase in VERBAL  
THREATS against  
students

## ~~CRIME~~ IMPACT ON TEACHERS AND STAFF 2019-2022

**225%**

increase in physical  
attacks on staff



**200%**

increase in verbal  
threats against teachers



**171%**  
increase in fights at school



**MORE TEACHERS INJURED  
OR ASSAULTED WHILE  
BREAKING UP FIGHTS**

# Instilling Fear with False Comparisons

Law enforcement officials utilized 2019-2020 student referral data to calculate the above comparisons.

**As we all recall, schools were closed from mid-March through the end of the school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

# ~~CRIME~~ IMPACT ON STUDENTS

2019-2022

~~67%~~

20%



increase in PHYSICAL  
ATTACKS on students

~~171%~~

42%



increase in FIGHTS at  
school

~~32%~~

7%



increase in VERBAL  
THREATS against  
students

# ~~CRIME~~ IMPACT ON TEACHERS AND STAFF

2019-2022

73%

~~225%~~

increase in physical  
attacks on staff



8% **DECREASE**

~~200%~~

increase in verbal  
threats against teachers



42% ~~171%~~

increase in fights at school

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**MORE TEACHERS INJURED  
OR ASSAULTED WHILE  
BREAKING UP FIGHTS**

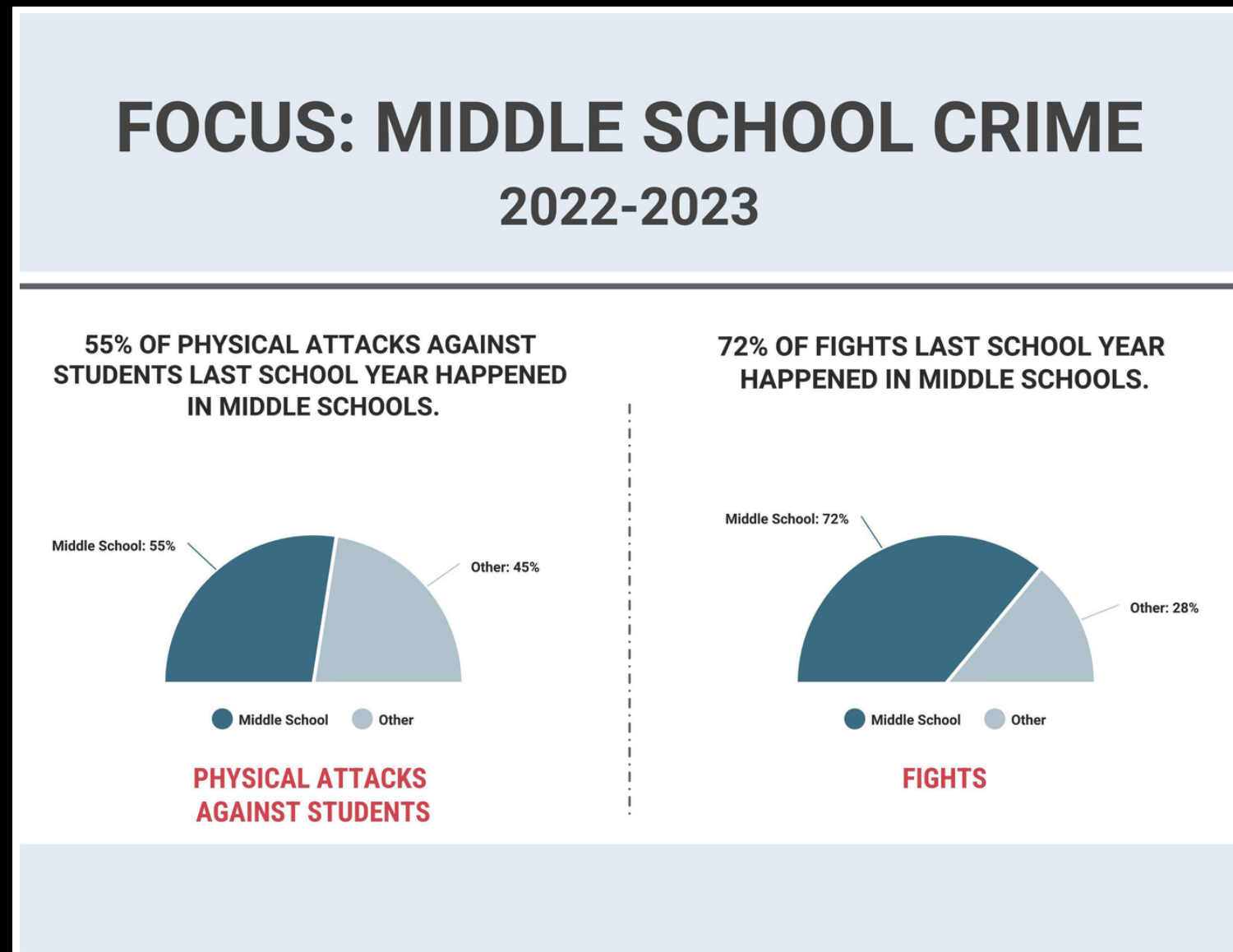
There is no data to  
support this claim.

## So, what's the truth?

Using the same methodology as law enforcement officials, we calculated the above using the 2018-2019 school year referral data as it was the last pre-pandemic full year of school.

# Middle School Discipline

We recognize that the middle school years can be some of the most challenging for our students, which is why it is a focus area for our school system. However, it is important to note that **this is not a new challenge** as the below slide makes it seem.



## MIDDLE SCHOOL REFERRALS: PHYSICAL ATTACK AGAINST STUDENTS

School Year	Percentage Occuring at Middle Schools (BIS, PMS, SHMS, SDMS)
15-16	53.3%
16-17	58.6%
17-18	79.2%
18-19	74.2%
19-20*	76.8%
20-21*	75.0%
21-22	52.1%
22-23	54.7%
23-24**	54.2%

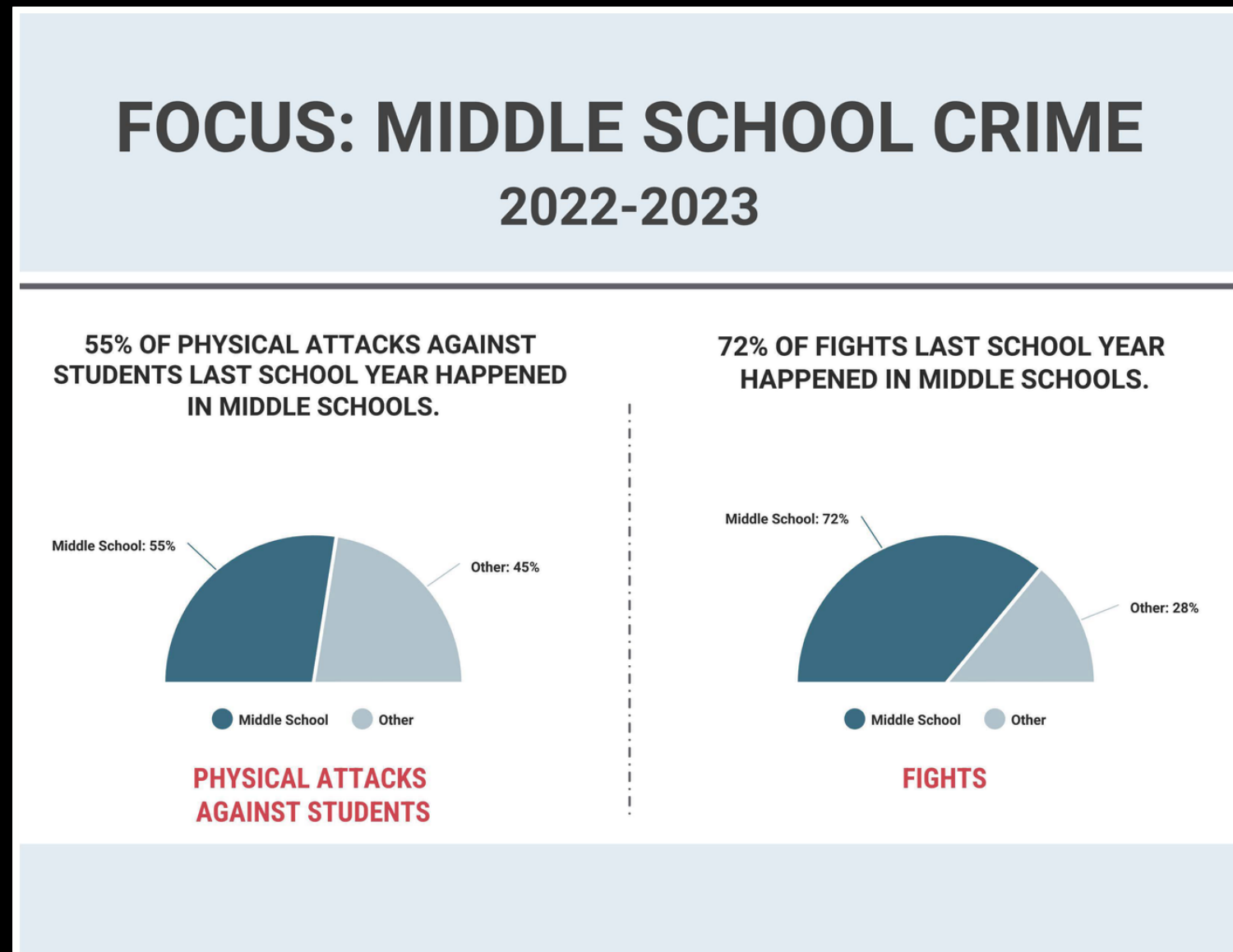
\*Data impacted by COVID

\*\*Based on Sept. 2023 - Jan. 2024 data



# Middle School Discipline

We recognize that the middle school years can be some of the most challenging for our students, which is why it is a focus area for our school system. However, it is important to note that **this is not a new challenge** as the below slide makes it seem.



## MIDDLE SCHOOL REFERRALS: FIGHTING

School Year	Percentage Occuring at Middle Schools (BIS, PMS, SHMS, SDMS)
15-16	52.6%
16-17	58.8%
17-18	47.0%
18-19	70.5%
19-20*	58.5%
20-21*	66.7%
21-22	74.4%
22-23	72.1%
23-24**	51.6%

\*Data impacted by COVID

\*\*Based on Sept. 2023 - Jan. 2024 data

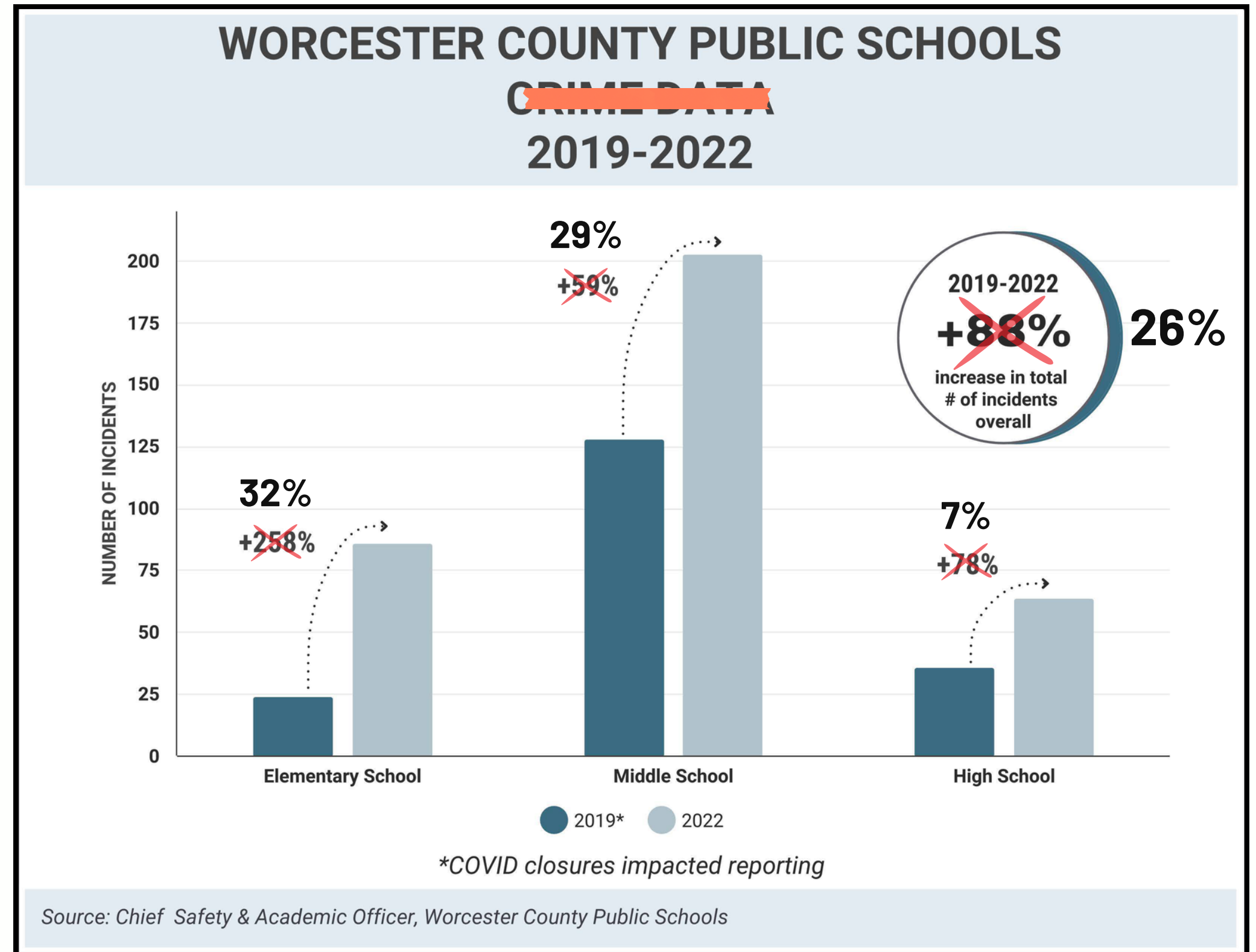
# Referrals on the Rise?

Law enforcement officials once again used pandemic-impacted student referral data (2019-2020) **to skew data to fit a false narrative.**

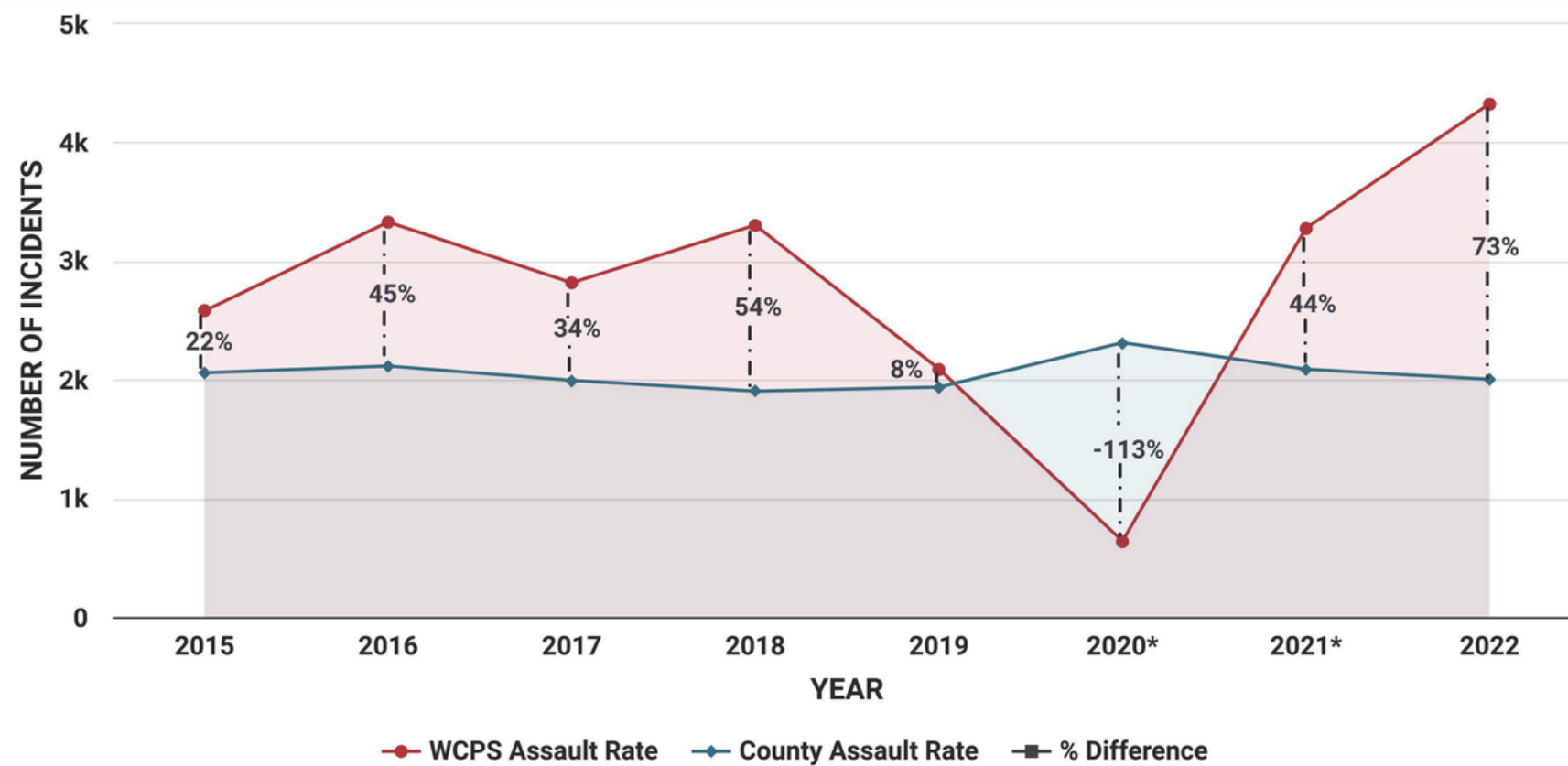
Using 2018-2019 data and law enforcement's same methodology, the numbers look more like this:

- Elementary school referrals increased **32%**
- Middle school referrals increased **29%**
- High school referrals increased **7%**
- Total referrals increased **26%**

Again, in 22-23 there was a renewed focus on reporting, leading to more referrals on file, but 23-24 projections show referrals declining significantly.



R [REDACTED] T:  
**WORCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
 VS. WORCESTER COUNTY**  
 2015-2022



\*COVID school closures impacted reporting

ASSAULT RATE INCLUDES: fighting, physical attacks, felony assault, simple assault, and arson per 100,000

Sources: Worcester County Public Schools Crime Data, FBI Uniform Crime Report & Worcester County Law Enforcement Crime Data

# “More Likely to Be Assaulted...”

The State’s Attorney and Sheriff made a bold claim on Tuesday, but as you can see, law enforcement is once again **deceiving the public by mislabeling student disciplinary referral data to create what they are labeling a “WCPS Assault Rate.”**

We also call for our law enforcement officials to make the data and methodology used to determine Worcester County’s rate of assault public.

# Board Actions on School Safety

## **OCTOBER: TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED**

Three members of the Board became members of the School Safety Task Force, a group that met seven times since its inception and worked for countless hours outside of formal meetings.

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## **SPECIAL BOARD MEETINGS**

The full Board of Education held seven special closed session meetings to discuss school safety in addition to the topic being included at regular board closed sessions as well.

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## **PROGRESS, THEN A STANDSTILL**

The Task Force and Board believed that the collaborative work was heading in a positive direction until the Board expressed concern over the inclusion of a video compilation of students.



# **Status of Law Enforcement Recommendations**

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<p><b>Create an executive-level dedicated position for Chief of School Safety and hire someone with substantial police administrative experience.</b></p>	Yes	Not Implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement acknowledged that this was entirely a decision of the Superintendent.</li> <li>• The Superintendent agreed to explore the creation of a new high-level position in cooperation with law enforcement, who said it would fully support the Board in obtaining funding for the position from the County Commissioners. Law enforcement worked directly with the Board and Superintendent to explore/obtain that funding.</li> <li>• When it became clear in December that for budgetary issues, funding would not be received mid-year, the Board continued to explore a similar type of position.</li> <li>• Law enforcement was advised that the Superintendent was actively working on a job description for the position and the general nature of that job description was shared with law enforcement.</li> <li>• The Board made these efforts in good faith strengthen the relationship with law enforcement.</li> </ul>

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<p><b>Create a sex offender registrant policy and protocols for school staff to control access to school grounds/attendance at school events/interactions with students, etc.</b></p>	Yes	Not Implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WCPS has an existing policy (Policy VII-D-06) on this subject matter. It was agreed by the Board to enhance this policy.</li> <li>• A revised procedure was presented to the Board in closed session on February 20, 2024.</li> <li>• Law enforcement was aware the Board had agreed to make this enhancement, and that it was coming to the Board on Feb. 20, for initial consideration.</li> </ul>

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<p><b>Establish and provide whistleblower protections for teachers and other school staff members who report crime or other information about school operations to appropriate authorities, to prevent retaliation by school administration/BOE.</b></p>	Yes	Not Implemented	<p>Law enforcement was previously advised of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This protection already exist in teachers' contracts (a copy of which was shared) and the Education Article of COMAR (state law)</li> <li>• The Education Advisory Committee meets with the principals monthly and concerns or complaints can be made anonymously</li> <li>• The Superintendent meets with the President of the Teachers Association leadership regularly and that and complaints/concerns can be presented anonymously</li> <li>• On January 17, 2024, the administration was all reminded of these protections at its monthly leadership meeting.</li> </ul>



# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<p><b>Increase parental notification of crime, disciplinary action, additional safety precautions, and other changes to student school day as a result of any incident at school/on school bus.</b></p>	Unknown	Not Implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Worcester County Safety Committee established a Communications subcommittee in spring 2023, which established guidelines and protocols around the communication of safety-related incidents. This subcommittee included the WCSO Public Information Officer. At the direction of the subcommittee, holding statements, graphics and other communications were developed, and all administration was provided direction on the new communication standards and protocols prior to the start of the 2023-2024 school year. Families were notified of the new communication protocols in Back to School packets.</li> <li>Through continued discussion with law enforcement, it was clear in certain instances communication could be improved by all parties and other outside agencies.</li> <li>Law enforcement was advised that the Executive Team was exploring what specific issues existed and whether better practices needed to be implemented.</li> </ul>

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<b>Implement weapons detection systems at each school.</b>	Unknown	Not Implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement was updated on this subject as recently as January 12, 2024.</li> <li>• It is also known by law enforcement that the Worcester County School Safety Committee has an established Weapons Detection Subcommittee, and last met on January 23, 2024.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Recommendations from this subcommittee that were presented to the Board of Education on Feb. 20, include:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continued focus on weapons detection systems with initial steps being the creation of a five-year strategic plan that includes root cause analysis.</li> <li>▪ Utilizing safety grant funding to install coating on exterior windows</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<b>Enact and enforce a policy prohibiting cell phone usage by students during school day.</b>	No	Not Implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement is correct that the Board decided not to accept its recommendation to prohibit cell phones.</li> <li>• The Board's reasoning, which was explained to law enforcement, supported staff's recommendation that families' desire to have their children have cell phones for access and safety outweighs law enforcement's existing concerns.</li> </ul>
<b>Harden targets, especially at schools with temporary/unusual classroom areas (e.g. no doors, no locks, outside trailers).</b>	Unknown	Not implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement is aware that the school system has applied for and received \$43,000 from the Maryland Center for School Safety with the specific task of assessing our schools to harden them as targets. The Worcester County Sheriff's Office has agreed to implement this work by September 2024.</li> <li>• It was further agreed that this would be part of the job description for the cabinet-level safety position. Law enforcement was previously so advised.</li> </ul>

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<p><b>Authorize frequent K9 scans and searches of each school at regular intervals throughout the school year, and take other proactive measures to increase school safety and enforce the law.</b></p>	Yes	Not Implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While this was an initial request of law enforcement, quickly it was resolved.</li> <li>• The Board agreed that the only law enforcement agency to conduct K-9 searches in schools would be the Sheriff's Office, and the Board requested that said searches be done as frequently as monthly.</li> <li>• The Sheriff's office agreed, and this was communicated to the Task Force by the Sheriff's Chief Deputy; however, to date only the following K9 searches have occurred:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ October 18, 2023, October 26, 2023, and January 16, 2024</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<b>Partner with SRDs to trespass any disorderly individuals from school/school property pursuant to ED 26-102.</b>	Unknown	Not Implemented	Consistent discussion has taken place between the agencies on this issue, and the Board has explained to law enforcement their reservations on the effects of trespassing students. The Board would still be required to meet the educational needs under the existing law to students that were trespassed.

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<p><b>Make public statement committing to serious improvements in policies regarding parental notification of crime, disciplinary action, additional safety precautions, and other changes to student school day as a result of any incident at school/on school bus.</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Not Implemented</p>	<p>The Board agreed to participate in three joint presentations that would be made to the public in late February. Work was to begin on the joint presentation in the last weeks of January by all three agencies. The planning of these presentations fell apart as a result of law enforcement's desire to show a video compilation of student behavior.</p> <p>The Board has made it clear that it believes a joint presentation by all three agencies would be far more effective than any other presentation and requested that law enforcement continue to try and work towards a joint presentation. The Board was surprised to learn of Tuesday's press conference.</p>

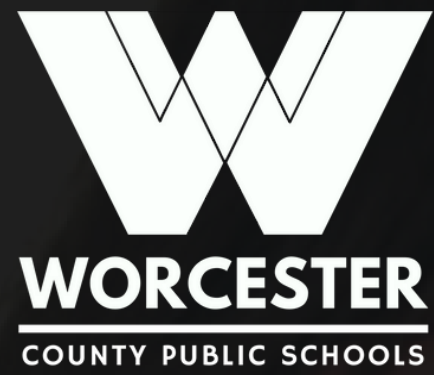
# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<b>Send survey to parents, teachers and bus contractors about school safety concerns to proactively capture additional safety issues requiring solutions.</b>	Yes	Not Implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This topic initially was discussed following law enforcement's presentation to the Board in October; however, all three agencies were considering a method of sending a survey and the manner on how best to formulate survey questions.</li> <li>• Law enforcement was provided a survey that already existed completed by all teachers and students that included school safety questions. Further discussion needed to continue.</li> </ul>
<b>Discipline staff who fail to report criminal misconduct or delinquent acts.</b>	Unknown	Not implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement was advised that there is existing policy in place that addresses misconduct by staff and provided said policy.</li> <li>• Law enforcement was further advised that that Board was unaware of an instance of an alleged violation of the MOU since their initial presentation in October.</li> <li>• As recent as January, law enforcement affirmed that progress has been made; relationships had been repaired; and while it wanted to see continued forward progress, "things were going better."</li> </ul>

# Recommendation Status

	Law Enforcement's Presentation		Board of Education
	"BOE Agree to Implement"	"Current Status"	Actions Taken / Response
<p><b>Partner with other BOEs to advocate for changes to state law restricting student discipline so that schools have more tools at their disposal.</b></p>	Unknown	Not Implemented	<p>This was not originally requested by law enforcement, rather has its genesis after the Board arranged for law enforcement to meet with a subject-matter expert of school law as recent as January 12 to discuss the hurdles and obstacles that exist and are frustrating school discipline for all agencies.</p> <p>The Board had hoped to have continued discussions with law enforcement as to what legislative initiatives should be taken up.</p>





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