



Pennsylvania
**Commission on Crime
and Delinquency**



Pennsylvania
**Office of the
Safe Schools Advocate**

2024 - 25

Office of Safe Schools Advocate

ANNUAL REPORT

Office of Safe Schools Advocate (OSSA)

Annual Report

School Term 2024-2025

The Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949 was amended in 2011 to provide for the Office of Safe Schools Advocate (OSSA) to fall under the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). The statute was amended again in the 2023-2024 fiscal year to provide a clearer definition of "victim" in this section of statute and further develop the role of OSSA in working with the School District of Philadelphia (District) and its incident data.

OSSA is housed in the District and works to provide support to students who are victims of violence during the school day and while traversing to and from school. This is done by supporting victims and their families in the navigation of District policies and procedures and following the statute set forth in [Section 1320-B of the PA Public School Code](#).

Under state law, OSSA is required to prepare an annual report regarding the activities of the Office during the prior fiscal year and suggest recommendations for remedial legislation, regulations, or school district administrative reforms.

Overview

In 2024-25, the OSSA expanded supports for School Safety Officers and Police Officers who assist student victims, families and colleagues impacted by violence related trauma on or near school property.

Strengthening Capacity

- **New Staff:** In July 2025, OSSA hired Daphne James-Riggins as the Victim Services Specialist. Daphne brings extensive experience as a former New York City (NYC) Police Officer serving in NYC schools.
- **Training and Support for Officers:** OSSA and the Philadelphia Office of School Safety facilitated three support sessions during the 2024-25 school term to assist School Safety Officers and Philadelphia Police Officers following traumatic events. These sessions provided space to share experiences, receive support and connect with resources.
- **School Safety Officer Training:** In collaboration with the Philadelphia School District Victim Assistance Specialist, OSSA trained three new classes of Safety Officers (27 officers total). The training introduced OSSA's role and resources, highlighted the Victims Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP),

and emphasized accurate reporting practices into the Serious Incident System (SIS).

School and Community Engagement

- **School Visits:** OSSA staff visited 15 schools in West Philadelphia, meeting with Principals, Assistant Principals, and School Climate and Safety Officers. Posters and brochures were provided to each school. The visits resumed in September 2025 with the goal of visiting all of the 224 schools by December 2026.
- **Community Outreach:** OSSA participated in three community outreach events, each reaching approximately 100-150 people, and provided OSSA brochures and posters at two Recreation Centers. OSSA also shared posters and materials with community-based victim service providers to formalize referral pathways.
- **Law Enforcement Connections:** OSSA distributed information to the Victim Assistance Officers in all Philadelphia Police Department Districts, including Homicide and Special Victims, and established new points of contact for parents of victims and staff when they need to file police reports within a designated police district.

Ongoing Collaboration

- OSSA meets monthly with the District's Chief of School Safety focused on addressing challenges, identify training opportunities, and strengthening protocols for the school term.
- OSSA also meets monthly with the Office of Social Responsibilities Restorative Discipline Liaison/Hearing officers to discuss cases and ensure that OSSA is able to support the victims and families following the Victim Meeting, including ensuring safety plans are in place for victims.

OSSA Victim Advocacy and Support

In 2024-25, OSSA provided direct assistance through:

- **129** victim meetings attended
- **334** information & referral services provided
- **235** letters mailed to victims/families on OSSA services
- **2** trauma-informed restorative healing circles for school safety officers and local law enforcement following critical incidents
- **3** school crisis responses at schools following student homicide deaths to provide support to staff and students, in coordination with the District's Victim Assistance Specialist and other community- and system-based victim service providers

2024-25 Student Enrollment

As of October 1, 2024, overall enrollment in Philadelphia public schools was 198,299 students¹. Please note that this locally collected data may differ from the data collected through the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

- 117,956 students were enrolled in District and Alternative schools.
 - 114,529 students were enrolled in District schools.
 - 3,427 students were enrolled in Alternative schools.
- 63,964 students were enrolled in Philadelphia Charter schools.
- 14,252 students were enrolled in Cyber Charter schools.
- 2,127 students were enrolled in other school categories (Schools that are Non-Philadelphia Charters, Non-Public Special Education schools, or Intermediate Unit #26 (IU26) schools).

From 2014-15 to 2024-25:

- District school enrollment decreased by 12.0% (15,546 fewer students).
- Alternative school enrollment increased by 3.1% (103 more students).
- Philadelphia Charter school enrollment decreased by 0.5% (337 fewer students).
- Cyber Charter school enrollment increased by over 2500% (13,705 more students).

¹ [Philadelphia Public School Enrollment, 2014-15 to 2024-25](#)

Incident Reporting

In December 2023, the Pennsylvania Public School Code was amended to relocate OSSA to [Section 1320-B](#). These amendments updated OSSA's statutory responsibilities and established new incident reporting and data-sharing requirements for school districts.

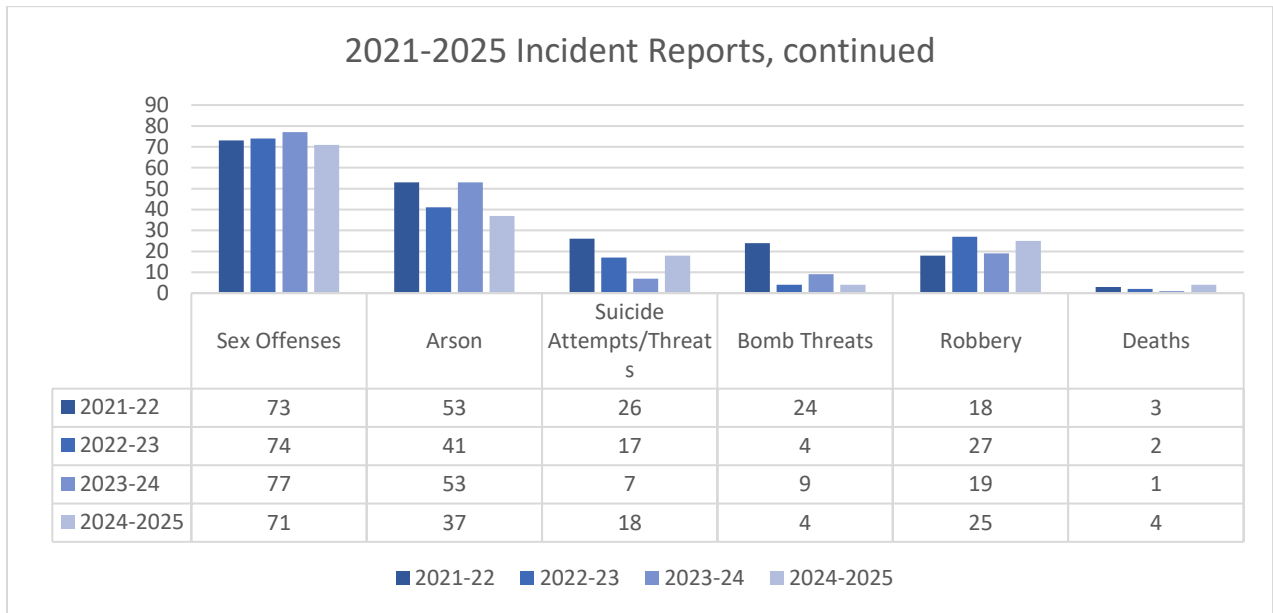
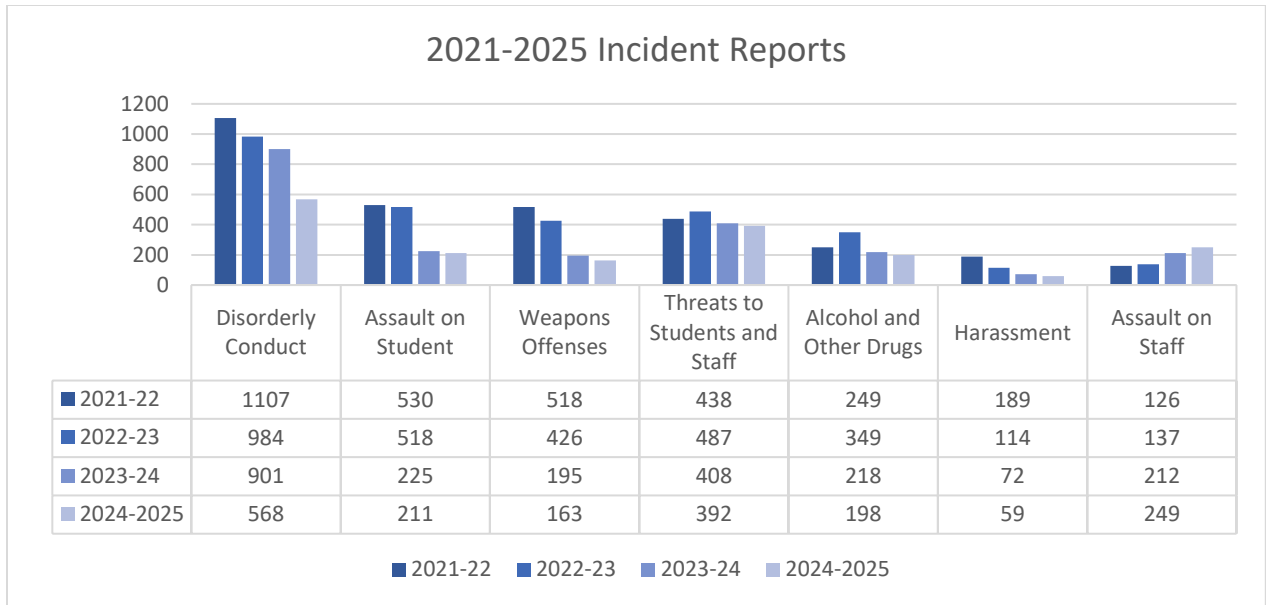
OSSA continues to work with the District to update reporting procedures to ensure the consistent capture of incidents as listed in Section 1319-B of the PA Public School Code, including, but not limited to, the following categories:

- Acts of violence
- Criminal homicide
- Simple and aggravated assault
- Rape and statutory sexual assault
- Involuntary deviate sexual intercourse
- Sexual assault and indecent assault (including aggravated indecent assault)
- Arson and related offenses
- Robbery and robbery of a motor vehicle
- Possession of a weapon
- Possession, use, or sale of controlled substances on school property
- Possession, use, or sale of alcohol or tobacco by any person on school property

Because OSSA continues to work with the District on their reporting procedures, incident data for the 2024–2025 school year reflects reporting practices consistent with prior years. As a result, the data should be interpreted in that context.

The charts below present a four-year trend analysis. Overall, the data show a continued decline in reported incidents related to violence and other school safety concerns. With the exception of Assaults on Staff, Robbery, and Suicides/Threats, reported incidents across all other categories decreased during this period.

Incidents listed by category with totals:



Overall Reported Incidents:

School Year	Total Incidents
2021-22	3,361
2022-23	3,191
2023-24	2,411
2024-25	1,999

This represents an overall decrease of approximately 40% from 2021-22 to 2024-25

Bullying Data

The School District of Philadelphia continues to experience challenges in collecting comprehensive bullying data due to reporting and response activities that occur across multiple departments, with limited coordination and data sharing. The Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (OSRR) operates an online reporting platform, which allows any individual to submit a bullying report. OSRR is responsible for reviewing these reports and taking appropriate investigative and intervention actions. However, the data captured through that online reporting platform differs from the information provided to OSA through the district’s IT systems, resulting in inconsistencies across data sources.

Despite these limitations, district data indicate a decline in overall bullying and harassment/discrimination complaints, decreasing from 1,269 in the 2023–24 school year to 1,042 in 2024–25. This includes reductions in both founded and unfounded reports.²

A single complaint may result in multiple findings—for example, both bullying and harassment—while other complaints may result in only one finding. As a result, the total number of complaints (founded vs. unfounded) will not necessarily equal the total number of complaints received.

2024-25 School Year	2023-24 School Year
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullying founded: 215• Bullying unfounded: 616• Harassment/discrimination founded: 308• Harassment/discrimination unfounded: 511• Total number of complaints: 1,042	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullying founded: 335• Bullying unfounded: 810• Harassment/discrimination founded: 422• Harassment/discrimination unfounded: 718• Total number of complaints: 1,269

Incidents reported to the district’s IT system are submitted through schools’ serious incident reports. When completing these reports, principals and safety officers typically identify only the most serious offense associated with an incident. As a result, bullying behavior may be underreported or categorized under a different offense. Although training and guidance are available to staff on incident reporting requirements, inconsistencies in how incidents are recorded continue to occur.

² [Bullying Harassment | The School District of Philadelphia](#)

Truancy

In the 2024-25 school year, the Philadelphia School District reported 60,364 students as habitually truant—highest among 9th graders and lowest among 12th graders. Under Pennsylvania law, students with three unexcused absences are considered “truant,” and students with six or more are “habitually truant.” The district also considers students with 10 or more unexcused absences as “chronically truant.” The District’s truancy process focuses on providing support and avoiding unnecessary involvement in truancy court or the child welfare system.

Truancy rates by gender

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Student Count</i>	<i>Truancy Rate</i>
<i>Female</i>	<i>29,073</i>	<i>48.16%</i>
<i>Male</i>	<i>31,291</i>	<i>51.83%</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>60,364</i>	<i>99.99%</i>

High School truancy rates

<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Student Count</i>	<i>Truancy Rate</i>
<i>9th (overall highest truancy level K-12)</i>	<i>6,181</i>	<i>10.23%</i>
<i>10th</i>	<i>5,576</i>	<i>9.23%</i>
<i>11th</i>	<i>4,950</i>	<i>8.20%</i>
<i>12th (overall lowest truancy level K-12)</i>	<i>2,820</i>	<i>4.67%</i>
<i>High School Truancy Rates</i>	<i>Total: 19,527</i>	<i>32.34% of 60,364 total truancy count</i>

Truancy and Trauma

Research highlights a clear connection between trauma, victimization, and school absenteeism. Cardwell et al. (2020) and Henry & Huizinga (2007) find that victimization experiences can weaken a student’s social connection to school, increasing the likelihood of truancy or engagement in risky behaviors. School-based victimization—including bullying—has been shown to reduce students’ sense of safety and attachment to school (Cardwell et al., 2020). Additional studies (Gastic, 2008; Vaillancourt et al., 2013; Baker & Pelfrey, 2016) note that students may avoid school as a way to reduce further victimization.

In practice, this can lead younger students to feign illness and older students to cut classes, disengage, or even drop out in an effort to stay safe. Understanding these trauma-related patterns can help identify students who may benefit from the services and supports offered by the Office of the Safe Schools Advocate.

Language Access

As of October 1, 2024, Spanish was the most common non-English language spoken at home, as reported by families of students in District schools. The number of District students whose families reported that they speak Portuguese at home has increased rapidly since the 2021-22 school year, surpassing the number of Mandarin Chinese speakers as the second most common non-English language spoken at home in 2024-25.

OSSA is equipped to serve students and or parents that may have language barriers through the use of interpretation services. These services will allow for our staff to provide support as well as direct the families to other services and support as needed.

School Climate

The district provides a [safe school climate and culture](#) for their students and faculty through the implementation of various practices throughout the schools to create and maintain learning environments that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive.

Examples of the various practices include:

- **School-Based Youth Court**

Youth court is a student-run restorative justice program that gives students who have made a poor choice an opportunity to improve their behavior without punitive or exclusionary measures like suspension. Youth Court is run by a group of students that will find a way to help other students become responsible for their behavior and make better choices in the future. The goal of youth court is to help students take responsibility and teach strategies for students to become more successful.

- **Relationships First**

Relationships First is a schoolwide restorative justice-practices program. Relationships First combines a human-centered philosophy with a set of practices that align with the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework. Relationships First operates in 40 of the 224 schools within the district.

- **Students**

A school community using the Relationships First model breathes restoration and uplifts individuals through empathy and healing. RF schools have an atmosphere of intentional peace-making. Students use their agency to transform their schools for positive outcomes.

- **Caregivers**

The RF tools used within schools, like Restorative Conversations, apply to how we think about interactions outside school as well. A core principle of RF asks practitioners to speak and listen from the heart, meaning to be open and authentic. One of the ways that is demonstrated is by fully sharing the RF model with the community with district-level contacts and sharing resources. Caregivers are encouraged to actively participate in the school culture and climate by doing heart work at home.

- **Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (CR-PBIS)**

Culturally Responsive PBIS (CR-PBIS) is a proactive, evidence-based framework that supports positive school climate through clear behavioral norms, inclusive practices, and a strong emphasis on social-emotional learning. It centers student, family, staff, and community voice to create positive, safe, equitable environments where everyone can thrive.

Climate surveys are administered by the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities and collected via the Student Well-Being Survey (SWBS) that is completed three times throughout the year. This survey asks students to answer questions regarding their feelings and experiences about their relationships with peers and adults in their schools.

The 2024-25 School Year

Three SWBSs were completed at the time of this publication. The table on the following pages highlight some key findings from these surveys.

Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
RELATIONSHIP SCORES		
<p>Positive Adult Relationships</p> <p>83.8% of students felt they had positive experiences with adult staff</p>	<p>Positive Adult Relationships</p> <p>84.5% of students felt they had positive experiences with adult staff</p>	<p>Positive Adult Relationships</p> <p>84.1% of students felt they had positive experiences with adult staff</p>
<p>Positive Peer Relationships</p> <p>71.6% of students felt they had positive experiences with at least one other student</p>	<p>Positive Peer Relationships</p> <p>71.4% of students felt they had positive experiences with at least one other student</p>	<p>Positive Peer Relationships</p> <p>69.8% of students felt they had positive experiences with at least one other student</p>
<p>Positive Self-Development</p> <p>76.2% of students felt they learned the skills to manage their emotions and feelings</p>	<p>Positive Self-Development</p> <p>77% of students felt they learned the skills to manage their emotions and feelings</p>	<p>Positive Self-Development</p> <p>76.3% of students felt they learned the skills to manage their emotions and feelings</p>

FOCUS ON EQUITY		
<p>Equity Indicator: <i>Removing barriers and increasing access & inclusion</i></p> <p>78.2% of students reported they strongly agree or agree in school, they learn how to deal with their feelings in a healthy way.</p> <p>88.8% of students reported they strongly agree or agree that adults at their school accept them for how they look, dress, talk and act</p>	<p>Equity Indicator: <i>Removing barriers and increasing access & inclusion</i></p> <p>76.8% of students reported they strongly agree or agree in school, they learn how to deal with their feelings in a healthy way.</p> <p>88.5% of students reported they strongly agree or agree that adults at their school accept them for how they look, dress, talk and act</p>	<p>Equity Indicator: <i>Removing barriers and increasing access & inclusion</i></p> <p>78.4% of students reported they strongly agree or agree in school, they learn how to deal with their feelings in a healthy way.</p> <p>88.1% of students reported they strongly agree or agree that adults at their school accept them for how they look, dress, talk and act</p>
<p>Equity Indicator: Building trusting relationships</p> <p>85.6% of students agree or strongly agree that adults from their school really try to get to know them.</p> <p>77.1% of students agree or strongly agree that students say nice things to them.</p>	<p>Equity Indicator: Building Trusting Relationships</p> <p>82.3% of students agree or strongly agree that adults from their school really try to get to know them.</p> <p>77.1% of students agree or strongly agree that students say nice things to them.</p>	<p>Equity Indicator: Building Trusting Relationships</p> <p>82% of students agree or strongly agree that adults from their school really try to get to know them.</p> <p>74.9% of students agree or strongly agree that students say nice things to them.</p>
<p>Equity Indicator: Creating a Shared Culture of Responsibility</p> <p>88% of students agree or strongly agree that adults at their school show that they care about them.</p> <p>74.2% of students agree or strongly agree that other students show they care about them.</p>	<p>Equity Indicator: Creating a Shared Culture of Responsibility</p> <p>88.4% of students agree or strongly agree that adults at their school show that they care about them.</p> <p>74.8% of students agree or strongly agree that other students show they care about them</p>	<p>Equity Indicator: Creating a Shared Culture of Responsibility</p> <p>87.8% of students agree or strongly agree that adults at their school show that they care about them.</p> <p>73.9% of students agree or strongly agree that other students show they care about them</p>

PARTICIPATION RATE		
District-wide participation rate: 79.7%	District-wide participation rate: 77%	District-wide participation rate: 72.8%
Participation by Grade Band:	**Data not available	Participation by Grade Band:
Grades 3-5: 90.5%		Grades 3-5: 90.1%
Grades 6-8: 86.4%		Grades 6-8: 82.7%
Grades 9-12: 67.3%		Grades 9-12: 52.8%

To find out more information about how this survey is collected, the questions asked, and how the outcomes are being utilized as actionable items, visit the [School Climate and Culture](#) page of the School District of Philadelphia’s website

OSSA Recommendations:

- The School District of Philadelphia should continue to work with the OSSA to ensure its incident reporting system and related procedures align with the amended Pennsylvania Public School Code, Section 1319-B. This includes revising data collection fields, reporting categories, and guidance to ensure all statutorily required incidents are consistently captured and accurately reported.
- The District should consider enhancing its incident reporting guidance and system functionality to encourage the consistent identification of bullying-related behaviors, even when a more serious offense is reported. Additional clarification or targeted refresher training for principals and safety officers may help promote more uniform documentation and reduce inconsistencies in how incidents are recorded.
- The District should consider developing and implementing a voluntary, trauma-informed screening and referral process into its response to students identified as habitually truant. When a student meets the threshold of habitually truant, the District may benefit from exploring whether adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or prior victimization or other trauma-related factors may be contributing to attendance concerns and connect the student to appropriate school-based or community-based supports.