



State of Tennessee

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For Immediate Release: April 20, 2010

'ZERO TOLERANCE' OFFENSES IN SCHOOLS UP THIS DECADE, BUT THERE'S BEEN IMPROVEMENT SINCE 2005, REPORT FINDS

The number of "zero tolerance" offenses committed by Tennessee schoolchildren has increased this decade, although there's been improvement in at least three of the last five academic years, according to a report released today by the state Comptroller's Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA).

Zero tolerance offenses are those which warrant predetermined disciplinary actions, such as expulsion or assignment to alternative schools. Although individual school districts have added to their lists of zero tolerance offenses, those defined by state law are drug possession/use, firearms possession and battery against school staff members.

In its latest report, OREA compared data from the 2005-2006, 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years to that collected since the 1999-2000 school year. Data from the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years will be evaluated in future reports.

Overall, the report indicates that zero tolerance offenses have increased since 1999-2000, although there has been a slight downward trend in the latest three years analyzed.

Drug offenses, which represent about 85 percent of the total zero tolerance cases, have risen significantly since 1999. Despite the recent downturn, the number of drug offenses has grown 45 percent overall since the beginning of the decade, outpacing student population growth.

Firearm offenses have shown a relatively steady decline in the years between 1999 and 2005, although in more recent years the year-to-year change in the statistics has been more erratic.

Battery of school staff members has also increased since 1999. However, the report notes that there is some variation in how different school districts classify those types of offenses.

Among the report's other findings:

- Ninth graders made up the majority of zero tolerance offenders.
- Boys committed twice as many zero tolerance offenses as girls.
- In 2007-2008, the most recent year evaluated, 40 percent of all zero tolerance offenses were committed in the state's five largest school districts.

“Our office has also created an online map of zero tolerance offenses to accompany this year's report,” said Russell Moore, OREA’s assistant director. “The public can access the map through our website and scroll over any Tennessee school district to find out the number of reported zero tolerance offenses for the 2007-08 school year.”

The link to that map is available online at:

http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/Repository/RE/ZeroToleranceMap_1.htm

The full report, titled “Zero Tolerance: An Update, 2010,” is available online at:

<http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/Repository/RE/ZT2010Report.pdf>

OREA is an agency within the Comptroller’s Office that is charged with providing accurate and objective policy research and analysis for the Tennessee General Assembly and the public.

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