



STATE OF TENNESSEE

John G. Morgan

COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY

Comptroller

STATE CAPITOL

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0264

PHONE (615) 741-2501

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 10, 2006

CONTACT: Sherry Kast, Communications Officer, (615) 401-7806
Phillip Doss, Assistant Director, (615) 401-7869

Drug offenses continue to top zero tolerance violations in schools

Drug offenses continue to top zero tolerance violations in schools statewide, according to a new report from the Comptroller of the Treasury's Office of Education Accountability.

Drug offenses accounted for 63 percent of all zero tolerance offenses for the 2004-2005 school year. This is up from 58 percent in 2001-2002. Possession of alcohol accounted for an additional four percent of offenses during the 2005 academic year.

For the same year, ninth graders committed 26 percent or 1,087 zero tolerance violations. Male students accounted for 73 percent of violations.

Entitled, "Zero Tolerance, An Update," the report is based on a statewide analysis of data reported by local school districts to the Department of Education. The analysis studied the 2003, 2004 and 2005 school years.

Zero tolerance offenses remained at about 4.5 per 1,000 students for the past several years.

According to Tennessee law, three categories of violations constitute zero tolerance offenses. They include offenses that involve drugs and drug paraphernalia; assault of a teacher, student or other person, or possession of dangerous weapons. Local school boards, however, may add other offenses.

Violations reported to the Department of Education include drugs, alcohol, firearms and other weapons, and battery. Other violations reported include possession of a toy gun, stink bombs and laser gun; dress code violations and false accusations against a teacher.

During the 2004-05 school year, more than half of the zero tolerance offenders were returned to school or placed in alternative school, while 13 percent were expelled without placement. "Students whose education is disrupted for a period of time may have difficulty catching up and may eventually drop out of school," said Phil Doss, Assistant Director. "In 2001-02, 19 percent of zero tolerance offenders were expelled without placement."

Legislative recommendations call for further research on the variation of zero tolerance policies among local education agencies, on fairness in applying zero tolerance policies, and on

understanding the desired effect zero tolerance punishments have on rehabilitating students and preparing them to return to the classroom.

The report recommends the Department of Education and local education agencies examine preventive ways to target the eighth and ninth grades, collaborate with other agencies to target zero tolerance, and ensure school districts publicize the school violence hotline for students to report school violence or threats, 1-800-824-3463.

The Office of Education Accountability conducts studies, analyses or audits to evaluate education performance and progress, often at the request of the governor or general assembly.

“Zero Tolerance, An Update” is available on the Comptroller’s web site at www.comptroller.state.tn.us. Previous zero tolerance reports were published in 1998 and 2003.

###