

By Bill Husfelt

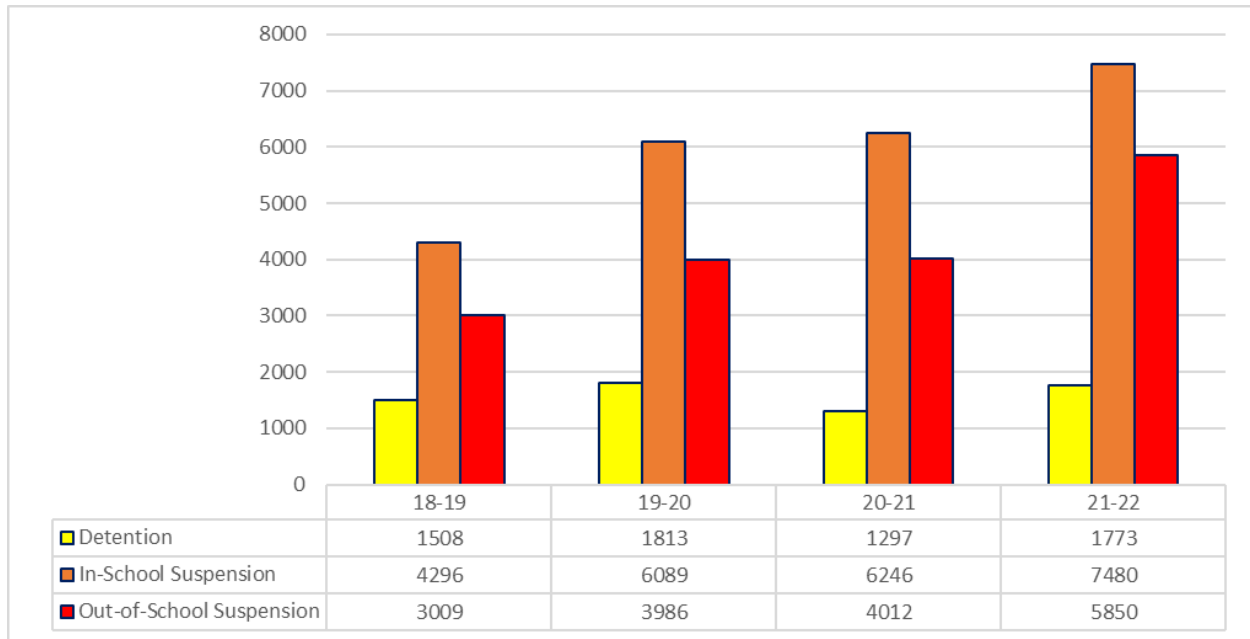
Superintendent, Bay District Schools

School safety is our number one priority, and we want you to know that we are constantly updating and revising our procedures to ensure we're taking advantage of the latest best practices and research-based approaches when it comes to securing our campuses for the safety of our students and staff.

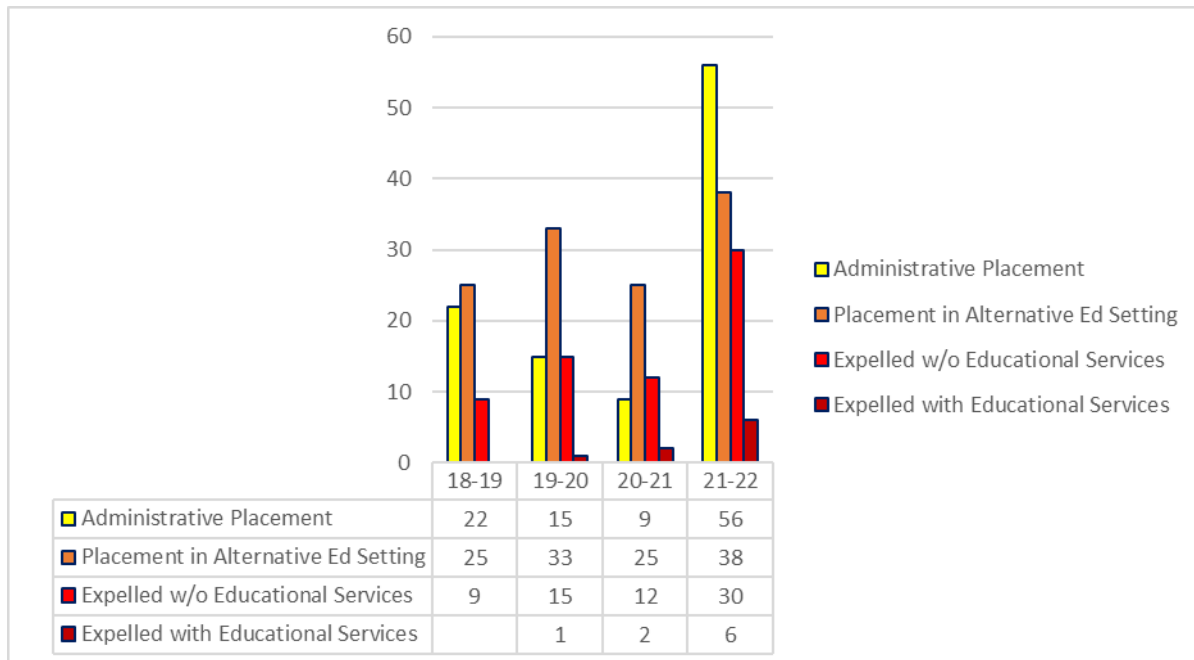
To help further that cause, we're partnering with Bay County Sheriff Tommy Ford again this year to make sure our secondary students know what we expect when it comes to their behavior and what we won't tolerate when it comes to school threats and other safety violations.

During the next week, Sheriff Ford and I will visit every middle school and high school campus to talk with our students about some very serious topics. While Sheriff Ford and I will do our best with these topics, YOU are the best teachers for your own children when it comes to these issues and we hope you will reinforce our conversations when talking with your students at home.

School safety is a critical topic right now and we're seeing an exponential increase in discipline issues that result in the assignment of detention or suspension and even expulsion. We know many of our students are struggling, and we've put a plethora of school-based resources into play to help with that. Still, those struggles cannot translate into behavior that disrupts the learning environment of others and threatens the safety of our students and staff. As you can see below, the numbers are increasing rapidly.



Additionally, more and more students are being placed in alternative settings or being recommended for expulsion by the School Board due to violent behavior and violations of School Board Policy. Each number in the chart below represents a student who has a story and it's heartbreaking to see these adverse outcomes because we want to help ALL students achieve their dreams of graduation and we want ALL students to succeed. However, we just can't tolerate certain behaviors at school and we know you don't want your students exposed to drugs, weapons, fighting and threats either.



So, we’ve put together a “road show” of sorts and we’ll talk with our students to help them understand the seriousness of these consequences and how they can avoid becoming part of these statistics.

Some of the topics we plan to discuss include:

SCHOOL THREATS

It’s not a joke and it’s not funny to threaten your school or to share a post, video or meme that is a threat. Students who see anything that looks like, or sounds like, a threat should report that information directly to their parents/guardians and to a trusted adult at the school. If it’s after school hours, those threats should be reported immediately to law enforcement. Many students don’t realize that sharing those threats, and allowing others to see them, can also be considered a felony so we need your help in ensuring that doesn’t happen.

It’s against the law to make a school threat verbally, in writing, on a social media post, in a video or even in gaming platforms like Discord. Students cannot yell “I’m going to kill someone” or “I’m bringing a gun tomorrow” at school and not expect to face harsh consequences ... that’s the just world we live in now and we have to help our students understand that. Likewise, they can’t pass notes with threats or whisper threats into the ear of another student without facing the same school-based and legal consequences.

FIGHTING

We all know that fighting NEVER solves a problem; it just creates a whole other set of issues. We have seen an alarming increase in school fights and we’re simply not going to tolerate that sort of behavior. Those disciplined for fighting at school can face legal consequences (assault or battery charges) AND can be recommended for expulsion. Students who fight can IMMEDIATELY be placed at another school by the Superintendent.

If your student is having trouble with another student, please contact the school immediately so we can intervene to try to resolve the conflict. It's heartbreaking to expel students for preventable situations like this but we need your help and we need your students to understand that we will not tolerate fighting at our schools.

One more reminder about fighting ... it's NOT okay for students to video other students fighting and then share those images on social media. Those videos quickly become a disruption to our orderly operations and students posting and sharing them can face disciplinary consequences.

WEAPONS

We will not tolerate weapons on campus. Additionally, it's against board policy for students to bring other inappropriate items like kitchen knives, mace, pepper spray and bows and arrows (yes, we've had that happen). Additionally, students should not bring toys that appear to be weapons to school.

PLEASE check the backpacks, cars and personal bags of your students periodically (daily if possible). It's mind-boggling what students bring to school, even the little ones, and many potentially serious situations could be avoided if parents checked backpacks and personal belongings every morning. While not a weapon, on the first day of school this year a kindergartner brought a full beer and another half-consumed can of beer to school ... we've got to rally around our kids to ensure they aren't making bad decisions before they even get on the bus!

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Please talk to your students about these topics and about "see something, say something" so they know what to do if they have concerns. Please let administrators know immediately if your child reports a concern to you during the school day and please call law enforcement if the information is shared with you after hours or on the weekend.

Additionally, please remind your student that it's not a "right" to attend public school, it's a privilege afforded to those who want to belong to a safe, and orderly, learning environment. Those who want to disrupt, make threats, fight or bring weapons to school do not belong on our campuses. Our schools must be safe places for students to learn and they must be safe places for staff members to teach and work. Students who violate the safety of others will be removed and will likely face legal consequences as well as school-based discipline.

Thank you, in advance, for your continued support of this initiative.

Stay safe and God Bless!