

Threats and Incidents of Violence in Schools:

A Mid-Year Analysis of the 2023-2024 School Year

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The Educator's School Safety Network

Introduction

Since 2015, The Educator's School Safety Network (ESSN), a national non-profit school safety organization, has compiled and issued reports using the most current information on violence in America's schools to determine the scope and severity of the threats and violent incidents. This abbreviated report is an initial analysis of what has occurred thus far from the beginning of August 2023 to the end of December 2023, the first half of the current school year.

This report draws limited comparisons from August through December of 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2022. Data collection for this study was suspended from February 2020 through August 2022. It is difficult to make a significant comparison between the fall of 2018 and the fall of 2022, partly due to the amount of time elapsed, but also because of the many social, emotional, and educational shifts that took place. When schools were largely re-opened in the fall 2022, the educational landscape had changed dramatically.

In addition, it is important to note that numerous incidents or threats most likely may not have been reported, or were inadvertently missed by the data collection methods used. Rather than undermining the findings, this potential "under-reporting" emphasizes the significance of the issues raised.

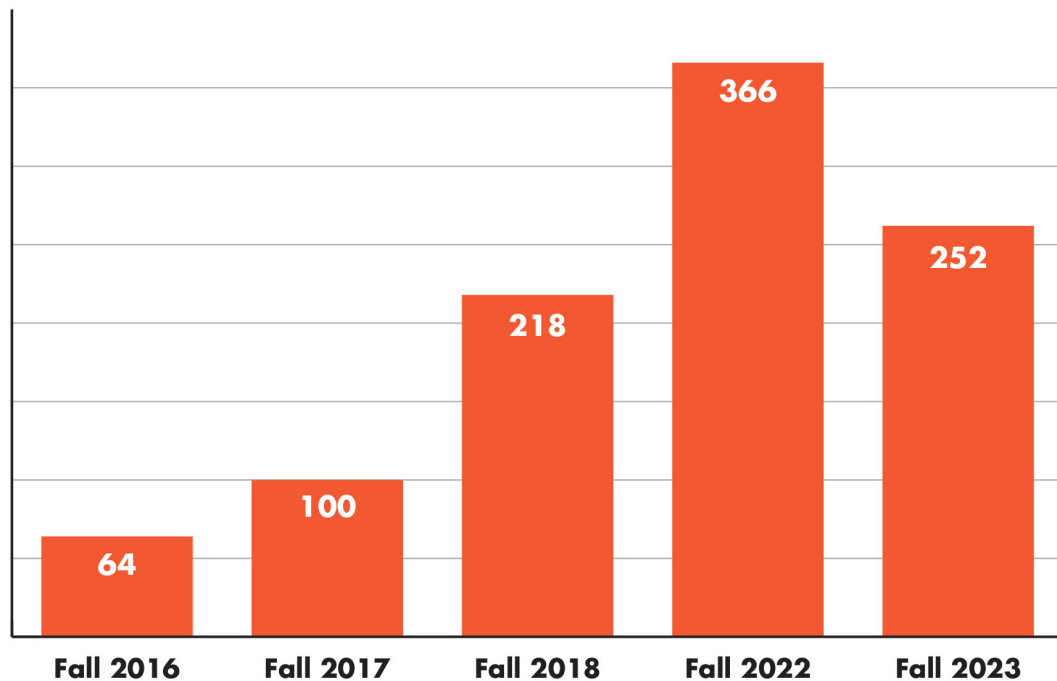
Summary of Key Findings

The analysis of violent threats and incidents for the first half of the 2023-2024 school year demonstrates several key findings:

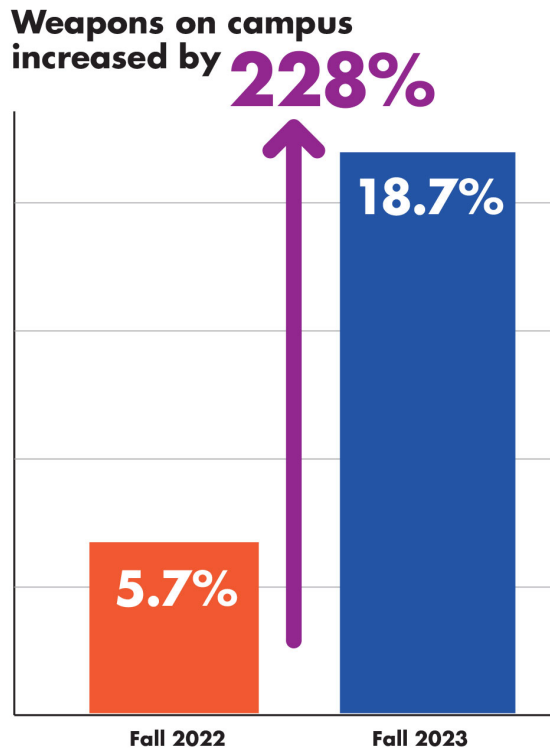
1. **Schools were significantly less impacted by false reports of an active shooter (swatting) in the fall of 2023.**

The number of violent incidents in general decreased by 31% when compared to fall of 2022. This decrease can be largely attributed to a 60% reduction in swatting events in fall 2023. There were 256 false reports of an active shooter in fall of 2022. This number fell to just 69 incidents in the fall of 2023.

All incidents – Fall '16, Fall '17, Fall '18, Fall '22, Fall '23



While false reports declined in the fall of 2023, incidents of gun violence increased 4.6% from the fall of 2022. The presence of weapons on campus increased dramatically from 5.7% of incidents in fall of 2022 to 18.7% of incidents in fall of 2023, a 228% increase.

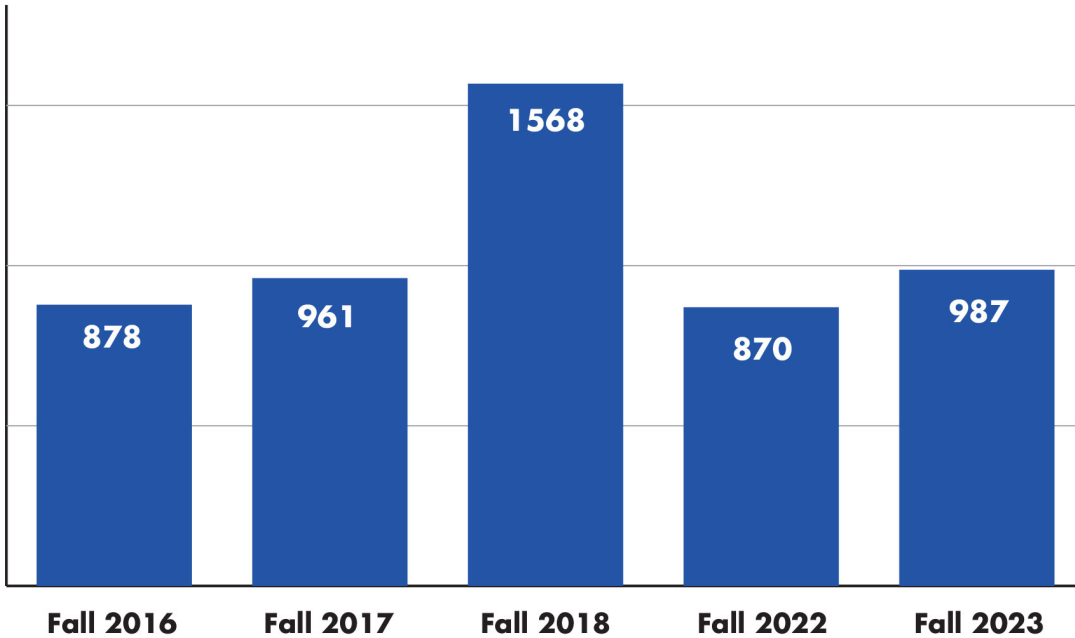


The number of violent incidents in schools has increased significantly since the fall of 2016, however, there are a number of factors that may have contributed to the dramatic spike in the fall of 2022. The most likely factors are related to the social and emotional impact of the closing of schools during the pandemic along with a slow return to safety related practices in many schools as they re-opened in the fall of 2022.

Despite the 31% decrease in violent incidents for the fall of 2023, the general trajectory of violent incidents in schools continues to increase year over year.

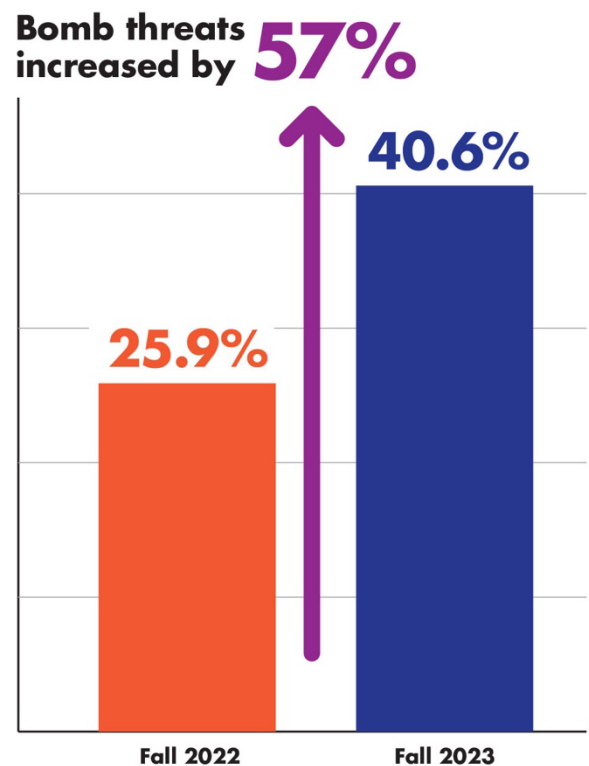
2. The rate of threats of violence in schools increased 13 % in the fall of 2023 from the previous fall. The 987 threats recorded in fall 2023 were, however, a decrease from the high of 1,568 that occurred in fall 2018.

Threats of violence – Fall '16, Fall '17, Fall '18, Fall '22, Fall '23



In addition to an increase in threats from fall 2022 to fall 2023, the nature of the threats also shifted.

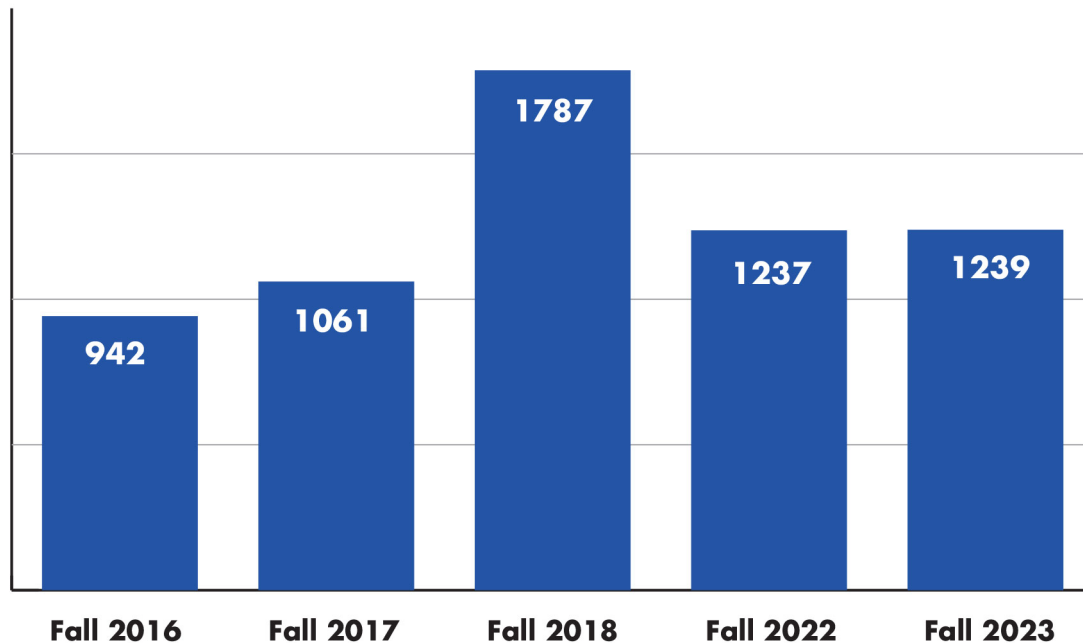
- The percent of bomb threats increased by 57%, from 25.9% of all threats in the fall of 2022 to 40.6% of all threats in fall 2023. Bomb threats were the most commonly reported threat in fall 2023.
- The percent of gun-related threats decreased 36% from 28.9% of threats in fall 2022 to 18.3% of threats in fall 2023.
- The percent of unspecified threats (where the nature of the threat is unknown) stayed relatively stable at 42% of threats in fall 2022 and 39% of threats in fall 2023.



3. Despite the fluctuations of the pre and post pandemic years, violent threats and incidents increasingly impact schools on a daily basis. The first half of the 2022-2023 school year saw at least 987 threats of violence and more than 252 violent incidents for a total of 1,239 safety concerns that required a response on the part of the school. This rate is almost the same as the fall of 2022.

While the number of threats of violence in the fall of 2023 was less than the fall of 2018 (before the pandemic), it has increased from the fall of 2022. Conversely, the rate of violent incidents fell in the fall of 2023 when compared to the fall of 2022, however the rate of violence is still increased when compared to pre-pandemic years.

Total threats and incidents – Fall '16, Fall '17, Fall '18, Fall '22, Fall '23



Study Methodology and Limitations

Starting August 1, 2023 reports of all violent incidents and threats in schools were reviewed and data collected on the date, location, type of incident, type of school, etc. Additional information such as perpetrator sex and age, and other specific or unusual findings were also incorporated when available. This data was verified and aggregated to arrive at the findings incorporated in this report. Data collection for the 2023-2024 school year began August 1, 2023 and is ongoing with the final study results for the 2023-2024 school year to be published in July 2024.

For the purposes of this study, “violent incidents” and “threats of violence” were defined as those with the potential for loss of life. Lower levels of school violence, such as fights, harassment etc. were not included.

Data sets are based on reports made in local and/or national media. This means that while multiple media reports were used to verify and update the accuracy of information related to an incident, if no information was released by the school or the incident was never reported in any fashion, then it is not included in the data set.

For additional information and training opportunities:

www.eSchoolSafety.org

For the full report, or an executive summary, go to:

www.eSchoolSafety.org/concern

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