

2023

SCHOOL CRIME IN TENNESSEE

- *SCHOOL CRIME OFFENSE BREAKDOWN*
- *VICTIM ANALYSIS*
- *OFFENDER DEMOGRAPHICS*



A PUBLICATION OF THE TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS CENTER | CJIS SUPPORT CENTER



BILL LEE
Governor

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

901 R.S. Gass Boulevard
Nashville, Tennessee 37216-2639
(615) 744-4000
Facsimile (615) 744-4500
TDD (615) 744-4001



DAVID B. RAUSCH
Director

December 26, 2024

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation is releasing its annual School Crimes Study. This study presents the nature, volume, and extent of reported crimes on school campuses, excluding colleges and universities in 2023.

The study is based on data submitted to the TBI through the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TIBRS) program, which collects data on all crimes occurring in Tennessee. All law enforcement agencies as well as colleges and universities, are mandated to report crime statistics to the TBI. This study is produced from the TIBRS program and includes comparison statistics.

This study will hopefully assist law enforcement, school administrations, and government officials in planning their efforts in the fight against crime and continue to create awareness that crime exists as a threat to our communities. The threats to society by criminal activity must be addressed by efforts from all law-abiding citizens, as well as law enforcement agencies.

Thank you to all participating law enforcement agencies for their hard work and contributions to making this report a thorough and accurate picture of crime in Tennessee. It is only with their support that the state continues to maintain such a successful TIBRS program.

Sincerely,

David B. Rausch
Director



INTRODUCTION

This study presents information on characteristics surrounding crime in Tennessee schools, focusing on public and private school systems, excluding colleges, universities, and technical schools. The period covered in this study is from 2021 to 2023. This study was completed by using data provided to the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TIBRS).

- This report is based on incidents submitted by law enforcement agencies.
- Since the offense of Justifiable Homicide is not considered a crime, the offense is excluded from this study.
- It is important to understand the characteristics surrounding school crime, the offenders who reportedly commit these offenses, and the demographics of the victims. A better understanding of these characteristics will assist law enforcement, policymakers, school administrators, and the public in developing strategies to reduce the amount of crime occurring at schools in Tennessee.
- In an effort to expedite the collection of data, TBI transitioned from monthly data submissions to weekly submissions. Since August 1, 2020, the TBI Statistical Analysis Center has been maintaining a watchful eye on the weekly crime rates and continues to do so.

Situations surrounding school crime vary based on the offender's motive and intended victim. For example, incidents involving student offenders and student victims constitute the stereotypical definition of crime at schools where the offender and victim are present to participate in school related activities. However, there are situations involving adult and/or juvenile offenders and victims where the school serves only as the location of the offense committed. Crimes perpetrated by offenders against victims who are not school or staff and have no other relation to the school, i.e., a drug deal committed in a school parking lot or an assault involving multiple offenders and victims would be examples of such situations.

INCIDENT BASED REPORTING

Incident based reporting views a crime and all of its components as an incident. In order to obtain incident data, facts recorded and preserved about the incident are organized into specific categories or segments. The mechanism used for recording these facts is a data element. Data elements provide information about crime and its involvement with victims, offenders, property, arrestees, etc.

TIBRS DEFINED

The Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TIBRS) program is designed to collect data on every single crime occurrence and on each incident and arrest within the occurrence.

METHODOLOGY

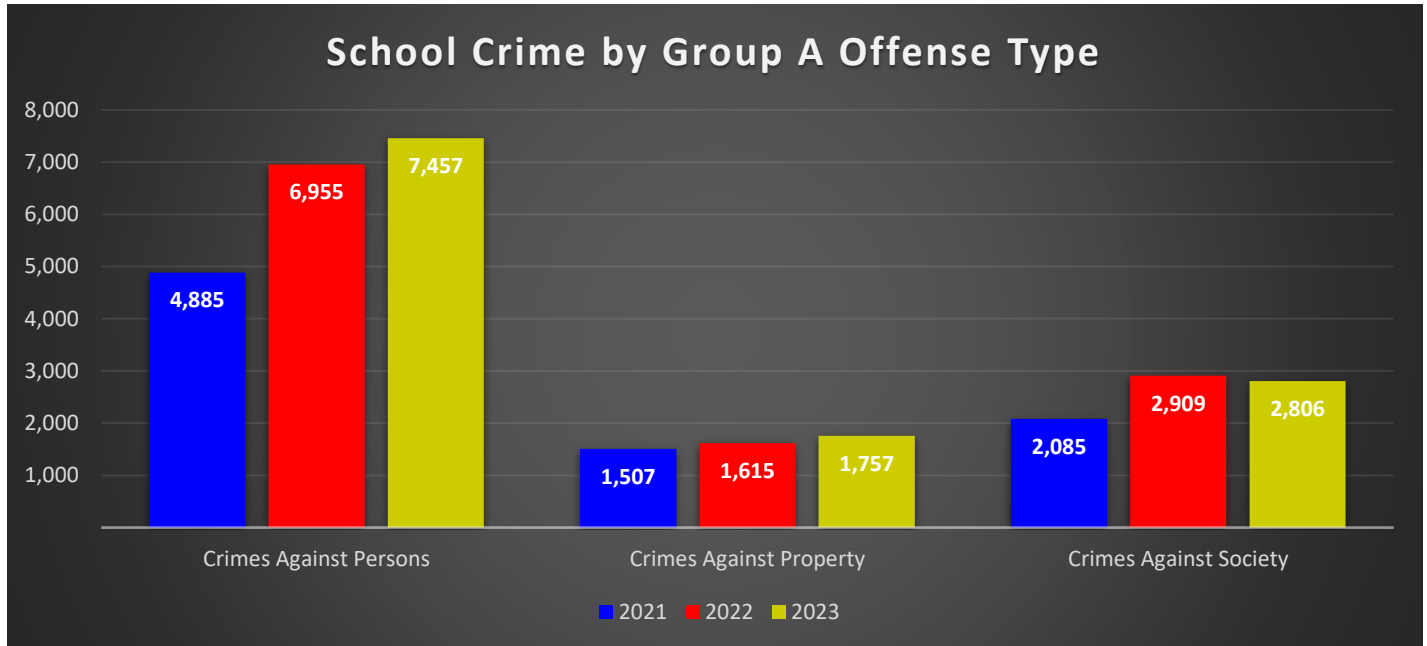
This study specifically addresses incident characteristics, offender characteristics, arrestee characteristics, offense characteristics, and victim characteristics.

QUICK FACTS

- From 2021 to 2023, a total of 31,976 crimes were reported by Tennessee law enforcement agencies with a location code of School – Elementary/Secondary.
- The overall number of reported offenses increased by 41.80% from 2021 to 2023.
- Simple Assault was the most frequently reported offense at 37.81% of reported offenses.
- The month of September had the highest number of reported crimes.
- The largest percentage of school crime happened between 12:00pm and 2:59pm, encompassing 32.38% of incidents.
- Wednesday was the most frequently reported day of the week for school crimes.
- The most commonly reported weapon type was Personal Weapons (Hands, Fists, Feet, Arms, Teeth, etc.) at 77.29%.
- Females made up 51.38% of school crime victims, while Males made up 48.11% with the remaining 0.51% reported as unknown.
- Males made up 60.25% of the school crime offender total, with Females comprising 29.70%. The remainder of offenders were categorized as either Missing (7.12%) or Unknown (2.93%).

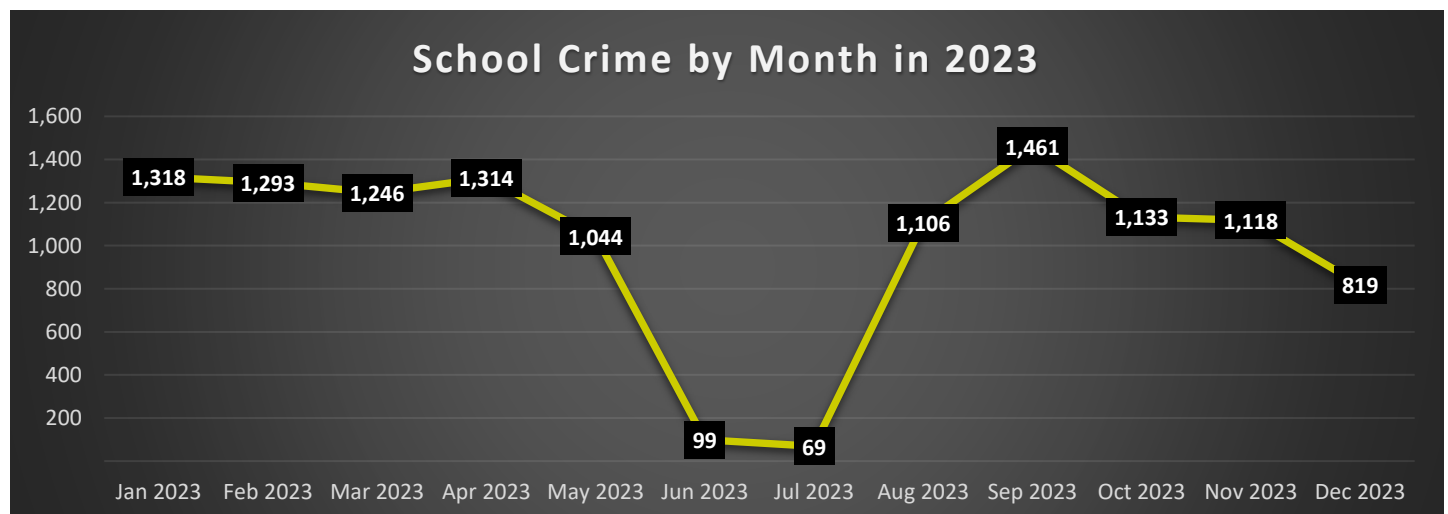
GROUP A OFFENSES

In 2023, a total of 12,020 incidents were reported as having occurred at an elementary/secondary school, showing a slight 4.71% increase from the reported 11,479 incidents in 2022. After the jump in reported incidents from the COVID impacted 2021 school year, this shows a more consistent trend in number of reported Group A incidents occurring in primary and secondary schools.

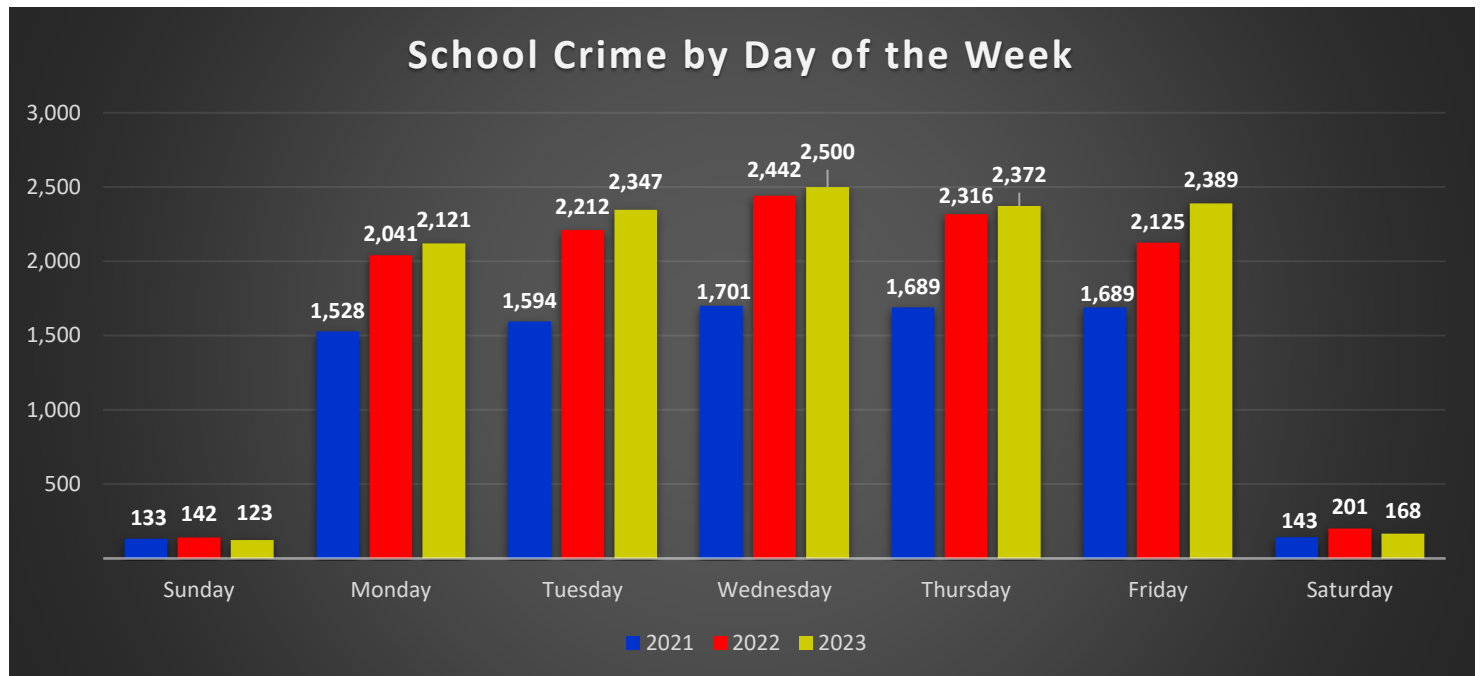


Group A Offenses are categorized into three groups, Crimes Against Persons (representing mainly violent and sex crimes such as Assault or Forcible Fondling), Crimes Against Property (representing crimes where the offense causes some damage against belongings such as Theft, Fraud, or Vandalism), and Crimes Against Society (representing crimes with no immediate victim such as Drug/Narcotic Offenses or Weapons Law Violations). Notably, despite the rise in overall reports in school crime, Crimes Against Society showed a 3.54% decrease in 2023 when compared to 2022.

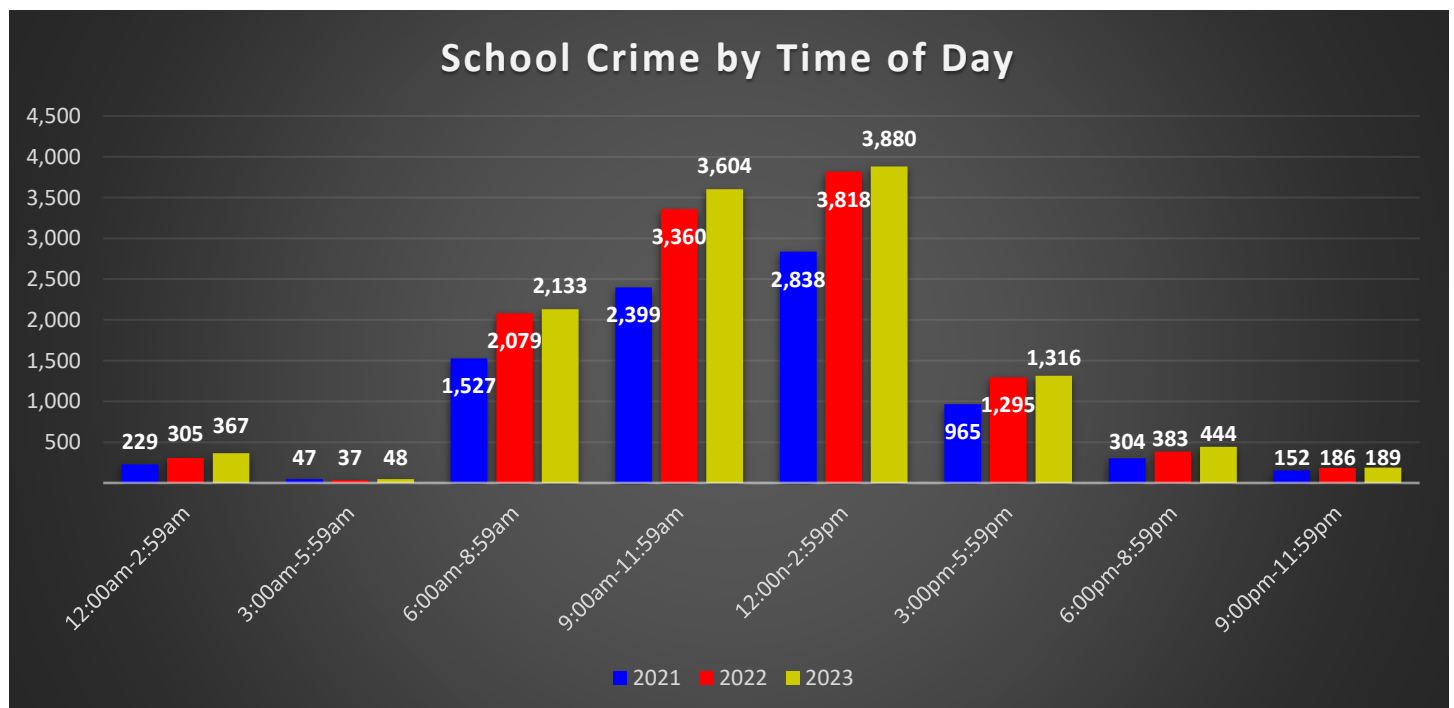
GROUP A OFFENSES BY TIME



Unsurprisingly, school crime incidents correspond directly with the school year, with the most common month for a school crime incident having been reported in 2023 being September, accounting for 12.15% of incidents. September is the first full month of a typical school year. Conversely, the lowest numbers came in during July, accounting for 0.57% of incidents, which is in the middle of Summer when the number of those on school campus are minimal.

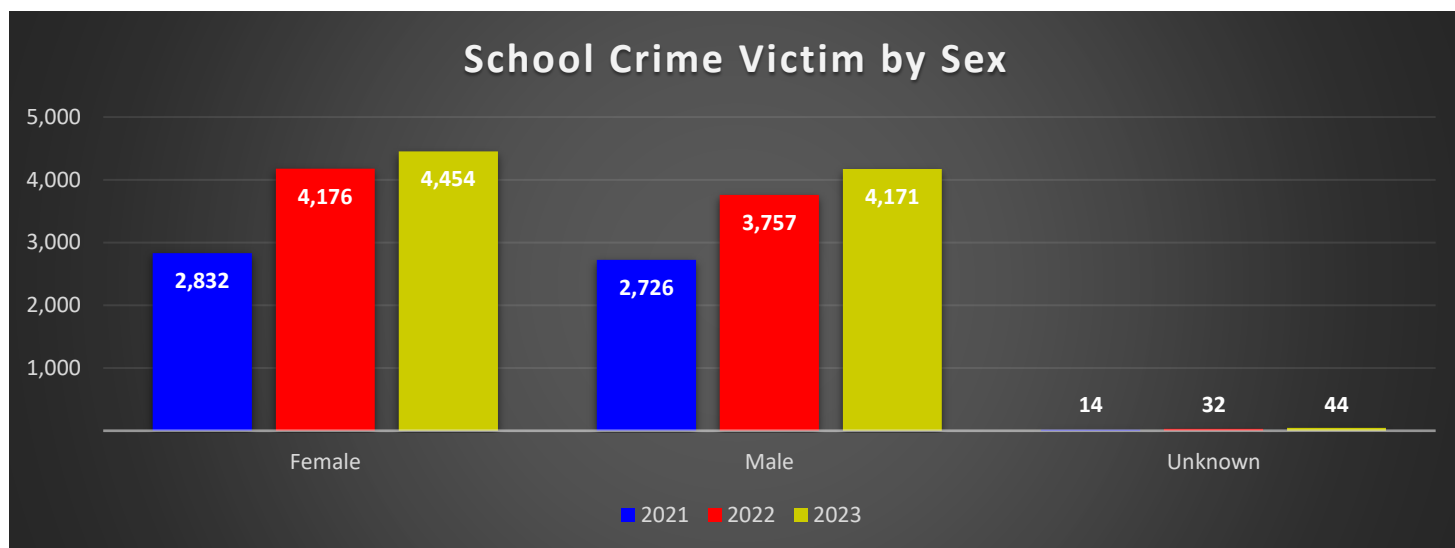


School crime incidents occur mainly during the school week when people are on campus, with Wednesday being the most common day for incidents to occur, with 20.80% of reported incidents, followed closely by Thursday and Friday, with 19.73% and 19.88% respectively.

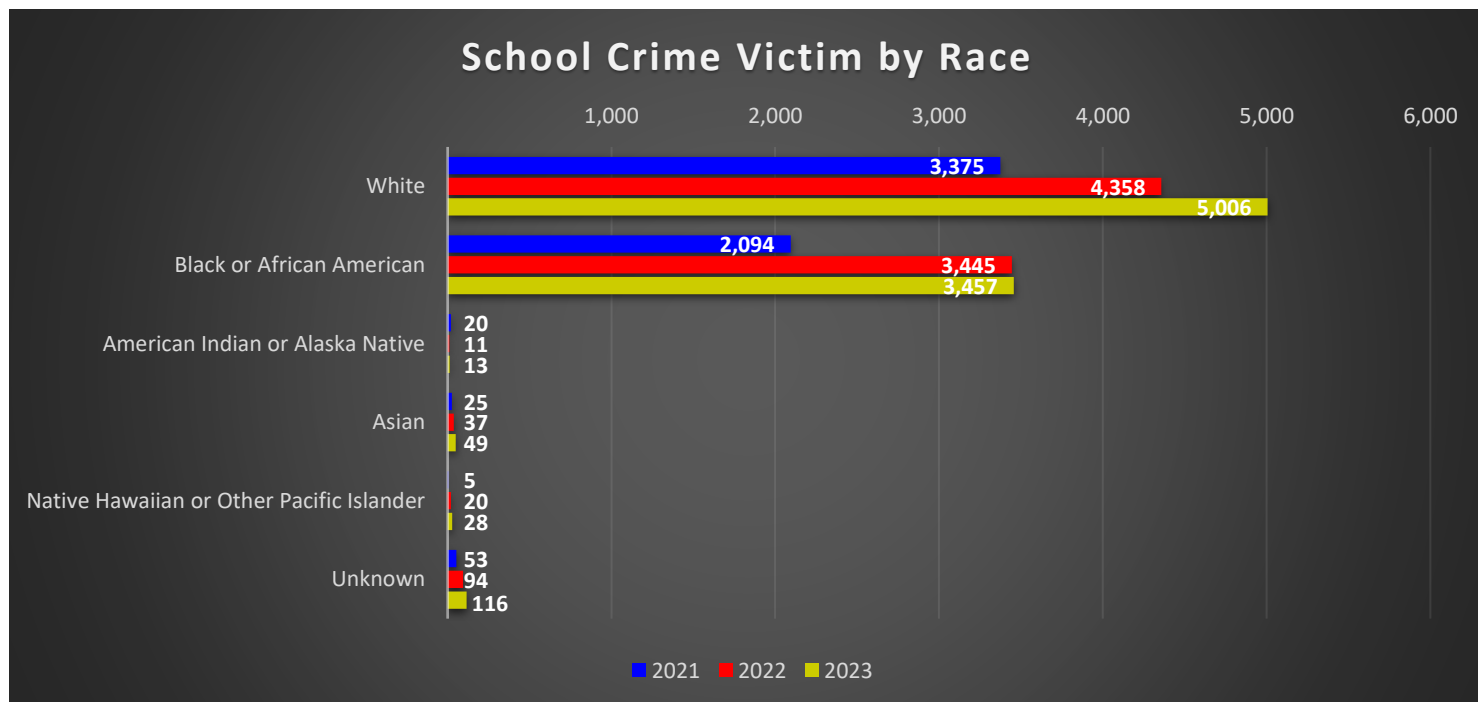


Similar to the other reported aspects regarding times in which school crimes were reported, time of day directly correlates with the time of day that school is in session. The majority of reported incidents are shown to have occurred around midday with 12:00pm-2:59pm accounting for 32.38% of incidents, and 9:00am-11:59am accounting for 30.80% of incidents. Conversely, the night and early morning show almost no incidents, with 3:00am-5:59am accounting for only 0.40% of incidents. The remainder of incidents were listed as Unknown and excluded from this chart.

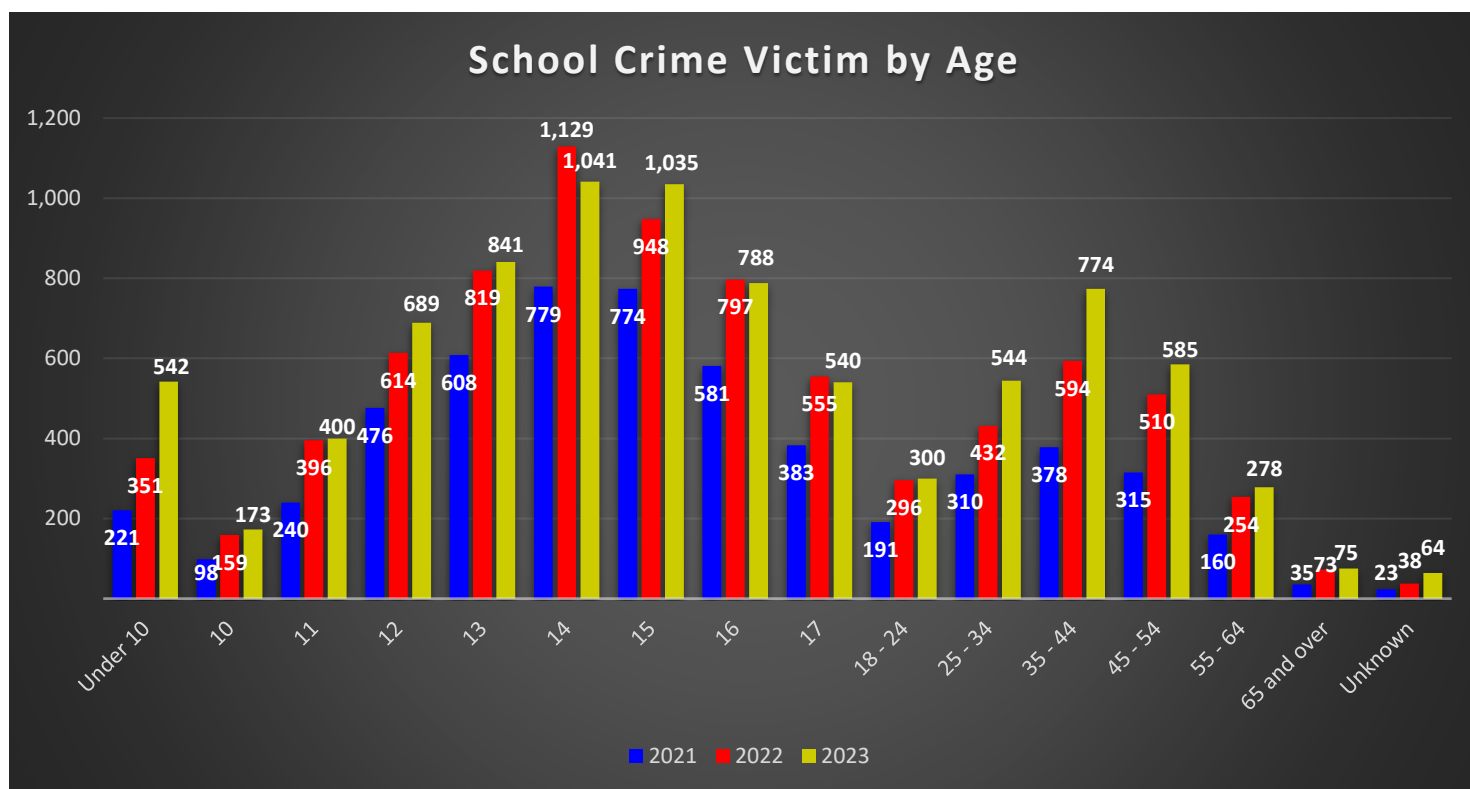
VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS



When looking at school crime victims by sex, the rates between Males and Females were similar year to year, with Females making up 51.38% of incident victims, and Males making up 48.11% in 2023, with the remainder being listed as Unknown.

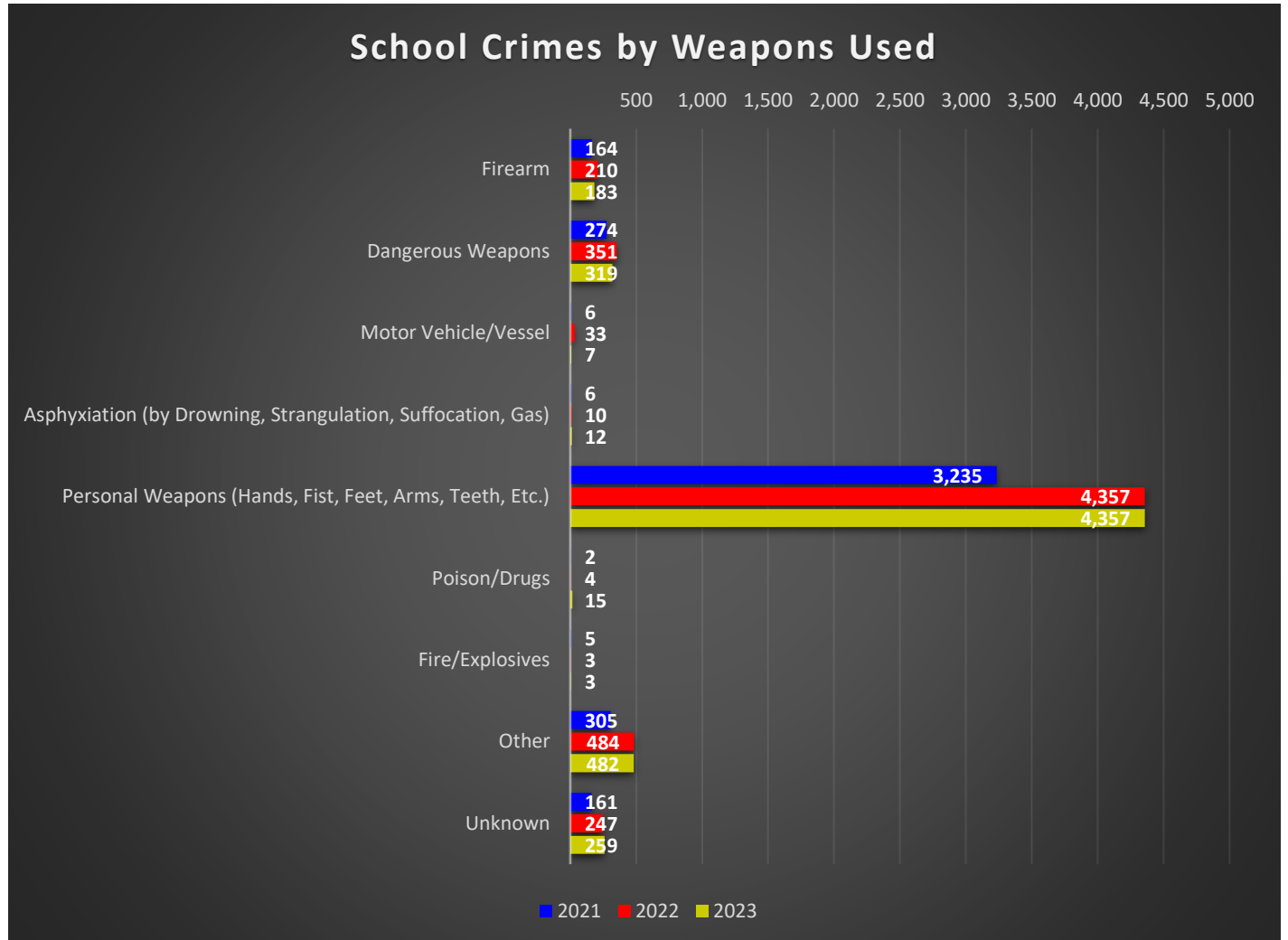


While examining the race of reported school crime victims in 2023, the vast majority fall into the categories of either White, at 57.75% of reported victims, and Black or African American, in 39.88% of reports. The remainder is split between the groups American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and those categorized as Unknown.



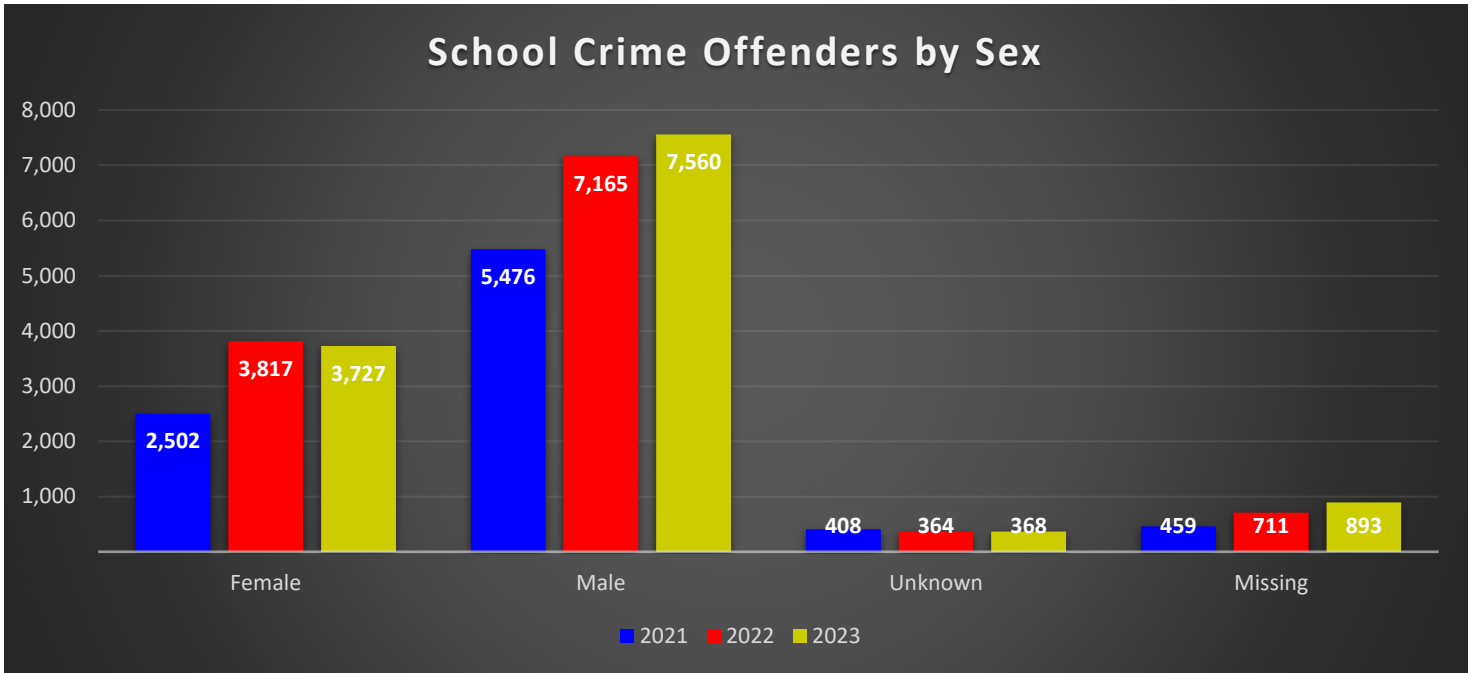
The final victim characteristic examined was age, which in 2023 displayed a bell-curve-like distribution among student-aged victims. Ages 14 and 15 marked the peak, comprising 12.01% and 11.94% of reported school crime victims, respectively. Meanwhile, victims aged 18 and older or classified as Unknown accounted for 30.22% of reported cases."

SCHOOL CRIMES BY WEAPON TYPE

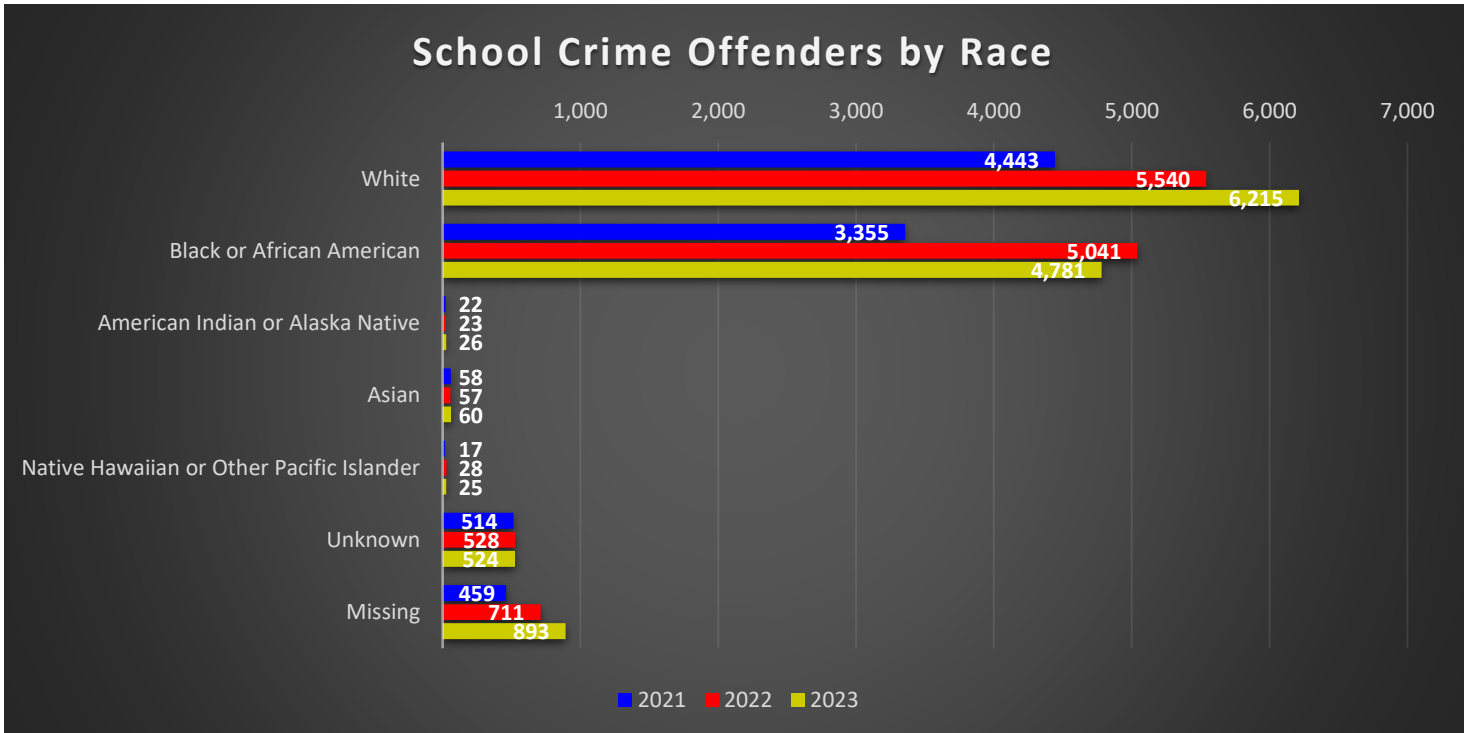


When looking at weapons reported to have been used in school crime offenses in 2023, the vast majority are shown to be of the category Personal Weapons, making up 77.29% of reports. Behind that were those weapons categorized as Other, meaning that they could not fit cleanly into one of the more defined categories, with 8.55% of reported weapons.

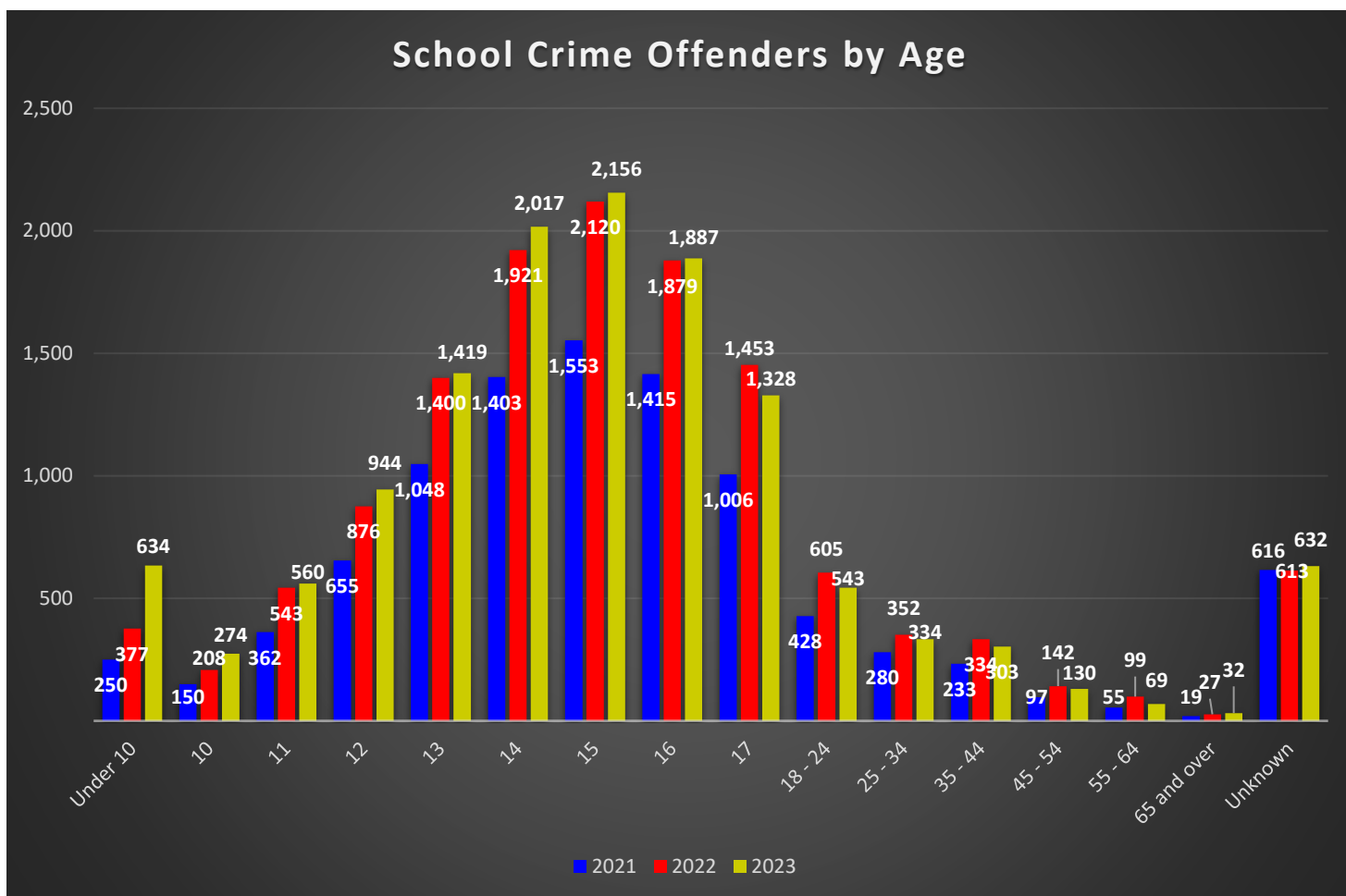
OFFENDER DEMOGRAPHICS



When looking at offender data for school crime offenses in 2023, offenders categorized as Male made up over double the amount of offenders compared to Female, accounting for 60.25% and 29.70% of reported offenders respectively. The remaining 10.05% of school crime offenders were reported as either Unknown, or the data was missing.



In 2023, school crime offenders categorized as White made up the majority of reported race demographics at 49.62% of reported offenders. Black or African American made up the other large portion of reported offender races, at 38.17%.



Offenders in School Crimes in 2023 showed reported ages in similar proportions to reported victims. Again, ages 14 and 15 have the highest number of reports with 15.21% and 16.26% of reported offenders. A more noticeable difference in victim and offender demographics comes with those 18 and older/Unknown, where those groups make up a much smaller proportion of offenders at 15.40%.

SCHOOL CRIME CLEARANCES

SCHOOL CRIME CLEARANCES						
CATEGORY	CLEARANCES			PERCENT CHANGE		
	2021	2022	2023	2021 to 2022	2021 to 2023	2021 to 2023
Cleared by Arrest	3,950	4,730	4,790	19.75%	1.27%	21.27%
Death of Offender	1	0	1	-100.00%	-	0.00%
Prosecution Declined	436	457	523	4.82%	14.44%	19.95%
In Custody of Other Jurisdiction	5	4	15	-20.00%	275.00%	200.00%
Victim Refused to Cooperate	601	677	581	12.65%	-14.18%	-3.33%
Juvenile/No Custody	317	348	399	9.78%	14.66%	25.87%
Total Crime Clearances	5,310	6,216	6,309	17.06%	1.50%	18.81%

Note: Any percentage marked with a dash (-) denotes an infinite increase, which cannot be represented.

Between 2021 and 2023, a total of 17,835 of 31,976 reported school crime incidents were cleared either by arrest or through exceptional means, resulting in a 55.78% clearance rate. Of these clearances, 75.53% were Cleared by Arrest, with the remaining 24.47% being Exceptional Clearances.

In 2023 in particular, 52.49% of the 12,020 reported school crime incidents were reported as having been cleared by arrest or exceptional means, with those 6,309 clearances being broken down into being 75.92% being cleared by arrest, and the remaining 24.08% being exceptional clearances.

An offense is cleared exceptionally when an element beyond law enforcement control prevents a physical arrest. All four of the following must be met in order to clear an offense by exceptional means:

1. The investigation must have established the identity of at least one offender. This means the agency knows at least one offender's sex, race, age, ethnicity, and resident status.
2. Sufficient probable cause must have been developed to support the arrest, charging, and prosecution of the offender.
3. The exact (present) location of the offender must be known so that an arrest could be made.
4. There must be a reason outside of law enforcement control which prevents arrest.

Within 2023 exceptional incident clearances, the most common type reported was Victim Refused to Cooperate, making up 38.25% of exceptional clearance reports.

A point to remember regarding clearance statistics is in a multiple offense incident, the exceptional clearance of any one offense involved clears the entire incident. An incident cannot be cleared exceptionally when an arrest has been made in connection with the incident because the incident would then be cleared by arrest.

SUMMARY

From 2021 to 2023, 31,976 crimes were reported by Tennessee law enforcement agencies with a location code of School – Elementary/Secondary. The overall number of offenses showed a 41.80% increase since 2021. Simple Assault was the most frequently reported offense type at 37.81%. September had the highest reported amount of school crimes. The most frequently reported time of day for school crimes to occur was 12:00pm – 2:59pm at 32.38% of incidents with Wednesday being the most common day for crimes to occur. School crime victims tended to be female, making up 51.38% of victims. The most common race of victims was White at 57.75%. School crime offenders were generally Male at 60.25% with the most common race reported being White at 49.62%. In 2023, 52.49% of school crimes were reported to have been cleared either by arrest or by exceptional means.



Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, December 2024. Publication Authorization Number 348515, electronic copies only. This publication was promulgated at a cost of \$0.00 per copy.