Weapons at Connecticut Public Schools: An Examination of Motives and Prevention Methods
2024

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Introduction

One of the primary reasons for conducting this study is to understand why students bring weapons to K-12 schools in the state of Connecticut. Another research goal was to identify ways to reduce weapon incidents in schools. Otte (2023) highlighted that for the school year 2021-2022, the incidents of students being caught with weapons at Connecticut schools reached the highest level since 2009. Moreover, according to the most recent data, that number has grown from 1,298 in the 2021-2022 school year to 1,432 in the 2022-2023 school year (EdSight, 2023). The concept of weapons in the K-12 schools in Connecticut raises many concerns for parents, educators, and school safety professionals. This research provides a first step to understanding what is happening in CT schools and exploring approaches that have successfully reduced it.

Background

In 2022, Connecticut had 514,000 students enrolled in 1,535 public schools and programs dispersed through 201 districts (EdSight, 2023). The number includes special schools, technical schools, charter schools, religious schools, and all others listed with the State Department of Education. The student-to-teacher ratio in Connecticut is roughly 12 to 1, which is better than the national average of 16 students per teacher. Generally, most towns or cities manage their public schools. There are 169 towns in Connecticut, including 19 cities, grouped into eight counties. The largest cities in Connecticut are Bridgeport (148,377), New Haven (138,915), Stamford (136,188), Hartford (120,686), Waterbury (115, 016), Norwalk (91,401), and Danbury (86,967). These communities represent significant diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status. The smaller towns are primarily Caucasian, with higher-income clusters in the southwest of the state (closest to New York City) and lower-income clusters in rural areas in the eastern part of the state. For example, the 2023 Town Profile for Wilton, CT, in the southwest region reveals a town that is 81 percent White, 8 percent Asian, 6 percent Other, 4 percent Hispanic, and less than 1 percent Black. The median home value in Wilton is over $768,400, which is more than double the median for the state ($286,700). The Town Profile for Killingly, CT, a rural town that borders Rhode Island, reveals a city that is 89 percent White, 6 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Other, 1 percent Black, and less than 1 percent Asian. The median home value in Killingly is $213,800, which is below the median for the state ($286,700). The state has been known for having the most significant achievement gap in the nation. Still, it has been working to reduce it by creating an Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2023), among other efforts. The achievement gap is a significant disparity between students' academic performance among and between racial groups, ethnic groups, socioeconomic groups, genders, and English language learners (Callaghan, 2019).

While an exhaustive review of literature on school violence is beyond the scope of this report, it is essential to note that the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) collects data on schools, including data on weapons on campuses. It is interesting to note that the national trend from 2009 to

2019 was a decline in weapon carrying in grades 9-12 (Irwin, Wang, Cui, & Thompson, 2023). For example, students carrying a weapon anywhere in the past 30 days decreased from 17.5 percent in 2009 to 13.2 percent in 2019. Schools tend to be much safer, with 5.6 percent of students carrying a gun to school in 2009 decreasing to 2.8 percent in 2019 (Irwin et al., 2023). Considering the national trend was down, it is interesting to examine why Connecticut experienced an upward trend in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 (EdSight, 2023).

Methodology

This research aimed to answer two fundamental questions: *Why are students bringing weapons into Connecticut schools, and what can be done to reduce it*? The researchers developed a questionnaire comprising three sections of questions. The first section included four multiple-choice questions to identify primary demographic data for the school. The second section consisted of three multiple-choice questions and four open-ended questions. Two of the four open-ended questions were to determine the number of specific incidents, and two were to gather qualitative data surrounding the reduction of weapons in schools. The third section of questions allowed participants to provide details surrounding a specific incident when a student brought a weapon to school. The third section contained five multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question. Each participant was able to enter up to ten separate incidents.

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) in the spring of 2023, the survey was disseminated at the end of June to the population of 1,825 administrators, principals, and assistant principals within the public school systems of the State of Connecticut. The data collection continued throughout the summer and terminated at the end of August. Several reminders were sent to the sample population throughout the data collection period. Initially, 201 school officials responded, but only 144 completed all the survey questions thoroughly, and the latter was included in the descriptives and examination of the survey results.

Results

The findings of the study are divided into three sections. First, the school administrators were asked for some primary demographic data. The second section allowed participants to describe general or school-wide weapon-related data. Finally, public school administrators were permitted to enter details surrounding a specific incident when a student brought a weapon to school.

Demographics

The initial questions asked participants to identify some basic demographic information. The data included geographic location, eligibility for Title 1 funding, school type, and the school's Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) Region.

Question 1: Which category best describes your school?

The largest group of respondents, comprising 54% (n=78), described their schools as located in suburban communities (see Figure 1). Suburban areas often have characteristics of both urban and rural settings, with a mix of residential, commercial, and educational spaces. The second-largest group of respondents, representing 25% (n=36), described their schools as in urban communities. Urban areas are typically characterized by higher population density, infrastructure development, and diverse socioeconomic factors. The remaining 21% (n=30) respondents described their schools as located in rural communities. Lower population density, agricultural landscapes, and a more spread-out community structure often characterize rural areas. The Connecticut State Office of Rural Health (2023) has designated 68 of the 169 towns in the state as rural.

Public Schools Categorized by Their Location in CT (N=144)

Rural 21%

Urban 25%

Suburban 54%
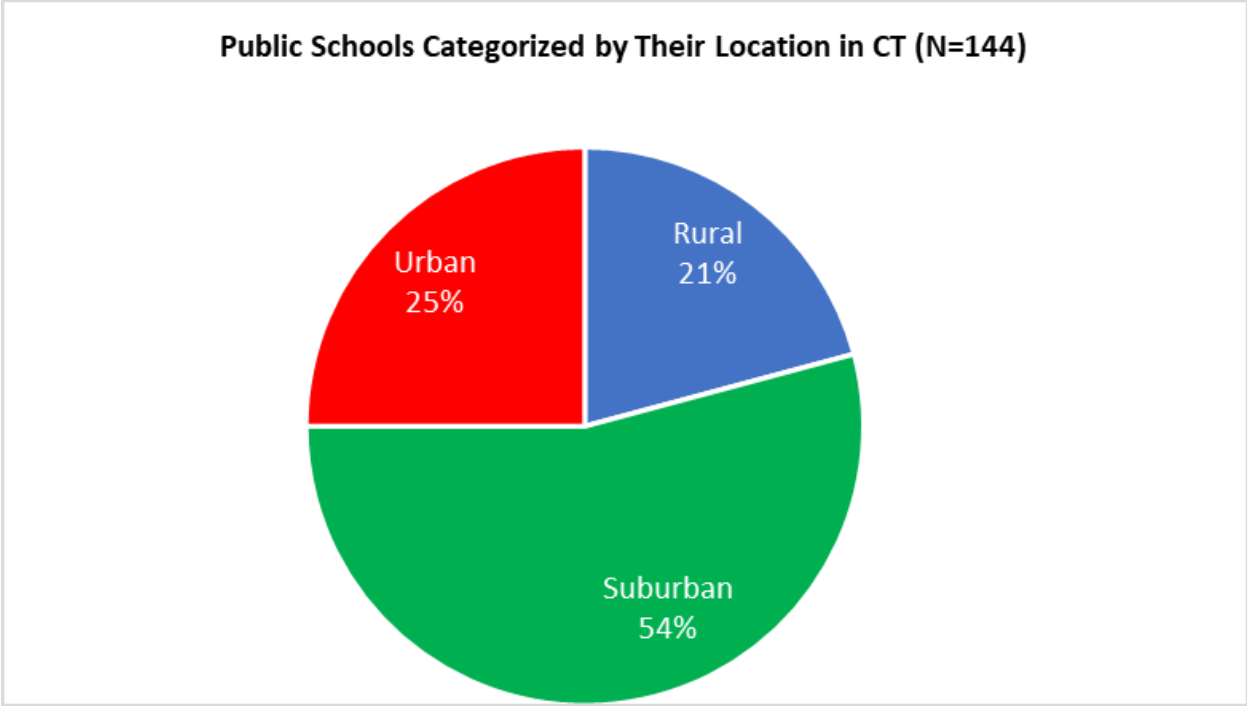
Figure 1. Geographic Classifications of Schools

Question 2: Does your school receive funding under Title 1?

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Title 1 is a provision of the ESEA enabling the US Department of Education to distribute funds to schools and school districts. The ESEA funds primary and secondary education promotes equal education access and helps close the education gap between high and low-income students. Therefore, out of the 144 respondents, 55 percent (n=79) affirmed the status of a Title 1 school, 33 percent (n=38) denied the status of Title 1, and 12 percent (n=17) reported they were unsure if they received funding under Title 1 (see Figure 2).
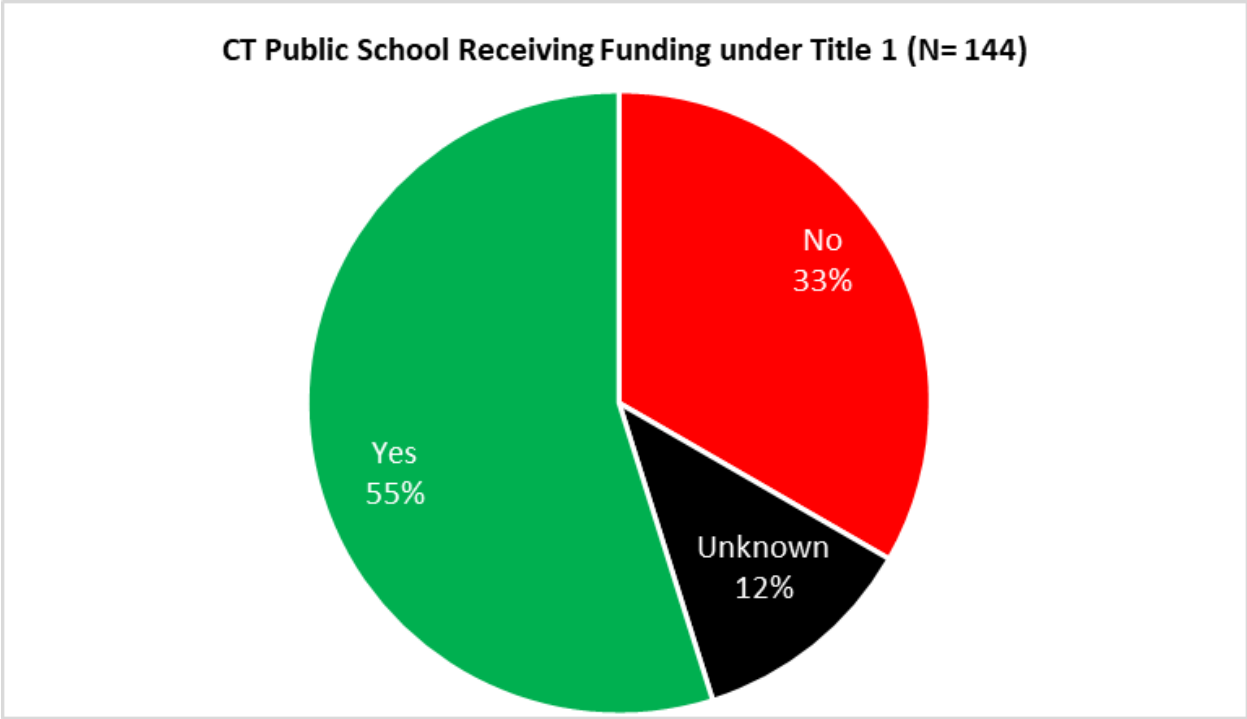
Figure 2. Title 1 Funding Received by Respondent Public Schools in CT

Question 3: What best describes your school?

Figure 3 displays the frequency of school types where the sample population participated in the survey. Of the 144 respondents, the largest group was high schools at 50 (35%), followed by elementary schools at 47 (33%), then middle schools at 32 (22%). Fifteen respondents (10%) indicated their school did not fit one of the three categories. Those schools will likely be technical schools, special schools serving students with disabilities, rural schools with small populations, or other alternative schools.
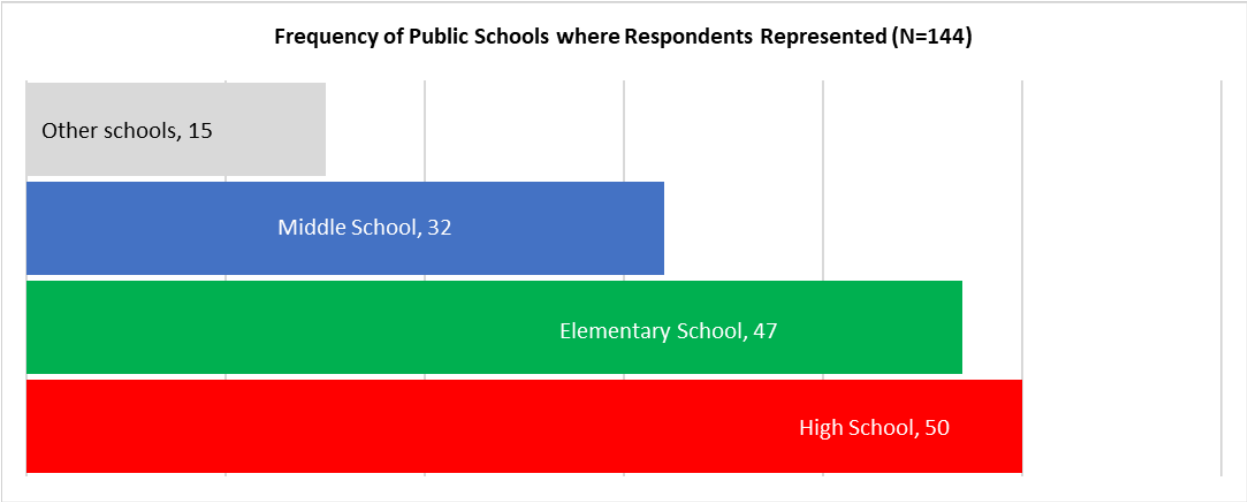
Figure 3. Type of Schools Identified by the Respondents in CT

Question 4: In which Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) region is your school located?

Respondents were asked to identify their Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) region (see Figure 4). The State of Connecticut is divided into five regions, ensuring that all schools and municipalities have access to a regional coordinator to assist schools with emergency management. This distribution of respondents across the different regions provides a comprehensive overview of the participation from various geographic areas within the state. Below is a brief description of the results from highest to lowest (see Figure 5):

- **Region 3** is situated in the northern central area of the state, with Hartford serving as the urban center. It encompasses forty-one towns, showcasing a mix of urban and rural settings. The most significant portion of the sample population came from this region, **with 27% (n=39).**
- **Region 1** is located in Southwest Connecticut and consists of 14 municipalities. It serves as the gateway to the New York Metropolitan area and includes suburban and urban areas, with Bridgeport as a notable urban center. Region 1 had the second largest participation, **with 26% (n=37).**
- **Region 5** is positioned in the northwest quadrant of Connecticut, covering forty-three municipalities. It features urban centers in Danbury and Waterbury and includes significant suburban and rural areas, particularly Litchfield County. Region 5 was in the middle, **with 17% (n=24).**
- **Region 4** is situated in the eastern part of the state, encompassing forty-two municipalities and two tribal nations. While Tolland, Windham, and New London are the most significant urban areas, most of this region is characterized by rural settings. Region 4 was represented with **16% (n=23).**
- **Region 2** is located in the state's south-central region, comprising 30 towns. New Haven is the largest city in this region, known for its mix of suburban areas and rural communities. The lowest number of respondents came from Region 2, with **14% (n=21).**
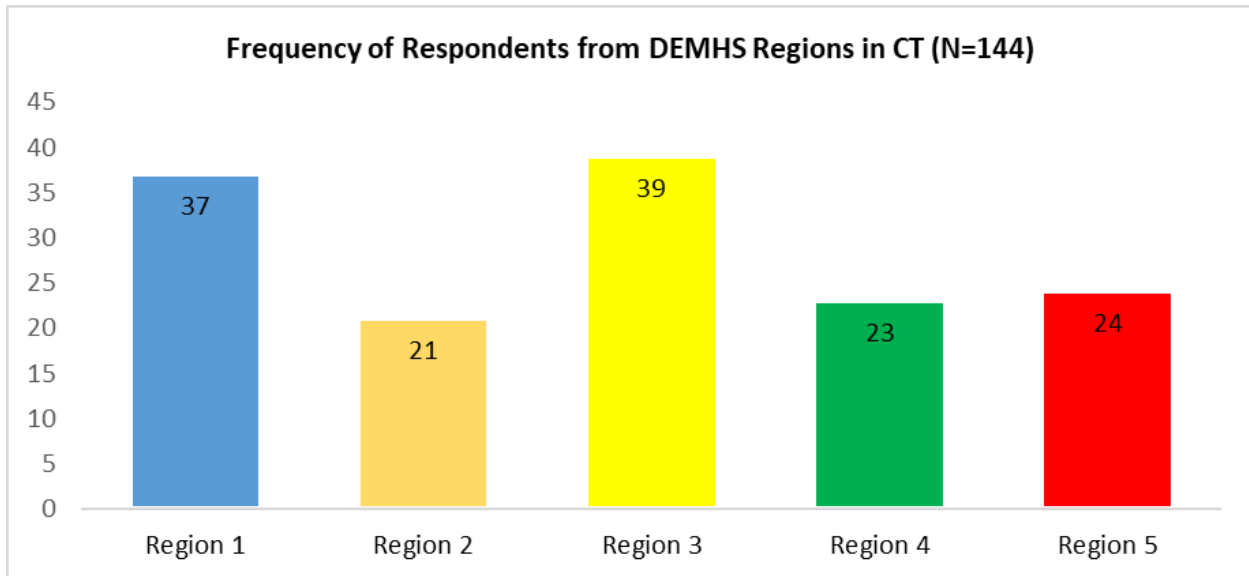
Figure 4. Respondents from each DEMHS Region in CT
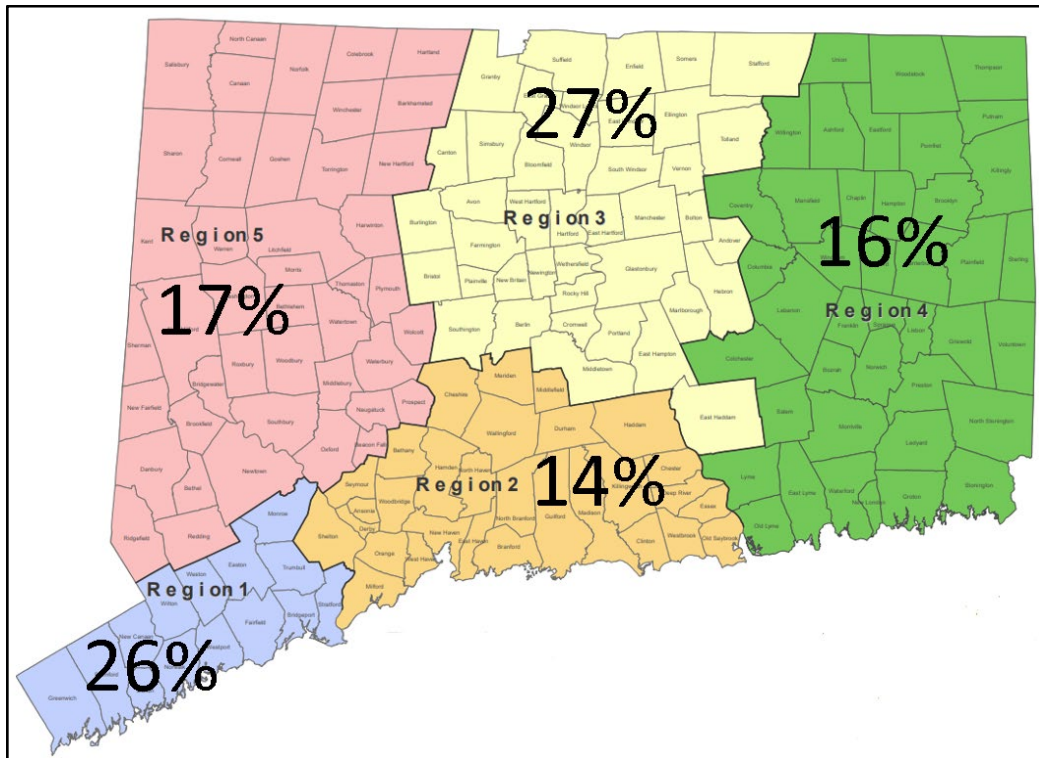
Figure 5. Respondents by Percentage from each DEMHS Region in CT

General Weapon-Related Questions

For this section, the public school administrators were allowed to enter school-wide information regarding weapon possession in their school. These data included the number of incidents, trends from the previous school year, repeat infractions, multiple weapons per infraction, successful experiences reducing weapons, and additional measures to help reduce weapons in their school.

Question 5: How many incidents of students bringing weapons to school did you experience in the 2022-2023 school year?

(Weapons in this study are defined as any instrument used to attack another person, including but not limited to firearms, knives, blunt instruments, explosives, slingshots, and chemicals.)

The survey responses regarding incidents of students bringing weapons to school during the 2022-2023 school year provide valuable information about the prevalence of such occurrences (see Figure 6). Nearly half of the respondents, constituting 47% (n=68), reported no incidents of students bringing weapons to school during the 2022-2023 school year. A significant portion of the respondents, accounting for 44% (n=63), reported experiencing between 1 and 5 incidents of students bringing weapons to school during the specified school year. A smaller percentage of respondents, 8% (n=12), reported encountering between 6 and 10 incidents of students bringing weapons to school during the 2022-2023 school year. Finally, only 1% (n=1) of respondents reported experiencing 11 or more incidents of students bringing weapons to school during the specified school year.
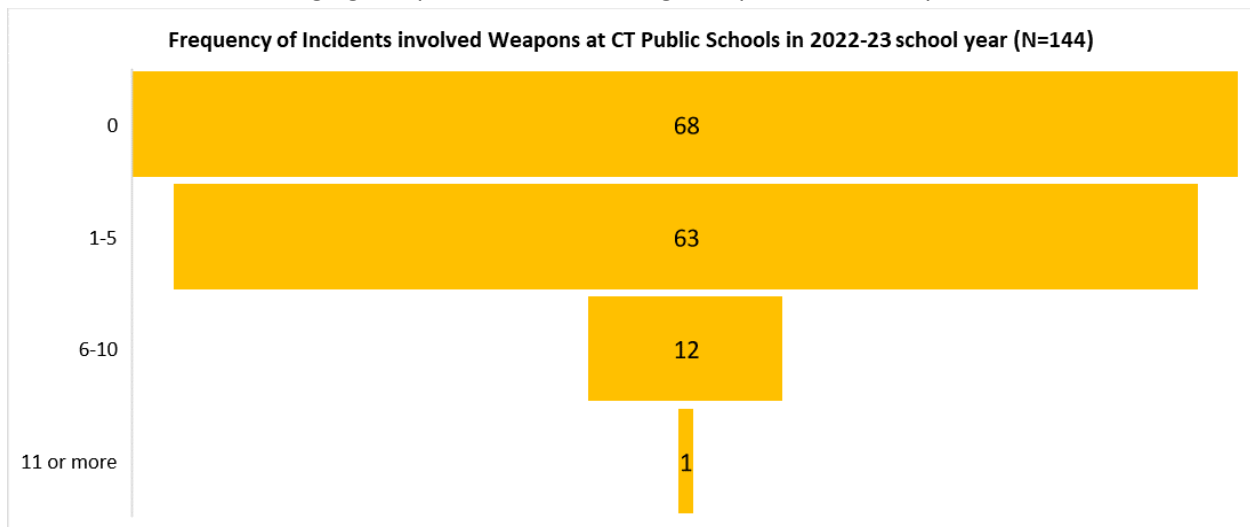
Figure 6. Number of Incidents with Weapons at CT Public Schools

Question 6: Comparing this school year (2022-2023) to the prior school year (2021-2022), what change have you seen in the quantity of weapons confiscated?

Most respondents, constituting 58% (n=84), reported that the number of weapons confiscated in the 2022-2023 school year was the same as the previous year (see Figure 7). A notable proportion of respondents, 18% (n=26), indicated that they were unsure or had unknown information about the comparison between the number of weapons confiscated in the 2022-2023 school year and the previous year. A smaller but significant percentage, 12% (n=18), reported that they seized fewer weapons in the 2022-2023 school year than the prior year. Finally, 11% (n=16) of respondents reported confiscating more weapons in the 2022-2023 school year compared to the previous year.

These findings provide insight into changes in the frequency of weapons confiscation, indicating that most respondents experienced a consistent number of confiscated weapons. However, a notable proportion expressed uncertainty, and a subset reported increased and decreased seized weapons. Understanding these trends can inform school security measures and interventions to address potential weapons-related challenges in educational settings. According to the most recent data from Edsight (2023), the number of reported incidents to the State Department of Education has grown from 1,298 in the 2021-2022 school year to 1,432 in the 2022-2023 school year.
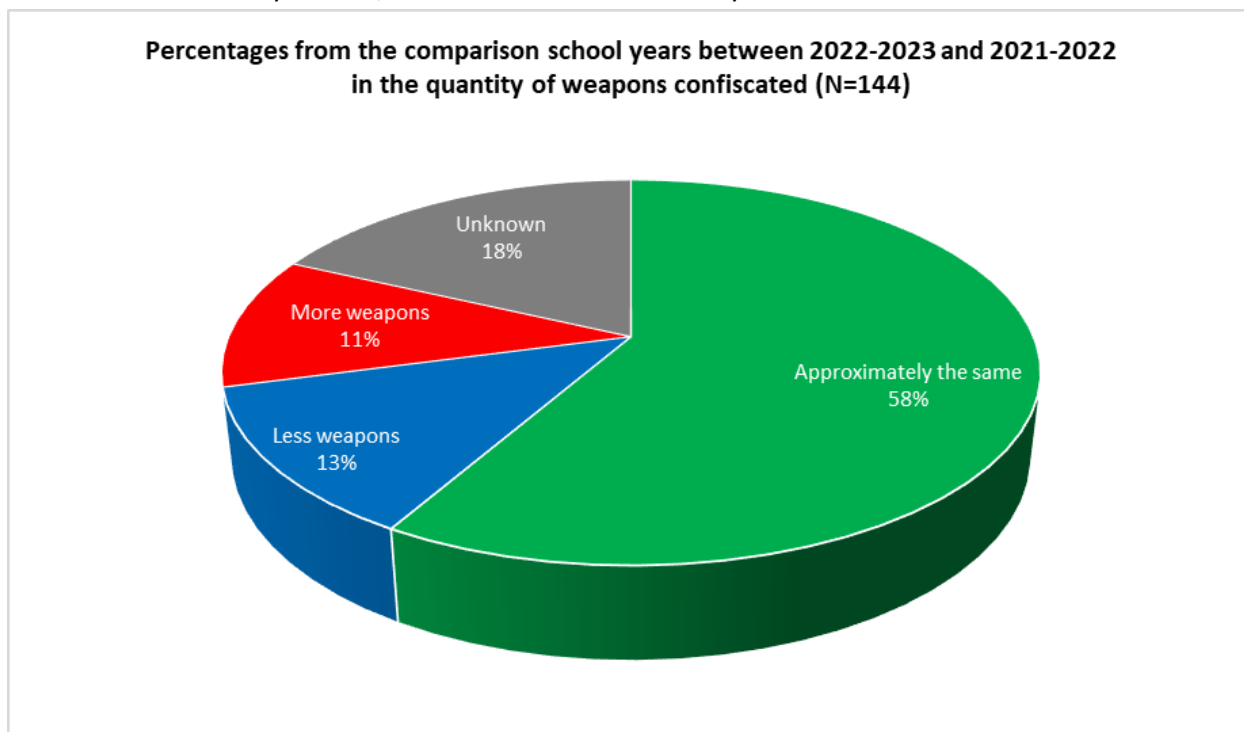
Figure 7. Comparing the School Year Ending in 2022 with 2023

Question 7: How many students have attempted to bring in weapons multiple times (separate incidents)?

The survey responses regarding students with repetitive deviant behavior related to bringing weapons to school provide insights into the recurrence of such incidents (see Figure 8). The majority of respondents, comprising 53%, reported that they did not have students with repetitive deviant behavior related to bringing weapons to school. This suggests that students involved in weapons offenses were not the same individuals causing repeated issues. 19% (n= 14) of respondents stated that they had the same students who brought weapons to school in two separate incidents. This indicates a subset of students with repetitive behavior involving weapons. Finally, 12% (n= 9) of respondents reported that one student brought a weapon to school on three or more separate occasions. This highlights a smaller subset of students exhibiting persistent and recurrent deviant behavior related to weapons.
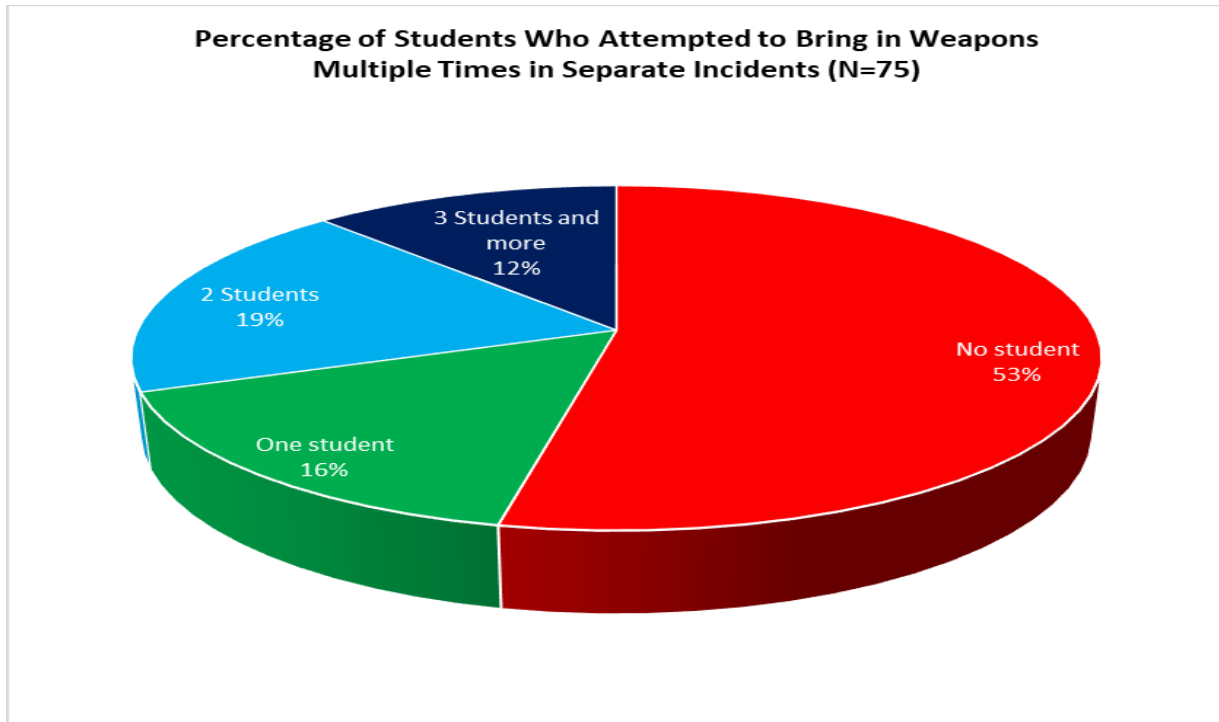
Figure 8. Students Having Multiple Weapon Offenses

Question 8: How many students have been found with multiple weapons in one incident?

Most respondents, 89% (68 cases), reported that students who brought weapons to school did not bring multiple weapons; each incident involved a single weapon (see Figure 9). These findings underscore that the predominant pattern is for students to bring a single weapon in each incident. Nonetheless, the existence of instances where multiple weapons are involved in a single incident is a notable concern.
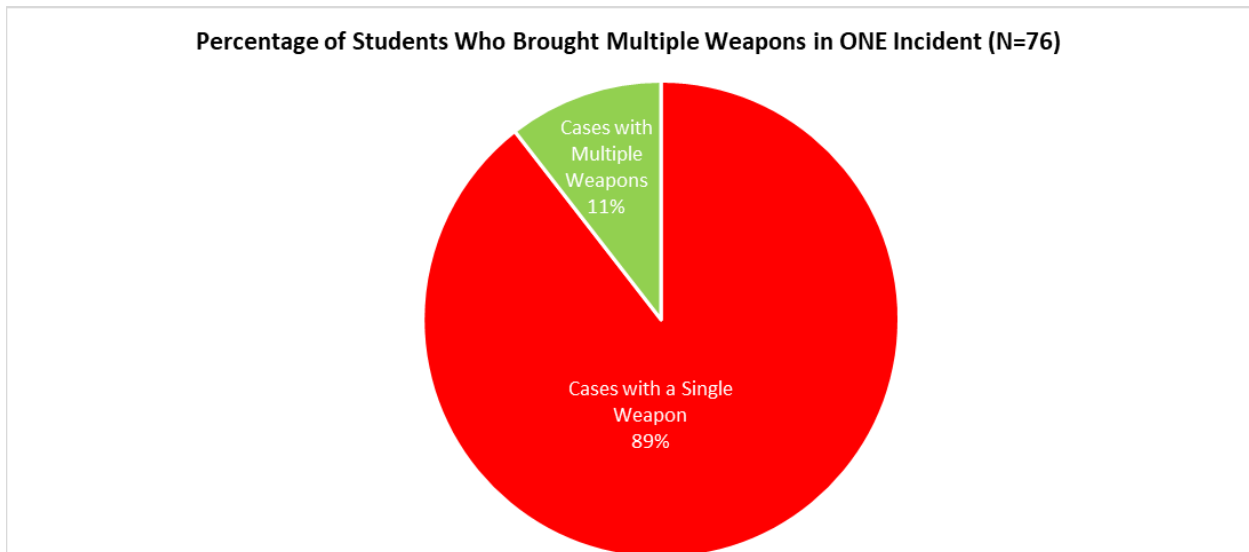
Figure 9. Cases in which Students Brought Multiple Weapons

Question 9: Does your school have a Behavioral Threat Assessment Team?

According to Figure 10, while many respondents, constituting 95 participants (66%), indicated that their school has a behavioral threat assessment team, 39 participants (27%) reported that their school does not have one. Ten (7%) indicated that they did not know if their school had a behavioral threat assessment team. While a significant portion reported the presence of such teams, a notable percentage either indicated the absence of a team or expressed uncertainty about its existence. Understanding the prevalence and awareness of behavioral threat assessment teams is crucial for enhancing school safety measures and ensuring effective response mechanisms are in place to address potential threats.
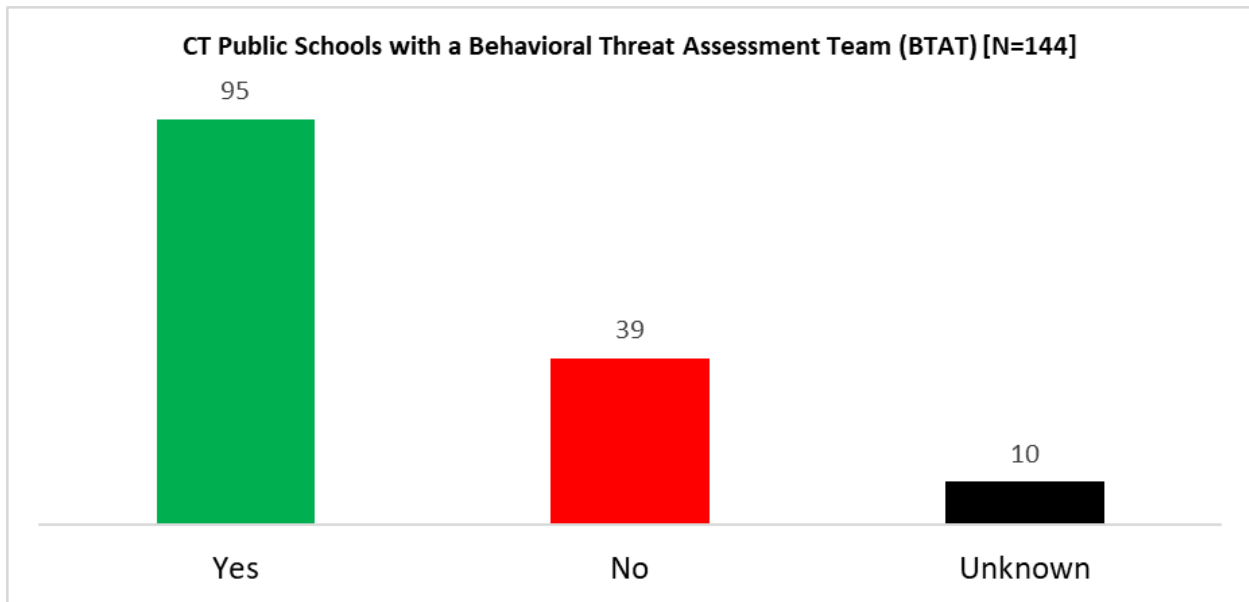
Figure 10. Schools with Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams

According to Table 1, BTAT is primarily available in elementary and high schools in suburban settings. The same observation can also be valid for schools that do not have a behavioral assessment team. The higher availability of BTAT in suburban settings may indicate that schools in suburban areas are more likely to invest in or have the resources for behavioral threat assessment teams. This could be due to perceived safety concerns, community expectations, or other factors associated with suburban environments.

BTAT?	School Type	Rural	Suburban	Urban	TOTAL
YES	Elementary	6	21	6	33
	Middle Sch.	4	9	8	21
	High Sch.	7	23	3	33
	Other	3	2	3	8
	Total	20	55	20	95
NO	Elementary	0	7	5	12
	Middle Sch.	3	4	2	9
	High Sch.	3	5	7	15
	Other	1	1	1	3
	Total	7	17	15	39
Unknown	Elementary	0	2	0	2
	Middle Sch.	1	1	0	2
	High Sch.	0	2	0	2
	Other	2	1	1	4
	Total	3	6	1	10

Table 1. Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams (BTAT) by School Types by Location

Question 10: In your experience, what recommendations do you believe might be successful in reducing the incidents of students bringing weapons to school? (Open field)

The thematic analysis of the open-ended responses from school officials provides valuable insights into the recommended policies for reducing student weapons offenses (Figure 11). These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of recommendations, emphasizing mental health, school climate, public awareness, security measures, and policy enforcement. Here is a summary of the six identified themes and their respective percentages:

1. The largest category, representing **29.9%** of the recommendations, focuses on **improving mental health support and fostering a positive school climate**. This theme suggests that addressing underlying mental health issues and creating a supportive school environment is perceived as an effective strategy.
2. The second-highest category, at **25.3%**, emphasizes **raising public awareness and education**. This theme suggests that informed communities and educational initiatives can contribute to preventing student weapons offenses.
3. The third-highest category, representing **17.8%** of recommendations, focuses on **increasing security personnel and implementing additional security measures**. This suggests a belief that enhancing physical security can be an effective deterrent.

4. At **11.6%**, the fourth-largest category centers on **refining and enforcing school policies, protocols, and procedures**. This theme underscores the importance of clear and strictly enforced policies as a preventive measure.
5. The fifth category, at **11.2%**, suggests that some school officials perceive student weapons offenses as **not being a significant issue** at their institutions.
6. At **4.1%**, the smallest category indicates **uncertainty or a perceived lack of success** in implementing effective policies to reduce student weapons offenses.
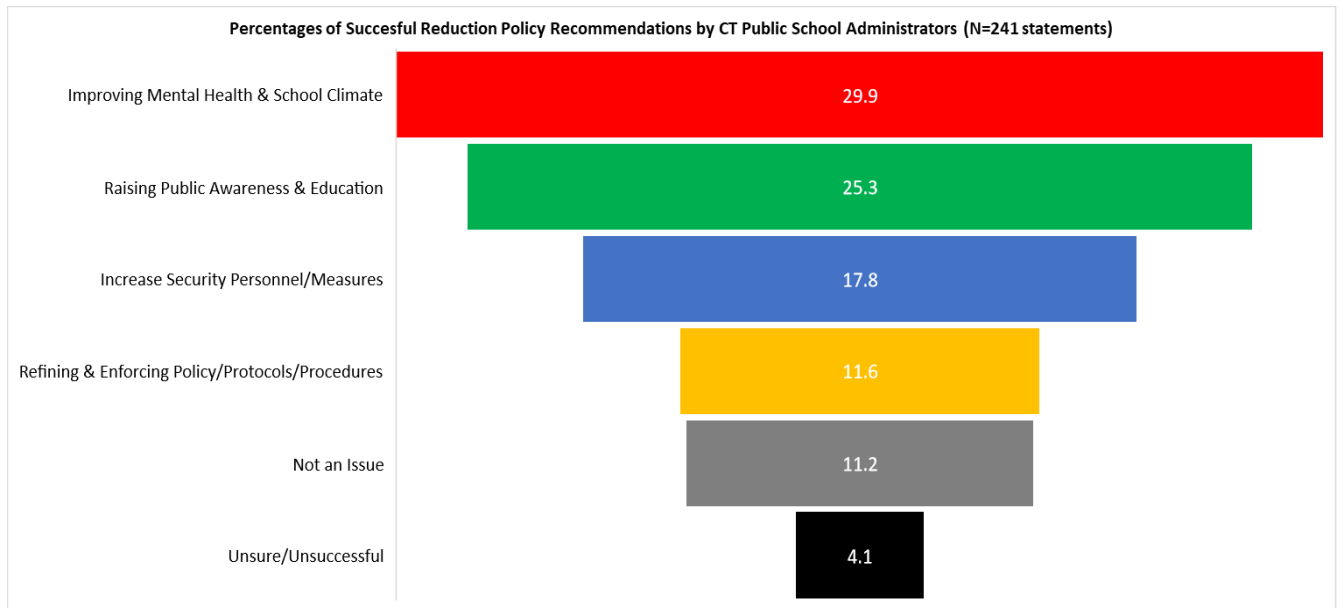
Figure 11. Policy Recommendations by School Officials for Successful Reductions

Question 11: What additional measures do you believe would be successful in reducing the incidents of students bringing weapons to schools?

The analysis of open-ended responses from school administrators regarding additional measures to reduce weapons in schools has yielded several vital categories (see Figure 12). These findings offer a comprehensive view of the diverse recommendations provided by school administrators. Here is a summary of the nine identified categories, along with the number of respondents for each:

1. **25%** of school administrators emphasize the importance of **increasing public awareness and education** to reduce weapons in schools. This suggests a belief that informed communities and educational initiatives can contribute to prevention.
2. **16%** perceive certain measures as **not available or not applicable** in their current context.
3. The third category, with **13%** of respondents, focuses on the recommendation to **collaborate with security and law enforcement agencies**. This underscores the importance of joint efforts in enhancing school safety.
4. **12%** highlights the recommendation to **expand access to school-based mental health services**.

5. **11%** of school administrators suggest investing in initiatives **to improve school climate and learning environments**. Creating a positive and supportive atmosphere is seen as a preventive measure.
6. The sixth category, with **10%** of respondents, emphasizes the importance of **addressing school security policies and procedures**. Clear and strictly enforced policies are considered vital to reducing weapons.
7. Finally, the remaining three categories are below 10%, and they include strengthening the **family supervision of the student** at 6%,
8. 4% identified **focusing on neighborhood/community safety** and
9. 3% felt that **it was not an issue at the moment**.

Percentages of Additional Measures for Reducing Weapons in CT Public Schools (N= 177 statements)

Category	Percentage
Increasing Public Awareness & Education	25%
Not Available	16%
Collaboration with Security & Law Enforcement	13%
Expanding Access to School-based Mental Health Services	12%
Investing to Improve School Climate & Learning Opportunities	11%
Addressing the Security Policy & Procedures	10%
Strengthening the Family Supervision on the Student	6%
Focusing on Neighborhood/Community Safety	4%
Not an Issue at the Moment	3%

Figure 12. Additional Measures for Reducing Weapons in CT Public Schools

Questions Specific to Weapon Incidents

For this section, the public school administrators were allowed to enter details surrounding a specific incident when a student brought a weapon to school. Each participant was given an opportunity to enter a maximum of ten incidents.

Question 12: What was the sex of the student?

According to Table 2, the observed patterns in weapon choice based on the sex of the student reveal interesting gender-specific preferences. The data indicates that bladed weapons, such as knives, razors, or small-edged weapons, are chosen by both male and female students. This suggests that bladed weapons are a common choice across genders. The second choice of weapon for male students is replicas of guns. This indicates a preference or access to items that simulate firearms, possibly reflecting cultural or societal influences. In contrast, female students predominantly accessed pepper spray as their second choice of weapon. This choice may align with a focus on personal safety and self-defense without resorting to lethal force. These findings can be interpreted in the context of societal norms, cultural influences, and perceptions of personal safety.

Std_Sex	Weapon_Type	Elementary	Middle	High	Other	TOTAL
Female	**Bladed/Edged weapon**	4	0	3	0	7
	Bludgeon/Impact weapon	0	1	0	0	1
	Fake/toy/replica firearm	0	1	0	0	1
	Firearm	0	1	0	1	2
	OC/Pepper spray	0	0	4	0	4
	Other type of weapon	0	1	1	0	2
	TOTAL	4	4	8	1	17
Male	BB/Airsoft Gun	0	2	1	1	4
	Bladed/Edged weapon	13	12	22	4	51
	Bludgeon/Impact weapon	0	1	1	0	2
	Bomb/Explosive	0	1	0	0	1
	Fake/toy/replica firearm	1	6	1	1	9
	Firearm	1	0	1	0	2
	Other type of weapon	1	1	1	2	5
	TOTAL	16	23	27	8	74
Unknown	Bladed/Edged weapon	1				1
	Other type of weapon	1				1
	TOTAL	2				2

Table 2. Type of Weapons at Schools by Sex of the Students

Question 13: Was the student who committed the weapons infraction classified as 504 or in special education?

The federal law of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, including public schools. It mandates that schools provide equal access and opportunities to students with disabilities. Legislation for individuals with disabilities was first passed in 1975. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) gives students with disabilities access to public schools and guarantees a free, appropriate public education. Students with disabilities may have mild conditions or more severe health and behavioral health conditions. Figure 13 displays an almost equal distribution of weapon infractions between students with and without special education classification. Forty-six percent of the students had 504 or special education status, while 51% did not.
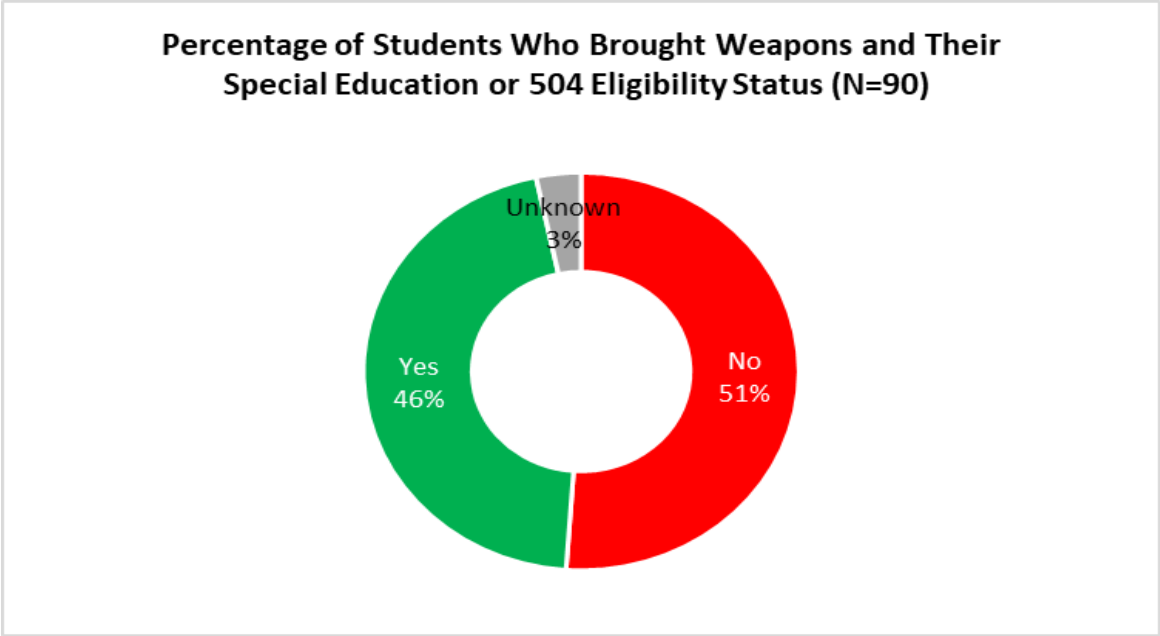
Figure 13. 504 or Special Education Classification of Students Bringing Weapons

Question 14: Identify the type of weapon brought to school.

The breakdown of weapon types reported in the survey provides valuable information on the nature of weapons involved in school incidents (see Figure 14). The most common type of weapon reported was bladed/edged weapons, accounting for 63% of incidents. This category includes knives, razors, or other bladed instruments. The second most common type of weapon was fake/toy/replica firearms, representing 11% of incidents. These items simulate real firearms but are not functional as actual weapons. The "Other" category was the third most common at 9%. This category may include various unconventional or unspecified items used as weapons. Actual firearms and BB/Airsoft guns were tied for the fourth most common type of weapon, each accounting for 5% of incidents. Bludgeon/impact weapons and OC/pepper spray tied for the sixth most common type of weapon, each representing 3% of incidents. Explosive/bomb was the seventh and least common type of weapon reported, accounting for 1% of incidents.

These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the types of weapons involved in incidents at CT public schools. Understanding the prevalence of different weapon types is crucial for developing targeted prevention and intervention strategies to enhance school safety and security.
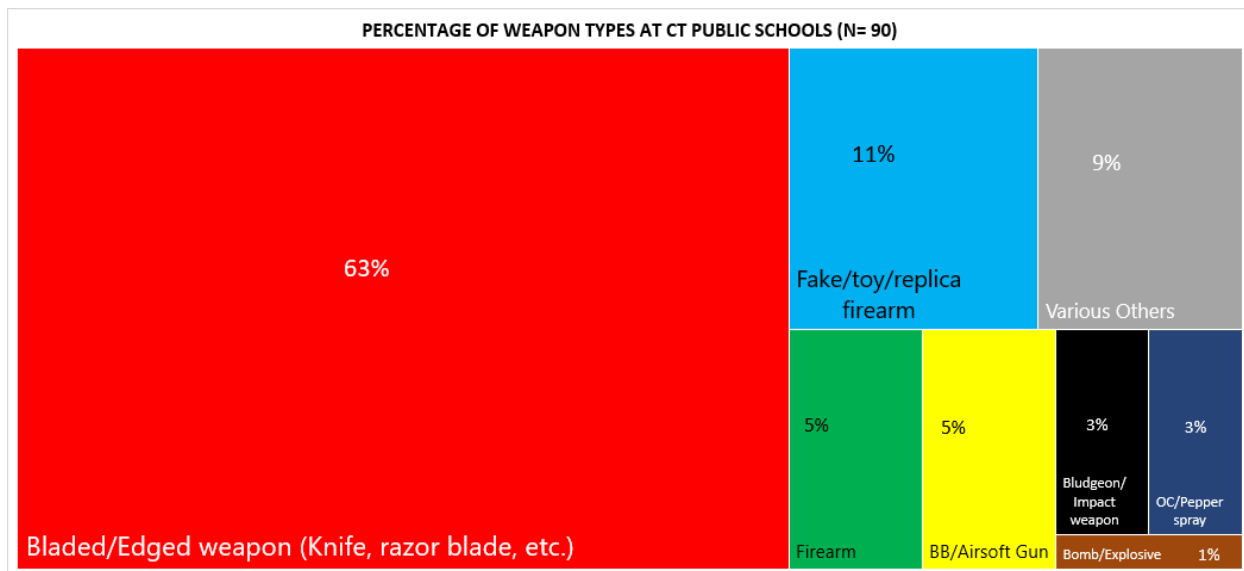
Figure 14. Types of Weapons Brought to Public Schools in CT

Question 15: What consequences were assigned for the weapons infractions?

Respondents could select multiple consequences that applied to the specific incident they were reporting, and there were eleven consequences for the weapon infractions (see Table 3). There was a total of 227 consequences for 90 weapon-related incidents reported.

Consequences	%	#
Out of school suspension	22.0	50
Conference with parent/guardian	20.7	47
Expulsion	16.3	37
Counseling	10.5	24
Restorative discipline	9.7	22
In school suspension	7.5	17
Arrest	6.2	14
Other	2.6	6
Placement in alternative campus	2.2	5
No Discipline	1.8	4
Afterschool detention	0.4	1
Total	**100.0**	**227**

Table 3. Distribution of Consequences per Frequency and Percentages

The researchers placed the eleven consequences into two categories. These categories were serious and less serious (see Figure 15). The serious consequences included arrest, expulsion, out-of-school

17

placement, and suspension. The less serious consequences included no discipline, afterschool detention, counseling, parent/guardian conferences, restorative discipline, in-school suspension, and others. Under the Serious Consequences category (n=106 statements), the highest ranking was out-of-school suspensions totaling 22%. The second was expulsions, reaching 16.3%. Respondents chose to arrest 6.2% and placement in an alternative campus 2.2%. Within the less serious consequences (n=121), the highest frequency was the conference with the parent/guardian at 20.7%. The next closest responses in frequency were counseling at 10.5%, restorative discipline at 9.7%, and in-school suspension at 7.5%. The least selected consequences were for other at 2.6%, no discipline at 1.8%, and afterschool detention at .4%. The emphasis on a range of consequences, including both serious and less serious measures, suggests a nuanced and individualized approach to disciplinary actions based on the specific circumstances and considerations of each case.
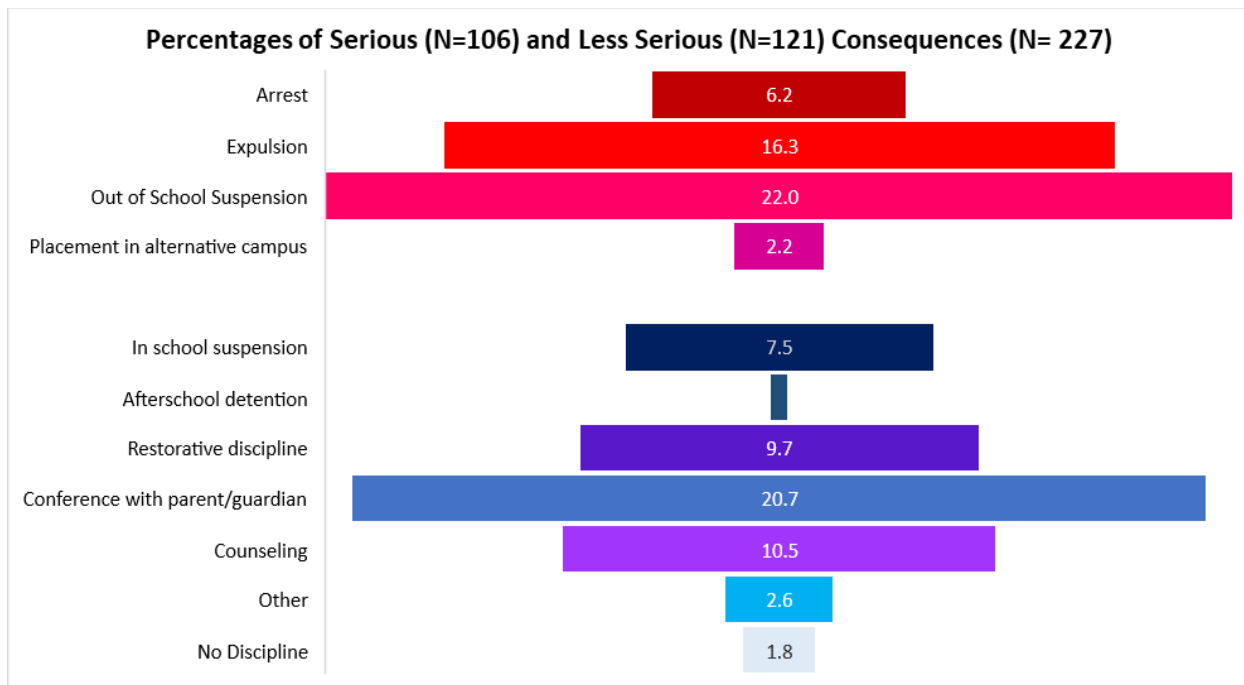

Percentages of Serious (N=106) and Less Serious (N=121) Consequences (N= 227)

Arrest	6.2
Expulsion	16.3
Out of School Suspension	22.0
Placement in alternative campus	2.2
In school suspension	7.5
Afterschool detention	
Restorative discipline	9.7
Conference with parent/guardian	20.7
Counseling	10.5
Other	2.6
No Discipline	1.8

Figure 15. Consequences for Bringing Weapons to School

Question 16. Was the incident referred to a behavioral threat assessment team?

Using a Behavioral Threat Assessment Team (BTAT) is a proactive approach to assessing and managing potential threats or concerning behaviors within the school community. The presence of these teams reflects a commitment to creating a safe and secure learning environment by proactively addressing potential threats and providing appropriate interventions and support when needed. These teams often consist of school administrators, mental health professionals, law enforcement, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response to behavioral concerns to identify, evaluate, and mitigate potential student threats. When the administrators were asked if they referred the possession of the weapon by the student to a BTAT, 39% of the respondents indicated they did not

have a formal Behavioral Threat Assessment Team in place; thus, there was no referral opportunity (see Figure 16). In comparison, 39% have referred the incidents to a BTAT. In 20% of the cases, the administrators did not consider the referral. Only 2% of the participants responded that they did not know if the incident was referred. Many schools have implemented BTATs, but there are variations in how incidents are handled among those with BTATs.
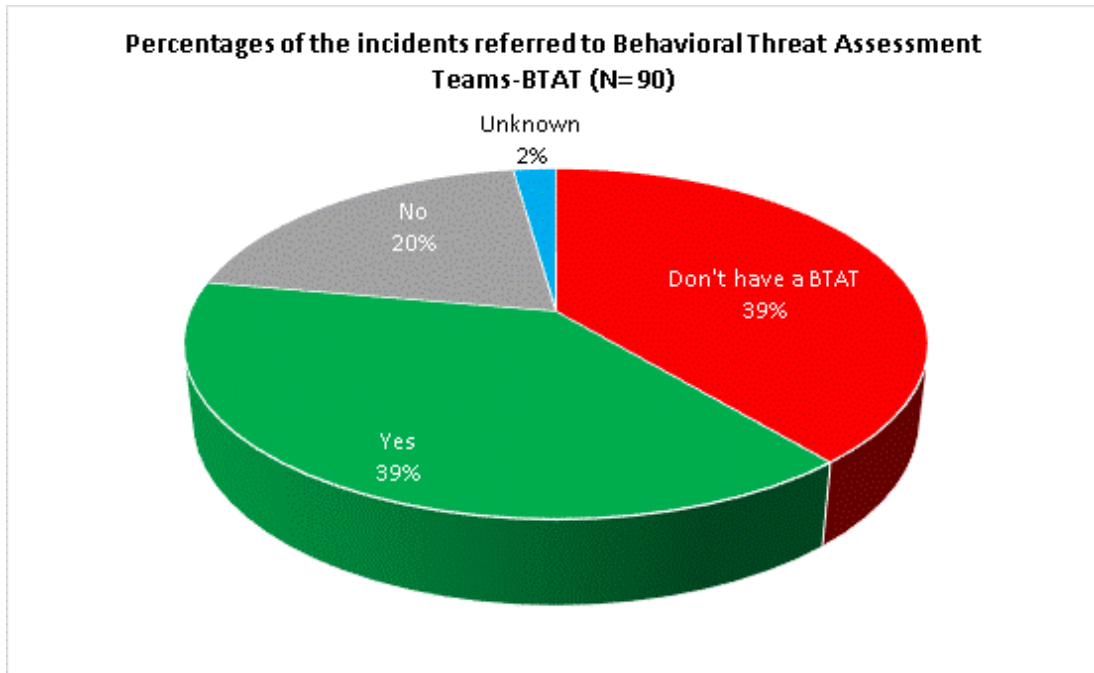

Figure 16.Incidents Referred to a Behavioral Threat Assessment Team

Question 17: What reason was given for bringing the weapon to school? (Open field and could answer multiple times for multiple incidents)

There were 90 reported incidents where students brought weapons to school. In three cases, the survey participants provided two reasons why the student brought the weapon to school, bringing the total number of reasons to 93. The researchers categorized the responses into six categories (see Figure 17). The most frequently reported reason was unintentional/claimed unintentional, with 26 instances. This may suggest that, in some cases, students may bring weapons without the intent to cause harm or without fully realizing the consequences. The second most common reason was safety/protection, with 23 instances. This indicates that some students perceive bringing a weapon as a means of protection or personal safety. The third most common reason was to "Show others/Get Attention/Reputation" with 20 instances. This suggests that, in some cases, students may bring weapons to gain recognition or establish a particular reputation. The fourth-ranked reason was to "Threaten-Scare-Harm Others," with 13 instances. This indicates that a subset of students may bring weapons with the explicit intent to cause harm or create fear. The fifth-ranked reason was "Unknown," with seven instances. In some cases,

administrators may need more information to determine the exact motivation behind a student bringing a weapon to school. The "Other" category was the sixth-ranked reason with four instances. This includes one incident of self-harm as well as varied and unspecified motivations not captured by the predefined categories. In sum, the results emphasize the importance of a multifaceted approach considering individual motivations and circumstances.
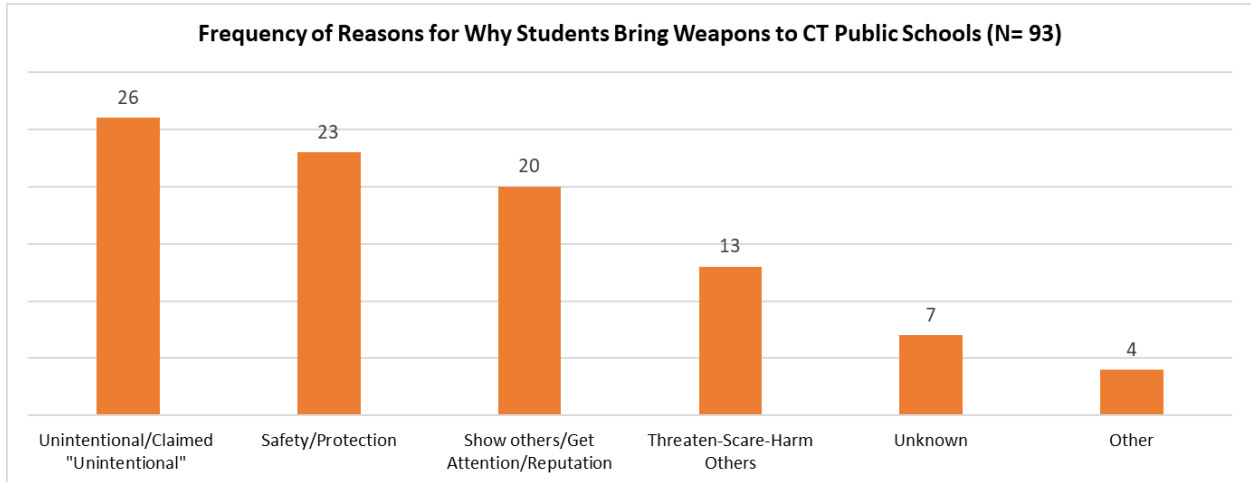

Frequency of Reasons for Why Students Bring Weapons to CT Public Schools (N= 93)

Category	Frequency
Unintentional/Claimed "Unintentional"	26
Safety/Protection	23
Show others/Get Attention/Reputation	20
Threaten-Scare-Harm Others	13
Unknown	7
Other	4

Figure 17. Reasons for Weapons at Schools

Conclusion

These findings provide a nuanced understanding of the frequency of weapons incidents in CT public schools, allowing for the identification of distinct clusters based on the reported numbers. Most respondents experienced either no incidents or a relatively low number of weapon incidents, while a smaller proportion reported higher incidents. This information can guide school officials, policymakers, and law enforcement in developing targeted strategies and interventions to address and prevent weapons-related incidents in schools.

There are some key findings which the researchers believe deserve attention:

- Most respondents reported their campuses were safe and had no infractions. Weapons infractions for some campuses are rare, but even one infraction is concerning.
- Students classified as 504 or with special education status represent about half of the weapons infractions but only 12 percent of the general population nationally. Students with severe emotional and behavioral conditions are disproportionally represented in this data. Therefore, more focus and attention must be dedicated to education and outreach for this population.
- The largest category was unintentional for the reasons why weapons were brought to school. This reminds school officials about the importance of educating their school community and using a consistent and thorough process such as BTAT.
- Additional reasons why weapons were brought to school pointed to students feeling unsafe in school or their communities. Addressing feelings of safety outside of school is complicated and will require schools to work with families and community leaders.
- The data reveals that only 5 percent of weapons confiscated were firearms. The escalation of weapons offenses may be associated with weapons that are easier to access, such as bladed weapons and other less lethal objects.
- Males were by far more likely to bring a weapon than females. The weapon of choice is a bladed/edged weapon, such as a knife. Parents and school leaders should be aware of this and keep this in mind when conducting searches.
- Notably, the largest category for successfully reducing weapon infractions focuses on mental health support along with school climate, followed closely by raising public awareness and educating. Addressing underlying mental health issues and creating a supportive school environment is perceived as an effective strategy.
- Another area to highlight is the referral of weapon possession to behavioral threat assessment teams (BTAT). In 20% of incidents, a weapon was confiscated, but the administrators did not consider referring the incident to the behavioral threat assessment team.

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