



Embrace Civility Student Survey

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

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Executive Summary

Results of a survey of U.S. secondary students reveals a high level of ineffectiveness of staff responses to hurtful situations (bullying), insight into significant causes of hurtful behavior, and evidence of positive values held by the majority of students.

The current bullying prevention approach is for schools to have rules against bullying, require that staff supervise, tell students to report if they are bullied, and punish the wrong-doer.

A national survey of 1,549 secondary students on bullying and hurtful behavior was conducted by Embrace Civility in the Digital Age in October 2015 calls into serious question the effectiveness of this approach. Students were asked questions about hurtful incidents. “Hurtful” was defined for them as including what is typically called “bullying,” but also including other hurtful interactions.

More Vulnerable students were identified as those frequently being treated badly, who were feeling distressed and unable to get the hurtful situation to stop. Staff members were frequently present and things rarely got better. The vast majority did not report these incidents and for those who did, this did not often make things better.

Impulsive retaliation appears to play a major factor in many of these hurtful incidents. Over two-thirds of students who reported they had been hurtful also reported someone had been hurtful to them.

The vast majority of students hold positive values against hurtful behavior and clearly desire to foster positive relations among their peers, to step in to help if they witness hurtful situations, and to resolve hurtful situations in a restorative manner.

The implications of this survey, along with insight from current research, are that the approaches to bullying that schools are encouraged or required to implement must be fundamentally altered in order to improve effectiveness by reflecting the actual circumstances and dynamics of potentially hurtful situations, by more effectively responding to the underlying concerns of the students, and by more effectively engaging students in leadership roles to foster positive relations.

Key Findings Regarding Staff Effectiveness & Student Reporting

This survey asked students how frequently someone was hurtful to them, how upset they were, and how effective they felt in getting the hurtful situation to stop. The definition provided for “hurtful” included bullying, as well as other hurtful behaviors.

Based on the responses to these three questions, students who were More Vulnerable were identified. These students were those who experienced someone being hurtful to them once or twice a week or almost daily, were upset or very upset, and felt that it was very difficult or they were powerless to get this to stop.

Students who reported someone was hurtful were also asked how staff members, if present, responded and whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse.

Students were also asked whether they told a staff member and, if so, whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse. If they did not tell a staff member, they were asked why they did not do so.

Briefly, the key findings regarding staff effectiveness and hurtful behavior are:

- Nine percent (9%) of students were identified as “more vulnerable.” Based on an estimated population of 25,000,000 U.S. secondary students, 9% equates to 2,250,000 students. Given the sample size, there is a 3% margin of error.
- From the perspective of the More Vulnerable students, staff members were present 69% of the time. Afterwards, things reportedly got better only 13% of the time, stayed the same 47% of the time, and got worse 45% of the time.
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of the More Vulnerable students did not talk with a school staff member. Sixteen percent (16%) of the students told and things stayed the same. Nine percent (9%) told and things got worse. Eleven percent (11%) told and things got better.
- Those who did not tell a staff member indicated they did not do so because they did not think a school staff member would do anything to help or they feared this would make things worse, that they probably deserved to be treated like this, that they would be blamed, or that the hurtful student would retaliate.

The current approach that schools are encouraged, or required by state statute, to implement to reduce bullying views bullying as an act of defiance against the authority of the school. This approach is focused on establishing rules against bullying, requiring staff to stop bullying if they witness this occurring, establishing reporting systems for students to report these hurtful incidents, and punishing those who are hurtful.

The evidence from this survey documents a high level of ineffectiveness in staff responses to hurtful incidents, whether witnessed or reported, and that only a minority of students report these hurtful incidents to staff. The evidence also demonstrates that many of these hurtful incidents involve what appears to be bidirectional cycles of hurtful acts--a hurtful response to being treated badly.

In sum, the evidence from this survey demonstrates that the approach that schools are encouraged, or required by statute, to implement to address bullying is not effectively helping the vast majority of students who are treated badly by peers..

Clearly, it is necessary for schools to rethink how they are seeking to reduce bullying and other hurtful incidents and how staff respond when such hurtful incidents are witnessed or reported.

Key Findings Regarding Hurtful Behavior & Prior Relationships

- Eighty-one percent (81%) of students who reported they were “frequently” hurtful and 69% of students who were “ever” hurtful also reported someone was hurtful to them. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of More Vulnerable students also reported they had been hurtful. Having someone be hurtful to you appears to be the risk factor. Being hurtful is the outcome, especially when telling a staff member did not make things better.
- The two top reasons students provided for being hurtful were that they acted fast without thinking and the person had been hurtful to them or a friend--impulsive behavior and retaliation.
- Both students engaging in hurtful behavior and those who were treated badly report a wide range of prior relationships, including no real connection, best friends, more recent argument, and prior hurtful acts.

The current approach also focuses solely on incidents of “bullying,” which excludes other forms of hurtful behavior. “Bullying” is defined in entirely different ways in the guidance provided to educators, as compared to definitions in state statutes. School staff are required to investigate hurtful incidents to determine whether “bullying” has occurred, so that “the bully” can be disciplined.

These findings document a wide range of prior relationships, as well as a significant amount of bidirectional hurtful acts occurring. These findings again suggest that the current bullying prevention approach will not effectively address the wide range of hurtful incidents that are occurring in schools, which cause emotional harm to students and disrupt student learning.

Key Findings Regarding Student Norms and Values

Students were asked about their norms and values related to bullying and their insight into why they would not engage in hurtful behavior, how to effectively respond to hurtful situations, and their thoughts on stepping in to help when they witness hurtful situations. Students who reported they were hurtful or someone was hurtful to them also were asked followup questions.

Briefly, the key findings regarding student norms, values, and experiences are:

- The vast majority of students disapprove of their peers being hurtful to others.
- Students admire those who are kind and respectful to others, step in to help if they witness hurtful situations, respond to hurtful situations in a positive

way, and stop themselves and strive to remedy the harm.

- Students do not admire those who support others being hurtful, laugh when they see hurtful situations, create hurtful drama to get attention, or think it is “cool” to denigrate others.
- Students most highly approve responses to hurtful situations that reflect a high amount of personal power, as well as personal responsibility, such as apologizing if they have been hurtful.
- The most important reason students indicated they would not be hurtful was how they would feel if someone did this to them.
- Students describe those who step in to help with such words as: Brave, Kind, Hero, Nice, Courageous, and Caring.
- The majority of students indicated that when they witnessed a hurtful situation, they stepped in to help. However, those who were treated badly reported a much lower level of receiving assistance from peers.
- The key barriers students identified to stepping in to help were not knowing what they could do and their perspective that the social norms at the school would not support such intervention.
- All students appear to have mixed feelings about retaliation, that is, they think retaliation may be an appropriate response in some circumstances. They also think that those who are treated badly should immediately respond. This insight is of significant interest, because it appears that reducing impulsive retaliation--and peer support thereof--could result in a significant improvement in student relations.

These survey findings support the conclusion that students should be empowered as leaders in the efforts to foster positive relations and reduce hurtful behaviors in their schools and specifically require greater support in self-regulation and avoiding retaliation. Fortunately, there are research proven approaches to address both of these issues.

Student Perspectives on Effectiveness of Staff Interventions, Reporting Hurtful Incidents & the Nature of Hurtful Behavior

More Vulnerable Students

As noted, this survey asked students how frequently someone was hurtful to them, how upset they were, and how effective they felt in getting the hurtful situation to stop.

Using a combination of the responses to these three questions, students who were considered More Vulnerable were identified. These students are ones who reported someone was hurtful once a week or more, they were upset or very upset, and they found it very difficult or they felt powerless to stop the hurtful incidents from occurring. For these More Vulnerable students, 56% said these hurtful acts occurred almost daily, 68% said they were very upset, and 67% said they felt powerless to stop this.

Nine percent (9%) of the students who responded to this survey were considered to be More Vulnerable based on this criteria. Based on an estimated secondary student population in U.S. schools of 25,000,000, this equates to over 2.2 million students who find themselves in this situation in secondary schools in the U.S.

Students were asked how school staff responded, if present, and whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse after staff response. They were also asked if they told a school staff member and, if so, how the staff responded and whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse. If they did not tell a school staff member, they were asked why they did not do so.

Response of Staff Witnesses

Overall, students indicated that from their perspective a staff member was present 65% of the time and students reported that after this:

- 30% Things got better.
- 49% Things stayed the same.
- 21% Things got worse

However, the More Vulnerable students fared much worse. For these students, staff were reportedly present 69% of the time and students reported that after this:

- 13% Things got better
- 47% Things stayed the same.
- 40% Things got worse.

What students reported made things better were when staff:

- 64% Stepped in to help.
- 47% Told the person being hurtful to stop.
- 38% Punished the person being hurtful.
- 37% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 31% Reported the incident to the office.

For all students reported staff responses that made things stay the same or get worse were when staff ignored the

situation or just watched. What reportedly made things get worse for the More Vulnerable students were when staff:

- 54% Ignored the situation.
- 46% Just watched.
- 43% Made me feel as if I were at fault.

Telling a Staff Member

Overall, only 32% of all students told a school staff member. Only 36% of the More Vulnerable students told a staff member.

Only 26% of the students considered Less Vulnerable--those who reported someone was hurtful once or twice a month, they were not upset, and they were able to get the situation to stop--told a staff member. The reason these students did not tell was that they had resolved the hurtful situation.

Overall, after students told a staff member:, students reported:

- 48% Things got better.
- 39% Stayed the same.
- 15% Things got worse.

Again, the situation was worse for the More Vulnerable students. After these students told a staff member, they reported:

- 30% Things got better.
- 45% Things stayed the same.
- 25% Things got worse.

What reportedly made things worse for the More Vulnerable students were:

- 54% Ignored me.
- 46% Made me feel as if I were at fault.
- 38% Told me to stop doing what I was doing.
- 38% Appeared to support the student being hurtful.
- 38% Also did something hurtful.

The same kinds of reported responses appeared to make things better or stay the same. These included intervening with the hurtful student, supporting the student who was treated badly, and helping resolve the situation.

However, the level of intensity of the staff intervention, based on more steps taken by this staff member, appeared to play a role in making things better. For the More Vulnerable Students, what reportedly made things better were:

- 75% Told the student being hurtful to stop.
- 75% Punished the student who was hurtful.
- 75% Talked with both of us apart to resolve the situation.
- 68% Helped me figure out ways I could handle the situation.
- 63% Told me if I were ever upset I could come and talk.
- 63% Checked in with me later to see if things were okay.
- 56% Talked with us both to resolve the situation.

Why Students Did Not Report

For the 64% of More Vulnerable students who did not tell a school staff member, the reasons given were:

- 50% Did not think a school staff member would do anything to help.
- 44% Thought that a school staff member might make things worse.
- 35% Thought I would be blamed.
- 35% I probably deserved it.
- 33% The student being hurtful would likely have retaliated.

Clearly, based on the data from those students who did talk to an adult, these reasons appear to be grounded in fact--likely past experiences in asking for help from an adult.

Overall Findings for More Vulnerable Students

Thus, looking at these findings from an overall perspective, the current level of the “tell an adult” approach to bullying for More Vulnerable students is:

- 64% Did not tell a staff member.
- 11% Told a staff member and things got better.
- 16% Told a staff member and things stayed the same.
- 9% Told a staff member and things got worse.

A dismal 11% level of effectiveness in the current approach must result in proactive reassessment of the current recommended approach.

It should be noted that this study is not the first to identify the concern of staff effectiveness. The *Youth Voice Project* asked students who were repeatedly bullied and had experienced moderate to very severe levels of distress whether they reported to an adult at school and, if so, whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse.¹ The findings indicated:

- Elementary (grade 5). 46% did not tell an adult, 29% told and things got better, 17% told and things stayed the same, 11% told and things got worse.
- Middle school (grades 6 to 8). 68% did not tell an adult at school, 12% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 12% told and things got worse.
- High school (grades 9 to 12). 76% did not tell an adult at school, 7% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 9% told and things got worse.

Staff Responses to Students Who Were Hurtful

Additional insight into the effectiveness of staff interventions was obtained in the responses to the questions of students who reported that they had been hurtful. These students indicated that from their perspective staff was present 78% of the time. These students reported:

- 28% Things got better.
- 54% Things stayed the same.
- 18% Things got worse.

Fascinatingly, the highest reported responses by staff that these hurtful students thought made things worse were:

- 33% Just watched.
- 30% Ignored the situation.
- 28% Told me to stop.
- 26% Appeared to support me.

What these hurtful students thought made things better were:

- 44% Stepped in to help.
- 42% Told me to stop.
- 41% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 34% Talked with both of us apart to resolve the situation.
- 33% Punished me.

It appears that students who were hurtful desired staff assistance in resolving these situations.

“Told me to stop” was high on the list of leading to all three outcomes. However, on another question regarding what had ultimately happened, only 3% of these students indicated they stopped being hurtful because they were told to stop by a school staff member. The vast majority reported they had stopped because they decided to, a classmate or the one who they had targeted told them to stop, or they had resolved the situation.

Implications

The results of this survey call attention to the significant challenges in the primary approach schools are currently being advised to use to reduce bullying.

It is presumed that school staff do want to respond to these hurtful situations in an effective manner and will be dismayed by these findings. Based on extensive research on these issues, it is suggested that the following key factors likely play a significant role in the lack of effectiveness of staff in responding to these hurtful situations and the lack of student reporting. These factors include:

- **The focus on “bullying” as a violation of a school rule, rather than a social skills challenge.** The authoritarian, rules-and-punishment-based approach that assumes that “bullying” can be effectively stopped by making rules against such behavior and punishing students who violate the rules. This approach dramatically shifts the focus away from important life lessons and learning opportunities for the students and the school community. By treating these situations as disciplinary matters, the school staff member usurps the position of the student who was treated badly, for whom remedy is deserved, and turns the matter into a violation of a rule that is imposed by the adult authority. Clearly, a significant number of these hurtful situations are bidirectional in nature. Being treated in a hurtful way is a risk factor for being hurtful.
- **What educators are taught about the nature of bullying and other hurtful behavior.** What educators are taught about students who engage in bullying is incomplete. Most instruction for educators focuses solely on the concerns of students who have significant challenges and are also aggressive. Recent research has demonstrated that the students who most frequently engage in hurtful behavior, especially at the secondary level, are the socially-skilled “popular” students who are engaging in hurtful behavior to achieve social dominance. Because these “social climbers” have excellent social skills, they are very effective at being hurtful to their peers using strategies that are not as easily detected by school staff. Many of these situations involve bidirectional cycles of hurtful acts.
- **The failure to focus on the empowerment of targeted students.** The most common description of students who are “bullied” presents these students as lacking in sufficient strength to positively and powerfully respond. There is ample research documenting the long lasting harms, but an abject lack of research on how to prevent these harms. Believing these students are incapable of becoming empowered and effectively responding when someone treats them badly supports

their continued victimization. Rather than view these targeted students as inherently lacking in personal strength, intervention efforts must be shifted to a focus on empowering them to better respond to hurtful situations on their own and addressing the harm that was caused.

The Nature of Hurtful Behavior & Prior Relationships

Being Hurtful & Having Someone be Hurtful to Them

There is clearly a relationship between being hurtful and having others be hurtful to you. Looking at the data from the perspective of students who reported they were hurtful:

- 81% who were Frequently hurtful (once or twice a week or almost daily) also reported someone was hurtful to them.
- 69% of students who were Ever hurtful (once or twice a month, once or twice a week or almost daily) also reported someone was hurtful to them.
- 40% of those who reported they were Never hurtful reported someone was hurtful to them.

Looking at the data from the perspective of students who reported someone was hurtful to them:

- 56% of students who reported someone Ever was hurtful to them had Never been hurtful to another.
- 88% of students who reported no one had been hurtful to them had Never been hurtful to another.
- 63% of the More Vulnerable students had Never been hurtful to another.

A risk estimate was computed for these findings. Being hurt is the risk factor. Engaging in hurtful behavior is the outcome. Students who had Ever engaged in hurtful behavior were 3.6 times more likely to have been hurt than students who had Never engaged in hurtful behavior.

As is documented below, retaliation for being treated in a hurtful way was a key reason given for engaging in hurtful behavior.

While some of these situations are more one-direction in nature, clearly many hurtful situations could more accurately be described as cycles of hurtful acts and retaliation. Thus, in an investigation and intervention, addressing the issue of prior relationships and prior hurtful acts by both parties is important.

When students who are identified as being hurtful are then punished by the school, without addressing the fact

that others have been hurtful to them, all schools are doing is adding to the harm.

There appears to be no relationship in making a decision to tell a staff member based on whether or not the student who was treated badly had also been hurtful. Thirty two percent (32%) of students who were Ever hurtful and had someone be hurtful to them told an adult and 32% of those who were Never hurtful and had someone be hurtful to them told an adult.

There appears to be a significant difference on the outcome of telling an adult on whether students were Ever hurtful.

- 33% of students who had someone hurtful to them, told an adult and things got better were Ever hurtful.
- 53% of students who had someone hurtful to them, told an adult and things stayed the same or got worse were Ever hurtful.

It appears that also being hurtful does not have a relationship with the decision to tell an adult that someone has been hurtful to you. However, the outcome of telling an adult if someone has been hurtful, whether things get better, appears to have a significant correlation with not being hurtful. This could mean that if things did not get better, the student retaliated or that staff were less effective in resolving situations where both students are being hurtful.

Prior Relationships

Students who were hurtful and those who were treated badly both reported a variety of prior relationships. Highest on both lists were that they were good friends, they had no connection, and things were fine between them. Students who were More Vulnerable reported a higher rate of ongoing hurtful relationships.

Implications

These findings must be considered in connection with the guidance provided to school staff that their focus should be on determining whether “bullying,” variously defined, has occurred and then applying a disciplinary consequence on “the bully.” There appear to be a wide range of potential relationships that underly hurtful situations, which will require a broader focus on fostering positive relations and resolving a broad range of types of hurtful incidents.

Student Perspectives on Hurtful Student Behavior

This survey also sought to identify additional student perspectives about hurtful interpersonal behavior, especially focusing on identifying students’ norms and values and their thoughts on effective responses when

treated badly, why they would not be hurtful, why they were hurtful, and stepping in to help.

Who Students Admire

Students clearly do not support hurtful behavior--with 89% of students reporting that they do not like to see a student being hurtful to another.

Students admire those who engage in these actions:

- 88% Are respectful and kind to others.
- 86% Reach out to help someone who is treated badly.
- 81% Tell someone who is being hurtful to stop.
- 71% Help someone who was hurtful decide to make things right.
- 65% Were treated badly and responded in a positive way. 61% Report serious concerns to an adult.
- 61% Were hurtful, but stopped and made things right.

Students do not admire those who engage in these actions:

- 56% Ignore hurtful situations involving others.
- 82% Laugh when seeing that someone is being treated badly.
- 84% Create hurtful "drama" to get attention.
- 84% Think it is "cool" to be disrespectful to others.

Students reported mixed feelings about those who were treated badly and engaged in retaliation, which will be discussed below.

Those Who Help

Students describe those who step in to help with such words as these:

In open ended questions asking how they could reach out to be kind to someone who had been treated badly or tell someone being hurtful to stop, the students expressed excellent ideas on what to do or say.

The majority of students indicated that when they witnessed a hurtful situation, they stepped in to help in a variety of ways. However, those who indicated someone was hurtful to them reported a much lower level of receiving assistance from peers.

This finding can be positively interpreted as an expressed desire of students to step in to help. However, there appear to be barriers between such positive intent and action.

The key barriers students identified to stepping in to help were:

- 59% I didn't know what I could do.
- 34% It was none of my business.

- 32% I could have failed and embarrassed myself.
- 28% Other students might have teased me if I tried to help.
- 28% School staff is supposed to handle this.

The first identified barrier reflects students' lack of comprehensive skills needed to safely and effectively step in to help. The following barriers all reflect students' perspective that the social norms at the school, imparted by staff and students, would not support their stepping in to help. Both of these factors can be better addressed through instruction and a focus on the actual student norms of admiration for those who help.

Why Not Be Hurtful

Students were asked the three most important reasons they would not be hurtful to another, The three top reasons were:

- 78% How I would feel if someone did this to me.
- 50% How I would feel about myself.
- 36% What my parents would think.

As noted, students were also asked an open-ended question about what they would say to someone who was being hurtful. Many of the statements they provided were a version of the "golden rule." For example: "Would like to be treated like that?" "Imagine if it was you." "Treat others the way you want to be treated."

How to Respond if Someone is Hurtful

When asked their opinion on what responses, when someone was hurtful, were generally helpful, generally not helpful, or mixed, the top generally helpful responses were:

- 61% To tell themselves they will not give this person the power to make them feel bad.
- 57% Apologize if they have also been hurtful.
- 56% Immediately respond.
- 55% Calmly tell the hurtful person to stop.

However, students do not think responding in a hurtful way, such as getting into a fight or saying or posting hurtful things about or to the person, are generally helpful responses.

While 49% of students indicated reporting the incident to the office was generally helpful, in another question, 62% of the students thought that it was not that likely or not at all likely that students in their school would report.

These responses indicate that students seek to be empowered to respond effectively to hurtful situations and

to accept personal responsibility for hurtful acts they have engaged in.

What Happened After

Students who were hurtful were asked what best described what happened after this incident and reported:

- 21% I realized that I should not do this, so I stopped.
- 16% Truthfully, I have not stopped being hurtful.
- 13% I just decided to stop for no specific reason.
- 12% The person I was hurtful to and I resolved the difficulty.
- 12% Other reason I stopped.
- 7% A friend told me to stop, and so I did.
- 6% The person I was hurtful to told me to stop, and so I did.
- 5% Another student told me to stop, and so I did.
- 5% My parents told me to stop, and so I did.
- 3% A school staff person told me to stop, and so I did.

Note the degree to which these students reported they resolved these hurtful situations by themselves or in relationship with peers, including the one who was hurtful and the low level of impact of adult intervention. This finding is supported by an understanding of the developmental priorities of teens.

Impulsive Retaliation

Students who indicated they had been hurtful to another student in the last month were then asked what they were thinking at the time. The two key reasons students said they were hurtful were:

- 47% I acted too fast when I was angry and really did not "think."
- 44% This student had been hurtful to me or a friend of mine.

The evidence of bidirectional hurtful acts also supports the conclusion that a significant amount of hurtful behavior can be characterized as cycles of hurtful acts.

It appears from the responses to questions of all students, that many students have mixed feelings about retaliation. As noted above, students reported they admired those who were treated badly and responded in a positive way. They also think apologizing if you were hurtful is an effective response.

Also, as reported above, students also overwhelmingly did not think that hurtful responses, such as getting into a fight or saying or posting hurtful things to or about a

person, were generally effective ways to respond if someone was hurtful.

However, 52% appeared to think that retaliation may be appropriate in some circumstances and 30% indicated they admired someone who was treated badly and retaliated. Clearly, the issue of retaliation must be addressed.

Also note that many students thought immediately responding was generally effective. If this immediate response is to calmly tell the student being hurtful to stop, this is likely a helpful response. The danger of an immediate response clearly is acting when angry and being hurtful.

It is likely that students consider an immediate response to show more power. However, if the immediate response is a hurtful act, as this frequently appears to be, this clearly will not act to resolve these hurtful situations.

The combination of responses by students provides insight to support better strategies to reduce hurtful behavior. Significantly, there are solid, research-based approaches that can help students increase their ability to self-regulate to avoid impulsive behavior and to decrease retaliation.

Implications

These survey findings provide insight into the positive norms and values held by the vast majority of students and clearly indicate the desire of these students to foster positive relations and address hurtful situations in a restorative manner.

To better address these barriers, schools must empower students with a more effective range of skills they can use to safely and effectively help and better communicate the positive norms and values held by the majority of their students regarding their admiration for those who step in to help.

Conclusions

Schools are strongly advised of the need to reassess the approach they have implemented to address bullying. The current authoritarian, rule and punishment based approach, which schools are encouraged to implement and often required by state statute to implement, does not appear to be having a positive effect.

Leaders in this field are now recommending a shift to a focus on engaging all members of the school community, including students, to build a positive school. and foster positive relations.

It is necessary that educators gain a greater understanding of the different forms of hurtful behavior, especially the hurtful behavior of more socially skilled students who are

seeking social dominance and the incidents that are more bidirectional in nature, and more effective approaches for staff to intervene.

Given the positive norms and values of students reflected in this survey, educators are encouraged to focus more significantly on strategies to empower students to foster positive relations.

Efforts to integrate social-emotional learning, cultural competency, growth mindset, mindfulness, and restorative practices into schools are clearly supported by this data.

The following specific strategies are recommended:

- Revise current staff intervention approaches and provide more effective professional development for staff for when they witness hurtful situations. Special attention must be paid to identifying those students who are More Vulnerable and ensuring appropriate follow-up to ensure the hurtful situations are resolved.
- Improve the effectiveness of interventions when students reach out to request assistance from staff. Simply repeatedly telling students to “tell an adult” and setting up new reporting systems are not approaches that will lead to greater numbers of students reporting--if when they do so there is not a significant likelihood that things will get better. This will require a shift from intervention responses that are disciplinary in nature to approaches that seek to resolve and restore relationships that have gone amiss and address the social skills challenges of all involved students.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in more serious situations. A district-wide post-incident evaluation system is strongly recommended. This system should support a determination of which situations require continued staff involvement, as well as the ability to assess the effectiveness of various intervention approaches in each school.
- Address the concerns of Marginalized students who are more frequently hurtful and those who are More Vulnerable using an approach grounded in Multiple Tier System of Supports (MTSS). Generally, a Tier II or III MTSS approach is implemented to address student misbehavior. However, ongoing intervention strategies that provide support, including a routine, positive-focused check-in/check-out, can be developed to provide essential support to students who experience relationship challenges. For students on Individual Education Plans or 504 Plans, this can be integrated into the plans.
- Strengthen and better communicate the positive norms and values held by the majority of their students .

- Empower all students with more effective skills to resolve hurtful incidents as participants or witnesses.
- Implement research-based approaches to address both impulsive behavior and retaliation, as well as restorative approaches that seek to help students who have been hurtful to acknowledge their wrongdoing and remedy the harm.

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age promotes a 21st Century approach to address hurtful youth behavior. This approach promotes the positive values held by young people, empowers young people with effective skills and resiliency, and encourages young people to be helpful allies who positively intervene when they witness peers being hurt or at risk. This approach also focuses on increasing the effectiveness of adults in supporting young people and effectively responding to the hurtful incidents that occur.

Website: <http://embracecivility.org>

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D., Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age, brings a background of working with emotionally challenged students, law, and digital technologies to the challenge of fostering positive relations in the digital age. Nancy is the author of the first book ever published on cyberbullying, *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats* (2007). She is the author of several other books and frequently contributed articles to publications for educators, such as District Administration.

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age is releasing two resources for schools:

Be a Leader! is a research-based instructional program for students that focuses on assisting students gain essential skills in five areas. Version I is provided to schools at no charge.

- **Reach Out** I reach out to be kind to someone who has been treated badly or left out. I help others think things through or resolve conflict.
- **Say “Stop”** I help someone who is being hurtful to stop, own it & fix it. If it is safe, I publicly tell someone being hurtful to stop.
- **Report Concerns** If it is a serious situation, I tell an adult who can help.
- **Stop, Own It & Fix It** I remember that my choices show who I truly am. I stop myself & make things right if I was hurtful.
- **Be Positively Powerful** I am making a positive difference.

Embrace Civility: Fostering Positive Relations in School is a professional development resource for school staff. This resource includes 6 short videos for school staff to watch, with accompanying written materials. Using a “flipped classroom-student voice” approach, staff can watch these videos on their own and then ask students questions about what they learned. This insight is then brought to a staff meeting for discussion and identification of positive strategies. The 6 units cover:

- Unit 1. Embrace Civility Student Survey & Overview of a Positive New Approach

- Unit 1. Research Insight to Support Rethinking Bullying Prevention
- Unit 3. Helping Students Who Have Been Targeted Gain Resilience
- Unit 4. Helping Students Who Are Hurtful Stop, Own it & Fix it
- Unit 5. Encouraging Students to Step in to Help
- Unit 6. Effective Interventions by Staff Who Witness Hurtful Incidents

Unit 7. Effective Investigations & Restorative Interventions is a resource for designated staff members who must respond to the more serious hurtful situations.

¹ Davis, S. and Nixon, C. (2013) Youth Voice Project: Student Insights into Bullying and Peer Mistreatment. Research Press: Illinois; Davis S. and Nixon, C. (2011) Youth Voice Project, National Data Set. Youth Voice Project. <http://www.youthvoiceproject.com>.

About the Survey

The *Embrace Civility Student Survey* was conducted during to obtain better understanding of student norms and behavior related to bullying and other hurtful behavior. The survey was conducted from October 7th to October 25, 2015.

The survey was fielded through SurveyMonkey.com and their Global Partner Network. The SurveyMonkey Global Partner Network consists of dozens of accredited research panels around the world. In order to generate high quality data from teenage respondents in the U.S., SurveyMonkey specifically selected the Tap Research panel for this study.

Respondents were invited via a network of more than 10,000 popular mobile apps where they can opt-in to take a survey to earn virtual currency. They were not given any information about the content or topic of the survey, only the length of time it would take to complete and what they would earn for completing in.

A total sample of 1,549 students were surveyed for the purpose of this study. This number of respondents provides statistical significance and minimal margin of error (1500 responses = 3% margin of error).

These students were in grades 6 through 12 in public or private schools in the U.S. Of these students, 52% were female (F), 44% were male (M), and 4% indicated they preferred not to say (PNTS). Respondents sampled were spread across regions throughout the U.S. The percentage of students who responded based on grade level was:

- 3% 6th grade.
- 7% 7th grade.
- 21% 8th grade.
- 27% 9th grade.
- 26% 10th grade.
- 9% 11th grade.
- 7% 12th grade.

This survey focused on a range of issues, including student's perspectives on norms and effective strategies, issues related to engaging in hurtful behavior as well as being targeted, and concerns associated with student reporting and the effectiveness of school staff responses.

Many of the questions relate to what is referred to as "hurtful." The definition provided was: "Hurtful incidents could be called bullying, harassment, disrespect or 'put-downs,' conflict or 'drama,' fighting, and the like."

This was an intentionally broad definition and as predicted, the reported rates of hurtful behavior were higher than those reported in other surveys that ask about

"bullying." By asking the question in a more expansive manner, greater insight was gained into a variety of aspects related to these situations.

The responses to these questions included Never, once or twice a month, once or twice a week, and almost daily. These responses are similar to those used in the National Crimes Victimization Survey - School Crimes Supplement.

Students who reported someone was hurtful or they were hurtful were asked about the response of staff who witnessed the hurtful situations. Those who reported someone was hurtful were also asked if they told a school staff member and, if so, how this staff member responded. After all of these questions, students were asked what happened, with three possible responses: Things got better. Things stayed the same. Things got worse. These outcome responses were first used in the Youth Voice Project research.

Great appreciate is expressed to Dr. Lee Sebastiani, Adjunct Professor in the Education Dept. at Maywood University in Scranton PA and author of the forthcoming book, *Building Character Online*, for assistance with the statistical analysis

This survey is underdevelopment as an instrument for schools to use to on an annual basis to assess the situation in their schools, develop better strategies to address the identified concerns, assess the effectiveness of those strategies, and support positive social norms instruction for students. .

Research Overview

Overall Evidence of Effectiveness

In *Reframing Bullying Prevention to Build Stronger Communities*, Dillon provides the following guidance:

In bullying prevention, safety doesn't come from controlling what students say and do to each other, it comes from working with them to create a psychologically safe environment for all members of the school community. Schools cannot truly be psychologically safe for students unless they change how they view and use power. ... Psychological safety cannot come from getting students to follow slogans or rules or from inspiration assemblies; it requires a change in how those in leadership positions treat others.²

Recent articles have raised attention to significant concerns associated with the current approaches to bullying prevention. Despite almost four decades of research on bullying, ranging from prevalence studies, etiological investigations, and systematic reviews and evaluations of prevention and intervention programs, the evidence indicates that current bullying prevention approaches are only marginally helpful.³

Cohen and colleagues note that there have been five meta-analytic studies published in peer-review publications that have focused on the efficacy of school-based bully prevention programs. These studies have indicated that the efficacy of school bullying prevention programs have varied from no reduction in bullying to minimal reduction in bullying--across countries and at different grade levels.⁴

A recent meta-analysis of studies assessing the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs by Yeager and colleagues demonstrated that current recommended approaches appeared to be somewhat effective up until 6th grade, but efficacy dropped significantly in 7th grade.⁵ In 8th grade and beyond, efficacy dropped to zero.

Schools in the U.S are often encouraged to use the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP).⁶ Much of the guidance provided to schools through the StopBullying.Gov web site is grounded in the insight provided by Dr. Olweus.

OBPP has not demonstrated effectiveness in implementations in the U.S. and is no longer listed as an evidence-based program on the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices NREPP.⁷ Espelage, a bullying prevention authority, recently noted:

The efficacy of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), considered the gold-standard and used in thousands of US school districts, is questionable.⁸

The Positive Behavior and Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework is also frequently mentioned as offering an effective approach to address bullying.⁹ PBIS is a behavioral management based framework that is narrowly focused on providing supports to prevent the development of problem behaviors and to teach and reinforce desirable behavior. Its primary focus is on those students who present problem behavior, which, as will be discussed below, does not describe the kinds of students who most frequently engage in hurtful behavior at the secondary level.

The PBIS framework does incorporate components that are important for school management, such as being school-wide, positively expressed behavior standards, positive acknowledgement of positive student behavior, data-driven processes, incorporating multiple levels of support for students who are at greater risk, and recognizing the importance of adult behavior.

However, Cohen and colleagues note that the PBIS program is implemented in disempowering authoritarian fashion rather than democratically and collaboratively.¹⁰ While research has documented that the implementation of PBIS resulted in staff perspectives of a reduction of bullying and improvement in school climate, there has been no documented effectiveness of PBIS in reducing student reports of being bullied.¹¹

Components of the Commonly Recommended or Required Bullying Prevention Approach

State legislatures have taken action to require schools to implement policies against bullying.¹² Each state addresses bullying slightly differently. In December 2010, the U.S. Department of Education recommended the following components for state statutes and school district policies:¹³

- A policy that prohibits bullying that occurs within all school environments and enumerates specific characteristics of students who have been historically targeted.
- A definition of bullying which distinguishes bullying from other student hurtful behavior.

- A procedure for students, parents, staff, and others to report incidents of bullying.
- A requirement that school personnel report, in a timely and responsive manner, incidents of bullying they witness or are aware of.
- A procedure for promptly investigating and responding to any report of an incident of bullying, which includes initial intervention and notification to parents, and, if appropriate, law enforcement.
- A procedure for maintaining written records of all incidents of bullying and their resolution.
- A detailed description of a graduated range of consequences and sanctions for bullying.
- A procedure for referring the victim, perpetrator and others to counseling and mental and other health services, as appropriate.

This is the training that the StopBullying.Gov web site recommends be provided to school staff:

To ensure that bullying prevention efforts are successful, all school staff need to be trained on what bullying is, what the school's policies and rules are, and how to enforce the rules.¹⁴

This is an authoritarian, rules-and-punishment-based approach that mistakenly assumes that “bullying” can be effectively stopped by making rules against such behavior and punishing students who violate the rules. It is well known that the “just say ‘no’” approach to drug abuse prevention was a total failure.¹⁵ There should be no surprise to find that this approach is only minimally effective, if that.

Under this approach, schools are also not directed to better address other issues of hurtful student behavior towards peers that do not meet the definition of “bullying.” These other hurtful incidents, frequently bidirectional and involving supporters, also distract learning, create a negative school environment, and cause severe emotional distress for the students most closely involved, including those who are supporters or witnesses.

Further, educators are not taught how to help students resolve hurtful situations, which students clearly want to do. They are generally only taught how to enforce the school rules.

In his excellent book, *Reframing Bullying Prevention to Build Stronger Communities*, Dillon explains the two different “frames” of mind associated with addressing bullying.¹⁶ The current, ineffective “frame” is:

- *Bullying is wrong and needs to stop. It is against the rules and now the law.*
- *It is an individual act of defiance against authority.*

- *Too many people, primarily students, have been doing it.*
- *Schools haven't been successful at solving this problem because they haven't controlled student behavior.*
- *Stricter laws and enforcement of them will help schools do a better job in controlling students and stopping behavior.*
- *Clear and consistent consequences are necessary to deter students from bullying.*
- *Clear and consistent consequences are necessary to make sure staff enforce the laws.*
- *Schools need to be monitored and evaluated to make certain that they comply with the law and the designated procedures for addressing bullying.¹⁷*

This “just say “no” approach is also wholly incapable of addressing issues related to hurtful behavior that students engage in using digital technologies. School districts are not making rules for the sites and apps student use, staff are not present, students rarely report concerns, and “sanctions” that generate anger can lead to virtually uncontrollable digital retaliation that is anonymous and can include individuals who are outside the authority of the school.

Research Evidence on the Lack of Effectiveness of these Components

Ample research evidence calls into serious question the effectiveness of these commonly recommended components of this common bullying prevention approach.

A study in 2007 showed that while 87% of school staff thought they had effective strategies for handling bullying, 58% of middle and 66% of high school students believed adults at school were not doing enough to stop or prevent bullying.¹⁸ Further, while only 7% of school staff thought they made things worse when they intervened in bullying situations, 61% of middle school students and 59% of high school students reported that staff who tried to stop bullying only made things worse. Lastly, while 97% of school staff said they would intervene if they saw bullying, 43% of middle school students and 54% of high school students reported they had seen adults at school watching bullying and doing nothing.

A clear concern these findings raise is that if staff think that what they are doing is effective, then there is little incentive for change.

A 2008 study found that students overwhelmingly believed that most teachers ignored or did not recognize such hurtful activities, were not prepared to intervene if asked, and were incapable of doing anything effective if they took actions.¹⁹

A 2014 study in middle schools found that the highest reported prevalence rates of bullying occurred in classrooms, hallways, and lunchrooms.²⁰ These are the places where presumably staff supervision should be the highest. The fact that these incidents were witnessed by staff and continued to occur increased the distress of the students. These locations findings are comparable to the findings in the National Crime Victimization Survey--School Crimes Supplement (NCVS-SCS).²¹

The vast majority of secondary students do not report hurtful incidents. Data from 2013 NCVS-SCS indicated that only 39% of students who reported someone had bullied them at school said that they told an adult.²² Only 23% of those who were cyberbullied told an adult.

One 2004 study at the elementary school level found that there was a perception among the students that the school tolerated bullying because nothing was ever done and therefore it was a waste of time to report.²³ Another 2004 study of secondary students revealed that students did not report their situation to teachers or other adults for fear of being viewed as a “squealer,” belief that the school staff would act in a way that would make their situation worse, and they did not trust school staff to keep secrets told to them in confidence.²⁴ In a 2007 study, students associated telling a teacher with a double jeopardy: they might not be believed and telling might result in retaliation by the perpetrators.²⁵

The *Youth Voice Project* asked students who were repeatedly bullied and had experienced moderate to very severe levels of distress whether they reported to an adult at school and, if so, whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse.²⁶ The findings indicated:

- Elementary (grade 5). 46% did not tell an adult, 29% told and things got better, 17% told and things stayed the same, 11% told and things got worse.
- Middle school (grades 6 to 8). 68% did not tell an adult at school, 12% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 12% told and things got worse.
- High school (grades 9 to 12). 76% did not tell an adult at school, 7% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 9% told and things got worse.²⁷

Looking closely at the *Youth Voice Project* data, at the secondary level, the “tell an adult” approach appeared to be effective only 10% of the time.

According to the Federal Partners for Bullying Prevention, as provided on the StopBullying.Gov web site, the reasons students do not ask for help are these:

Why Children Do Not Ask for Help

Statistics from the 2008–2009 School Crime Supplement show that an adult was notified in only about one third of bullying cases. Children do not tell adults for many reasons:

- *Bullying can make a child feel helpless. Children may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They may fear being seen as weak or a tattletale.*
- *Children may fear backlash from the child or children who bullied them.*
- *Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Children may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether it is true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak.*
- *Children who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or understands.*
- *Children may fear being rejected by their peers. Friends can help protect children from bullying, and children can fear losing this support.²⁸*

Of significant concern is apparent assumption on the part of these professionals that when students tell an adult this will make things better and that the reasons children do not report is based on an unreasonable conclusion by the child or a weakness of the child.

Clearly the primary concerns students have about reporting hurtful situations to an adult is that this very often does not make things better and could very well make things worse. Rather than focusing on the supposed weaknesses of children who are being treated badly, greater attention must be paid to the effectiveness of adults in responding to the hurtful situations they witness or are reported to them.

Some state legislatures have enacted statutes that require all schools to make an annual public report of bullying incidents. The unintended negative consequences of this requirement are significant.

There is a natural tendency for any institution, schools included, to seek to limit publication of data that could unfairly damage its reputation. Schools that improve their effectiveness in responding to reports of bullying should see an increase in reporting because more students would feel that it is safer to report.

But higher or increased reports of bullying will be translated as a “black mark” on schools. Thus, schools could discourage students from reporting bullying or classify incidents as “not bullying” to avoid this kind of negative reputation.

By way of example, the New Jersey 2010 Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act has such a reporting requirement.²⁹ Several

years after the implementation of this statute, the Acting Education Commissioner made this proclamation:

Bullying incidents in New Jersey schools have nearly been cut in half since schools were first required to document and investigate every allegation in 2011, according to the state report.³⁰

The one sticky, but unmentioned, detail is that according to the New Jersey Student Health Survey, there was absolutely zero decline in student reports of being bullied over the same time period.³¹ The result of this statutory provision is nothing more than “smoke and mirrors,” resulting in no real positive effect.

Discriminatory Harassment

In 1999, in the case of *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, the Supreme Court held that schools can be financially liable under Title IX if they are “deliberately indifferent to known acts of student-on-student sexual harassment and the harasser is under the school’s authority,” so long as the harassment is “so severe, pervasive, and objectionably offensive that it can be said to deprive the victims of access to the educational opportunities or benefits provided by the school.”³² Often this is referred to as “hostile environment.” The five elements include:

- Student is a member of, or perceived to be a member of, a protected class under federal statutes and the hurtful behavior is associated with the student’s protected class status, or perception thereof.
- The school had actual knowledge of the harassment.
- The student or students engaging in the harassment were under the school’s authority.
- The harassment was so severe, pervasive, and objectionably offensive that it deprived the student of access to the educational opportunities or benefits provided by the school.
- The school was deliberately indifferent to this harassment.

In most of these cases, the element that is most contested is the determination of whether the school’s actions demonstrated deliberate indifference. School districts often seek to defend their efforts, relying on *Patterson v. Hudson Area Schools*.³³ In this case, the Sixth Circuit found that the peer-to-peer harassment had occurred over years and the district had repeatedly used the same ineffective method to address it, which the appeals court said a jury could find to be deliberate indifference, subjecting the district to liability. After the Sixth Circuit remanded the case for trial, the jury returned a verdict of \$800,000 for the plaintiff. However, the District Court set aside the

verdict, granting the school district’s motion for judgment as a matter of law, stating:

In the instant case, the Court finds that the uncontroverted evidence is that Defendant’s teachers and administrators responded to each and every incident of harassment of which they had notice.³⁴

This determination appears to be grounded in two inaccurate perspectives. The first is that students who are being treated badly will report this to staff. The second is that when staff intervene, this effectively stops the harm. Based on the data from the NCVS-SCS, the Youth Voice Project, and now the *Embrace Civility Student Survey*, continued reliance on this standard for judging the responsiveness of a school should be called into question.

Staff Maltreatment of Students

In April, 2014, the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council held a 2-day workshop titled *Building Capacity to Reduce Bullying and Its Impact on Youth*.³⁵ The last session included a panel of students. These students were asked to identify issues that were not raised by the professionals during the workshop presentations and that were missing from the overall discussion.

A key issue raised by the students was “Teachers and Adults as Bullies.” Student comments were:

Teachers can be bullies too.

If teachers are giving the impression that this kind of behavior is okay, the kids are going to think this kind of behavior is okay.

We cannot be having teachers and coaches being okay with bullying kids in addition to the students who are doing so.³⁶

There is additional evidence that the issue of staff maltreatment of students is a neglected concern. The StopBullying.Gov web site is a key resource on issues related to bullying.³⁷ There is no insight presented on this site for how to address the concern of hurtful school staff members. National surveys do not generally ask about or report this data on this concern.

The Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) 2011 National School Climate Survey found that over half (56.9%) of sexual minority students heard teachers or other staff make homophobic comments or negative comments about a student’s gender expression at school. Further, when school staff were present, less than a fifth of the students reported that they frequently intervened.³⁸

The 2013 GLSEN survey found that 61.6% of LGBT students who reported a hurtful incident to school staff said that school staff did nothing in response, 55.5% of LGBT students reported personally experiencing LGBT-

related discriminatory policies or practices at school, and 34.8% said their administration was very or somewhat unsupportive of them.³⁹

A 2009 report issued by The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, entitled *Unsafe in the Schoolhouse: Abuse of Children with Disabilities* documented reports of children with disabilities who were subjected to abuse by school staff.⁴⁰ In a survey of students with obesity or weight problems attending a weight loss camp, 42% of these students reported being bullied by physical education teachers or sport coaches and 27% reported being bullied by teachers.⁴¹ Recently, anti-Islamic hurtful behavior by staff or students is a concern.⁴²

As the National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline and numerous reports have documented harsh and exclusionary disciplinary policies and practices have been applied disproportionately to members of specific demographic groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, males, and students with emotional, behavioral or cognitive disabilities.⁴³

In a study by Twemlow and colleagues, teachers from seven elementary schools completed an anonymous survey about staff bullying.⁴⁴ A definition provided by Dr Twemlow, which unfortunately focused solely on teachers and not all staff, was:

*Bullying teacher was defined as a teacher who uses his/her power to punish, manipulate, or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure.*⁴⁵

Twemlow's work identified two kinds of teachers who engage in bullying: Those seen as Intentionally humiliating students and those seen as being overwhelmed by situations.

Notably, 45% of the sample of teachers admitted to bullying a student. Teachers who had experienced bullying were more likely to report seeing bullying by peers. Teachers felt that bullying behaviors by teachers resulted from a lack of support from the administration, in addition to a multitude of other causes such as a lack of training and classes that were too large. Teachers also said that bullying teachers lacked the ability to effectively manage their classrooms.

McEvoy defined bullying by teachers as:

*(A) pattern of conduct, rooted in a power differential, that threatens, harms, humiliates, induces fear, or causes students substantial emotional distress.*⁴⁶

According to McEvoy, like student-on-student bullying, staff bullying is an abuse of power that tends to be chronic and involves degrading a student in front of others.

There are usually no negative consequences for teachers who engage in bullying. Those who are targeted often have

some manner of vulnerability, because they are unable to stand up for themselves, others will not defend them, or they have some devalued personal attribute. Frequently, there are references to how this student differs from other students who are more capable or valued. As a result, the student may also become a target by peers.

Teachers who bully feel their abusive conduct is justified and will claim provocation by their targets. They often will disguise their behavior as "motivation" or as an appropriate part of the instruction. They also disguise abuse as an appropriate disciplinary response to unacceptable behavior by the target. The target, however, is subjected to deliberate humiliation that can never serve a legitimate educational purpose.

Students who are bullied by teachers typically experience confusion, anger, fear, self-doubt, and profound concerns about their academic and social competencies. Not knowing why he or she has been targeted, or what one must do to end the bullying, may well be among the most personally distressing aspects of being singled out and treated unfairly. Over time, especially if no one in authority intervenes, the target may come to blame him or her self for the abuse and thus feel a pervasive sense of helplessness and worthlessness.

*Bullying by teachers produces a hostile climate that is indefensible on academic grounds; it undermines learning and the ability of students to fulfill academic requirements.*⁴⁷

Supportive School Discipline Initiative

In July 2011, the USED and USDOJ announced the launch of the *Supportive School Discipline Initiative*.⁴⁸ This *Initiative* addresses the school-to-prison pipeline and punitive disciplinary practices, such as Zero Tolerance, that push students, especially minority students, out of school and into the justice system and encourages discipline practices that will foster safe and productive learning environments.

In January 2014, the Initiative introduced helpful resources for schools, including a *School Discipline Guidance Package* which recommends a focus on Positive Behavior Management to address overall management, greater focus on identifying and addressing the underlying reasons for students wrongdoing through Multiple-Tier System of Supports, and using Restorative Practices.⁴⁹

While this guidance is directed at overall disciplinary issues, it is highly relevant to the issues related to bullying, especially involving socially marginalized students who are both bullied and engage in bullying.

The emerging problem, however, appears to be at the implementation level. The pressure to implement changes in disciplinary practice, which necessarily requires

professional development for all school staff, especially administrators and teachers, at the same time as the shift to Common Core and new high stakes tests, has created difficulties, combined with lack of resources, has resulted in widespread reports of problems.⁵⁰ One notable statement in a news article was:

“I haven’t heard anything positive about it.” The words (colleagues) used to describe it: crazy, zoo, madhouse. “People are just unsure and feel powerless.”

Insight to Support a More Positive Approach

The following research insight appears highly relevant to the efforts that will be necessary to address the above identified challenges and support a more positive approach.

Fostering a Positive School Climate

More recent guidance to schools regarding bullying prevention focuses on the importance of shifting from an approach that seeks to prevent hurtful behavior through a disciplinary process to more comprehensive approach that will foster a positive school climate.

One example is a recently published article by leading authorities in positive school climate and bullying prevention, Cohen and colleagues, entitled *Rethinking Effective Bully and Violence Prevention Efforts: Promoting Healthy School Climates, Positive Youth Development, and Preventing Bully-Victim-Bystander Behavior*.⁵¹

Their argument based on this review, informed by their extensive background is:

It is our contention that bullying is most effectively prevented by the creation of an environment that nurtures and promotes prosocial and ethical norms and behaviors, more so than by simply targeting the eradication of bullying and related undesirable behaviors. In fact, research – and our collective experience – supports the notion that a continuous process of school climate/prosocial educational improvement can and needs to be an explicit and organizing educational policy and practice goal for K-12 schools.

The six key overlapping elements deemed essential to support the development of a positive school climate are:

- Transparent, democratically informed leadership.
- Engaging the students, parents and ideally community members as well as school personnel to be co-learners and co-leaders in the improvement efforts.

- Measurement practices that recognize the social, emotional and civic dimensions of learning and school life.
- Improvement goals that are tailored to the unique needs of the students and school community.
- Adult professional learning that supports capacity building.
- Prosocial education for all students.⁵²

The other example is *Reframing Bullying Prevention to Build Stronger Communities*. In this book, Dillon provides the following guidance:

*When bullying prevention is just a story for students about following the rules and for staff about implementing a policy or a program, then nothing will ever change; it’s a story that will remain the same. When bullying prevention becomes a story that inspires everyone to work together to achieve something great and noble, and to write and tell their own story of their accomplishments, bullying prevention disappears into this bigger more important story about how people do heroic things every day to make life better for everyone.*⁵³

Dillon’s excellent insight into the “frame” that underlies the current approach to bullying was set forth above. His recommended “reframing” is:

- *Children are born to learn and need the right conditions for this learning to flourish.*
- *Children learn from everything around them, not just from a teacher.*
- *Learning is not an intellectual act, but involves emotions and is dependent on the social context.*
- *Learning to navigate the social world is not a simple thing that can be instilled in childhood and left alone. Children need support and guidance and the right environment to learn to accept differences among others.*
- *People learn more deeply when they can exercise some control over their learning.*
- *People learn more when they feel socially connected and supported by others around them.*
- *People make mistakes in the process of learning and growing. These mistakes are not signs of bad character or poor upbringing, but are influenced by the social context where they occur.*
- *People learn more and learn more deeply when they understand the purpose, value, and meaning of what they are learning.*⁵⁴

As Cornell has documented, there are concerns regarding the harmful impact authoritarian practices utilized in

schools.. When school staff use authoritarian practices to address student misbehavior, these result in an increase in bullying and other forms of aggression.⁵⁵ Punishment and use of power over students who have engaged in misbehavior reinforce the idea that power is an effective social tool.⁵⁶ Also when school staff use authoritarian methods to control behavior, students intervene less often when they witness bullying incidents.⁵⁷

However, as Cornell has documented, when schools maintain an authoritative environment, characterized by strict but fair discipline and supportive teacher–student relationships, this results in reduced levels of student risk, including lower levels of student-reported alcohol and marijuana use; bullying, fighting, and weapon carrying at school; interest in gang membership; and suicidal thoughts and behavior.⁵⁸

As noted earlier, these resources, *Embrace Civility: Fostering Positive Relations In School* and the *Be a Leader!* student program, should be viewed as adjunct resources to be used in connection with a more comprehensive initiative to foster a positive school climate. These resources are more specifically focused on strategies to better empower students to foster positive relations and increase the effectiveness of staff responses when hurtful incidents are witnessed or reported.

Schools are encouraged to acquire a book by James Dillon entitled, *Reframing Bullying Prevention to Build Stronger Communities*, and to utilize the resources from the National School Climate Center to further the more comprehensive efforts directed at building a positive school climate.⁵⁹

Schools can also use these resources in the context of the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) program.⁶⁰ The focus of PBIS on positive acknowledgement of positive behavior and using a Multiple Tier System of Supports to address the concerns of students who are at greater risk are fully supported by these resources. Modifying PBIS to incorporate the above concepts to support a positive school climate, especially expanding to include social emotional learning and restorative practices and fully engaging students, is strongly encouraged.

Developmental Priorities

Given that students undergo significant developmental changes, starting in early adolescence, it is important to consider how these changes should be addressed in developing strategies to more effectively reduce hurtful behavior.⁶¹ Yeager and colleagues outlined the following key key developmental considerations:

- **Developmental Priority for Independence.** Adolescence is a time for developing personal identity and a sense of morality, and establishing

independence, competence, and personal control. Teens want to manage their own personal relationship challenges.

- **Changes in the Type of Students who Engage in Bullying Behavior.** Students who most often are hurtful to others at the elementary level are those who are “at risk” in other ways. At the secondary level, most bullying behavior is grounded in a quest for social dominance.
- **Change in the Nature of Bullying Behavior.** Direct and observable forms of bullying decline. More indirect forms of bullying, which are less observable, increase. Adults may also be less likely to interpret the behavior they see as hurtful.
- **Significantly Less Adult Supervision.** Teens are not as closely supervised and spend additional time in environments without adult supervision, including the use of digital technologies.
- **Sexual Maturity.** Sexual harassment, disagreements between and competition over romantic partners, disparagement based on perceived value as a romantic partner, and bullying of gender nonconforming students is frequent at this age.
- **Social Groups and Exclusion.** Teens form social groups with others who share their interests that, by their very nature, involve exclusion.
- **Autonomy and Reactance to Adult Influence.** Ample evidence from prevention programs demonstrates that adults telling teens to “Just Say ‘No,’” often has the opposite effect. This is why “No Bully Zone” signs are entirely ineffective.

In considering these developmental changes as a whole, it is clear that for adults to better address the challenges of bullying and other hurtful behavior, it is imperative to work in partnership with students and to recognize that the authoritarian rules-and-punishment approach simply is not in accord with these developmental priorities.

Bullying Behavior

The predominant, often exclusive, description of those who engage in bullying describes youth who have multiple challenges. Educators are told that students who engage in bullying are impulsive, easily frustrated, lack empathy, have difficulty following rules, view violence in positive ways and come from homes where there is a lack of supervision and harsh discipline.⁶² The following insight is from a slideshow for staff development that is currently on the StopBullying.Gov Web site:

Children and youth who bully others are more likely than their peers to:

- *Exhibit delinquent behaviors (such as fighting, stealing, vandalism)*
- *Dislike school and drop out of school*
- *Drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes*
- *Bring weapons to school*
- *Think about and attempt suicide*

What has been ignored in the resources for educators are the concerns associated with the popular and socially skilled students who are hurtful to others to achieve their goals of social status and dominance. The hurtful acts of these students are privilege-based.

The late Dr. Rodkin should be credited as providing excellent pioneering insight into these two different kinds of students who engage in bullying.⁶³ His terms for these two different kinds of students were “socially marginalized” and “socially motivated.”

Faris and Felmlee have provided an excellent description of the understandings that have emerged in more recent research:

Clearly it is the strong who do the attacking: recent scholarship has debunked the traditional view of aggressive youth as socially marginal and psychologically troubled. Indeed, aggressors often possess strong social skills and harass their peers, not to reenact their own troubled home lives, but to gain status. Furthermore, as youth ascend school social hierarchies, their aggressive behavior increases, at least until they approach the pinnacle.⁶⁴

This insight from Juvonen effectively explains the basis for this hurtful behavior:

Social prominence, defined as perceived popularity or “coolness” in early adolescence, is associated with peer directed aggression. ...

Ethological research suggests that aggression is a strategy to establish a dominant position within a group. Among a number of species (e.g., various non-human primates), physical aggression enables attainment of a dominant position, such that the most powerful fighter (typically male) acquires a top position within a group and therefore gains access to valued resources. Within human youth, aggression can be considered a strategic behavior that serves similar social dominance functions.⁶⁵

Clearly, what school staff are being taught about the nature of bullying is at odds with the nature of bullying. It should therefore be of no surprise that school staff fail to recognize when those students who they perceive to be strong leaders are the ones who are being hurtful to their peers.

There are also related challenges with the description of those who are targeted. Clearly some of those who are targeted are among the classes of students who would be considered “different.” This includes students who are obese, have a minority sexual orientation or identity, have disabilities, or are of a race or religion that is a minority in the specific community.⁶⁶ Students who have significant social influence are able to characterize students “deviant”--students to be excluded and denigrated.⁶⁷

However, hurtful behavior that is associated with a quest for social status and dominance is also directed towards other students who are rivals, or perceived to be rivals, for such status and dominance.⁶⁸ These hurtful situations can be one-directional or bidirectional. They may involve supporters or allies on one or both sides. Often these situations are referred to as “drama.”⁶⁹ Students may seek to downplay the emotional harm associated with this “drama,” but such harm can be intense.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, most, if not all, professional development resources provided to educators focus **solely** on the Marginalized students with significant challenges who are also aggressive. Further, the focus is also on hurtful behavior directed at students who are “different.” As encouraged by the U.S. Department of Education, many state statutes list protected classes of students as those who are the target of bullying.⁷¹

Most often ignored in the professional development resources is a focus on the hurtful behavior of socially dominant students, who have excellent social skills and behave responsibly in front of adults, as well as issues related to hurtful behavior between rivals.

Further, because these socially dominant students have significant social power and are not traditionally viewed as “problem students,” staff are less likely to recognize that they are being hurtful.⁷² The fact that these students likely also come from socially powerful families in the school and the community may also dampen educator willingness to intervene appropriately.

Because these hurtful incidents are grounded in battles for social dominance and privilege also provides insight into why many students do not report. If the one being hurtful has high social status and personal power and is thought of as a leader by the school staff, the risks and potential damage are significant if a student reports to an adult.

The focus solely on one profile of students who engage in “bullying” is also a likely reason why the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has not demonstrated any effectiveness, as this program only describes the profile of the Marginalized student.⁷³

The PBIS program also focuses attention on students who demonstrate negative behavior and require intervention at a Tier II or III level.⁷⁴ Socially Motivated hurtful students are compliant to school staff and, therefore, would not be

considered the type of student to cause problems. Further, it is possible that the “rewards” given to the “good” students may result in their feeling entitled and therefore justified when they denigrate less worthy students.⁷⁵

The solutions to addressing these different sources of bullying are also very difficult. As will be discussed more fully in Unit 4, Marginalized students who have experienced trauma and also engage in aggression require intensive interventions to seek to address and resolve the harm that was inflicted upon them, as well as to stop their hurtful acts towards others.

To change the behavior of those who are hurtful to achieve social status and dominance, it is necessary to change the climate so that denigrating others is no longer an effective path to achieve higher social status in the eyes of their peers. This requires a focus on the positive norms and values of students and a shift in the school climate where those students who are identified as “leaders” are the students who consistently demonstrate kindness and respect to others and step in to help if someone is treated badly.

In the situations that involve “battles” to achieve social status and dominance, many of the hurtful situations could more appropriately be considered cycles of hurtful acts or conflict between students who are seeking such status and dominance.⁷⁶ These situations involve repeated hurtful acts of retaliation for what is perceived to be a prior hurtful act. A specific hurtful incident could have been started by “eye-rolling,” which, if executed well in front of the right group of peers, can have a devastating impact.⁷⁷

Positive Social Norms

An innovative new approach being implemented in risk prevention focuses on positive social norms. The rationale underlying the positive social norms approach was explained by Berkowitz, one of the pioneers, as follows:

Human beings act within a social context that serves to inhibit or encourage healthy behaviors, and environments can serve to either inhibit or encourage violence. Violence prevention is facilitated when individuals can identify situations with the potential for violence and then act to prevent it. Whether someone intervenes is in turn influenced by the extent to which they feel that others in their immediate environment share their concerns and will support their efforts.⁷⁸

The National Social Norms Institute provides information on the various efforts that are under way to use a social norms approach to encourage positive health behavior:⁷⁹

For many years, prevention efforts had focused almost exclusively on the problems and deficits of particular populations. The work emerging from those employing the social norms approach, however, began to

demonstrate the effectiveness of promoting the attitudinal and behavioral solutions and assets that are the actual norms in a given population.

Essentially, the social norms approach uses a variety of methods to correct negative misperceptions (usually overestimations of use), and to identify, model, and promote the healthy, protective behaviors that are the actual norm in a given population. When properly conducted, it is an evidence-based, data-driven process, and a very cost-effective method of achieving large-scale positive results.⁸⁰

The Youth Health and Safety Project has made effective use of local surveys to reduce bullying behavior.⁸¹ This project collected school-based data about students’ perspectives on bullying. As could be predicted, a very significant majority of students themselves expressed disapproval of bullying behavior. But students also thought that their peers thought that those who engaged in bullying were “popular.”

The data expressing peer disapproval of bullying behavior was then used to create posters that demonstrated the school’s norms related to bullying: “Strength in Numbers: 80% of (name of school) students do not think students should not tease in a mean way, call others hurtful names, or spread unkind stories.” The use of messaging that incorporated these locally derived positive social norms led to a reduction in the reported incident rate of bullying in middle schools, ranging from 18% to 35%.

As noted, research studies consistently find that students perceive those who engage in bullying as “popular.”⁸² However, this does not translate to liking this person.⁸³ For as long as the misperception that others think the one being hurtful is “popular” exists, students are likely unwilling to take any positive action when witnessing such harm.

The perception of peer norms in favor of intervention are a critical factor in influencing positive peer intervention.⁸⁴ To reduce hurtful behavior and to increase positive peer intervention in these situations, it is necessary to ensure students have accurate perceptions of peer disapproval of hurtful behavior and high regard for those who step in to help.

Growth Mindset Versus Fixed Mindset

Based on the findings in the Embrace Civility Student Survey, it clearly is necessary to consider research-based approaches to reduce retaliation. Fortunately, there is research that is directly related to this objective. As a PhD student of Dweck, who developed extensive understandings of the differences between fixed and growth mindsets, Yeager explored a growth mindset approach to reduce retaliation.⁸⁵

The implicit theories of personality approach is the foundation of Dweck's focus on fixed mindset and growth mindset.⁸⁶ Dweck found that students' mindsets, that is how they perceive their abilities, played a key role in their motivation and achievement. She also found that it was possible to change students' mindsets and thereby increase their achievement.⁸⁷ Specifically, students who believed their intelligence could be developed outperformed those who believed their intelligence was fixed. As explained on the Mindset web site:

In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort. They're wrong.

In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all great people have had these qualities.⁸⁸

Research has demonstrated that those who believe that personality is fixed are more inclined to engage in retaliation. However, there is also research insight that indicates that it is possible to change one's implicit theory, allowing people to understand that others can change.

In the Yeager study, a group of teens who were taught about the capacity of people to change demonstrated reduced aggressive retaliation and increased pro-social behavior when compared to control groups who were simply taught coping skills or received no treatment.

Stopping retaliation will go a long way to stopping the cycle of hurt that that can occur when hurtful act builds upon hurtful act. While Yeager and colleagues focused most significantly on students' mindset, it is probable that a combined emphasis that people can change, along with strategies for interpersonal relationship problem-solving, can be very powerful.

Further, when evaluating guidance provided to educators on bullying prevention, it becomes apparent that the resources very often reflect a fixed mindset. Calling students who engage in hurtful behavior "bullies" is a clear sign of this. Calling a student a "bully" is name calling, rather than referring to inappropriate behavior, and reflects the mixed mindset perspective of an inability to change.

The evidence of a fixed mindset perspective of those who are victimized is even worse. Far too often, these "victims" are characterized as powerless and helpless--students who are incapable of ever standing up to the one who was hurtful to them.

Essentially, the manner in which these students are portrayed in materials provided to educators and in the more general media is that of "wimps"--always to be in a state of perpetual "victimhood." While there are multiple studies that outline the long-lasting harms associated with being bullied, there has been almost no focus on the identification of strategies to more effectively empower these youth and remedy the harms caused by such aggression.

Exceptionally dangerous messaging that is grounded in a fixed mindset is that students should not engage in bullying because this could cause others to suicide or engage in school violence. The movie *The Bully* demonstrates this dangerous approach.⁸⁹ There is zero evidence that this approach will reduce bullying or increase positive peer intervention. There is clear evidence that conveying these kinds of messages may be linked to actual youth suicide and school violence.⁹⁰ The CDC strongly warns:

(F)raming the discussion of the issue as bullying being a single, direct cause of suicide is not helpful and is potentially harmful because it could ... (p)erpetuate the false notion that suicide is a natural response to being bullied which has the dangerous potential to normalize the response and thus create copycat behavior among youth.⁹¹

It is imperative that educators, and those providing guidance and resources to educators, evaluate all messaging to ensure that it fully communicates the perspective that students can change. Those who are hurtful can stop themselves, accept personal responsibility, make amends, and restore relationships. Those who have been treated badly can become empowered and restored from the harms they have suffered.

These statements reflect the differences between a Fixed Mindset and a Growth Mindset approach.

Fixed Mindset

- Schools must place a high priority on preventing bullying.
- Bullies are at-risk students with violent tendencies who are likely to end up in prison.
- Bullies need to be taught what the rules are.
- If bullies violate those rules, they should be punished and excluded.
- Victims of bullying are powerless, and they most often are different and lacking in social skills.
- Victims of bullying will suffer life-long mental health challenges.

- Victims must rely on adult protection because they lack sufficient power to stand up to the students who are bullying them.

Growth Mindset

- Schools must establish a positive school climate and foster positive relations.
- The school community--staff, students, parents--should identify the positive norms and values they intend to abide by.
- Students may be hurtful for a variety of reasons, including that they have suffered trauma, they are seeking social dominance, someone was hurtful to them, or an impulsive overreaction to other stress.
- Students who are hurtful to another require assistance to understand the reasons for and impact of their hurtful behavior, accept personal responsibility, and remedy the harm.
- Students who have experienced trauma require intensive assistance to recover from that trauma.
- Students can be guided onto a path of leadership through the demonstration of kindness and respect.
- Students who are treated badly may currently lack social strength and skills and may appear, in the eyes of some, to be different, but these students can be empowered to become self-confident and resilient.
- The norms and values of the school community can fully embrace differences.

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Student Perspectives on Effectiveness of Staff Interventions, Reporting Hurtful Incidents and the Nature of Hurtful Behavior

The *Embrace Civility Student Survey* asked all students questions about hurtful behavior. As noted, hurtful behavior was defined as: “Hurtful incidents could be called bullying, harassment, disrespect or ‘put-downs,’ conflict or ‘drama,’ fighting, and the like.” This was an intentionally broad definition.

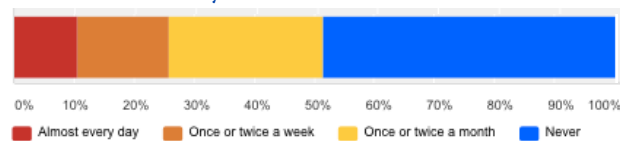
Note: The numbers used in this report are not in the numerical order the questions were asked of students. The survey started asking about student norms and values, then asked about students who were hurtful. Lastly, the survey asked questions about students being hurtful to them.

Students Who Reported Someone Was Hurtful to Them

Question 1: In the last month, how frequently has any student in your school been hurtful to you?

- 11% Almost every day. (Male: 9% Female: 11% Prefer not to say: 18%)
- 15% Once or twice a week. (Male: 15% Female: 15% Prefer not to say: 15%)
- 26% Once or twice a month. (Male: 24% Female: 27% Prefer not to say: 27%)
- 49% Never. (Male: 52% Female: 47% Prefer not to say: 40%)

Chart 1. In the last month, how frequently has any student in your school been hurtful to you?

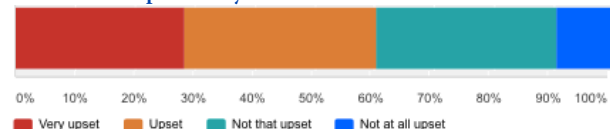


Students who responded that someone had been hurtful to them were asked to think of the most significant incident and respond to the following questions based on that incident.

Question 2: How upset were you?

- 28% Very upset.
- 32% Upset.
- 30% Not that upset.
- 10% Not at all upset.

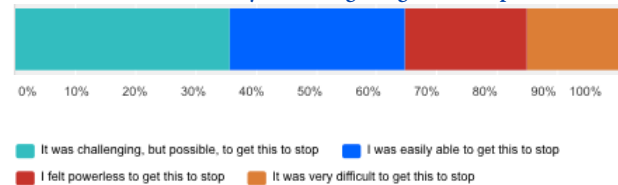
Chart 2. How upset were you?



Question 3: How effective did you feel in getting this to stop?

- 36% It was challenging, but possible, to get this to stop.
- 29% I was easily able to get this to stop.
- 20% I felt powerless to get this to stop.
- 15% It was very difficult to get this to stop.

Chart 3. How effective did you feel in getting this to stop?



Expanded Analysis: Comparing the responses to Questions 1, 2, and 3.

The responses to the two questions on degree to which students were upset and ability to resolve the situation were analyzed to determine the impact.

Analysis: How upset were students (Question 2) who indicated it was very difficult or they felt powerless to get the situation to stop (Question 3):

- 47% Very upset.
- 27% Upset.
- 19% Not that upset.
- 6% Not at all upset.

Analysis: How effective students felt in responding (Question 3) who were upset or very upset (Question 2).

- 40% It was challenging, but possible, to get this to stop.
- 27% I felt powerless to get this to stop.
- 17% I was easily able to get this to stop.
- 16% It was very difficult to get this to stop.

Discussion

Many surveys ask students if someone was hurtful to them and then report that a large percentage of students were “bullied.” For example, the NCVS-SCS asks students if someone “bullied” them “once or twice a year” and then publicly reports that a large percentage of students in the U.S. were “bullied,” 21% in 2013. But according to the NCVS data, 67% of that 21% reported these hurtful acts occurred once or twice in the school year.⁹² There were no followup questions regarding degree of distress.

It is argued that these two followup questions are critically important. Assessing the degree to which these students are upset and their perceived effectiveness in responding

provides a more effective way to evaluate what is happening with these students.

Note specifically that while 51% of all students indicated that someone was hurtful under this broad definition, 65% of these students apparently felt that they were able to get the hurtful situation to stop with no, or just some, challenges. While it is indeed important for schools to see a decline in overall hurtful incidents, it is equally important to see an increase in the degree to which students feel they are able to get these situations to stop.

Note that there is a predictable relationship between being upset and effectiveness in responding, but it is not as strong as one might have predicted. For example, 40% of the students who were upset or very upset found that it was challenging, but possible, to get the hurtful situation to stop and 17% indicated that they were easily able to get this to stop. Thus, yes, they were upset, but they also apparently had the skills and/or support to resolve the situation.

Expanded Analysis: Distinguishing students who are More Vulnerable and those who are Less Vulnerable.

An expanded analysis was conducted to identify patterns when comparing those students who are considered More Vulnerable with those who are considered Less Vulnerable:

More Vulnerable Students: (N: 147 of 790--19%--of students who were treated in a hurtful or 9% of all students M: 53--36% F: 82--56% PNTS: 9--6%) Those who indicated that in the last month someone was hurtful to them once or twice a week or almost daily (Question 1), they felt upset or very upset (Question 2), and they felt that it was very difficult or they were powerless in getting the hurtful situation to stop (question 3). 56% of them said this was almost daily, 68% said they were very upset, and 67% said they felt powerless to stop this.

Less Vulnerable Students: (N: 163 of 790--21%--students who were treated badly and 11% of all students M: 70--43% F: 89--55% PNTS: 4--2%) Those who reported someone had been hurtful once or twice in the last month (Question 1), that they were not upset or not that upset (Question 2), and that they easily or with some challenges resolved the hurtful situation (Question 3).

More females were a target of hostile behavior, although there was no significant gender effect.

Discussion

This analysis left out those whose responses crossed these categories, but has revealed helpful insight, especially into the challenges faced by those students who are More Vulnerable.

Note that the NCVS-SCS determined the weighted student population of U.S. students between the ages of 12 and 18 enrolled in a primary or secondary education program leading to a high school diploma in 2013 was 25,195,000

students. Based on this number, 9% equates to 2,267,550 students who find themselves in this situation in secondary schools in the U.S.

The value of considering the distinctions made between students who are More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable will become evident in the following discussions. Quite obviously, the More Vulnerable Students are being treated in a hurtful manner with much greater frequency than the Less Vulnerable Students. As will be demonstrated, these students also face much greater challenges in getting these situations resolved--including with staff involvement.

It is suggested that it makes little sense for educators to spend significant time striving to determine whether a situation meets the official "definition" of bullying. As will become very evident, especially in the following section related to staff responses, the more frequent these hurtful incidents, the higher the level of distress, and the less effective students feel in responding are the three critical factors.

Staff Who Witnessed This

Question 4: If any school staff member saw this happen, how did he or she respond? (Check anything that any staff member did. Skip this question if a staff member did not see this.)

- 37% Stepped in to help.
- 36% Told the person being hurtful to stop.
- 30% Ignored the situation.
- 28% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 28% Punished the person being hurtful.
- 24% Just watched.
- 24% Reported the incident to the office.
- 24% Talked with both of us apart to resolve the situation.
- 16% Told me to stop what I was doing.
- 11% Also said or did something hurtful.
- 8% Other response by a staff member.

Note: A total of 797 students reported someone had been hurtful to them and 520 students responded to the question on how a staff member responded. This indicates that, from the student perspective, a staff member witnessed this hurtful incident 65% of the time.

There may be differences between student perspectives and staff perspectives on whether or not staff actually saw and interpreted the situation accurately. However, based on data from NCVS-SCS, 34% of students reported they were bullied in the classroom, 46% reported they were bullied in school hallways, and 19% indicated they were bullied in the cafeteria--all places where staff are expected to be present.⁹³

Question 5: What happened after the school staff member did this? (Skip this question if a school staff member did not see this.)

- 30% Things got better.
- 49% Things stayed the same.
- 21% Things got worse.

Expanded Analysis: Regarding how students reported staff responded to students who are hurtful and the effectiveness thereof.

Analysis: The first five staff responses as reported by students for each outcome category were determined.

Outcome: Things got worse.

- 38% Just watched.
- 34% Ignored the situation.
- 33% Told the person being hurtful to stop.
- 33% Made me feel as if I were at fault.
- 25% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.

Outcome: Things stayed the same.

- 39% Ignored the situation.
- 32% Told the person being hurtful to stop.
- 30% Stepped in to help.
- 28% Just watched.
- 26% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.

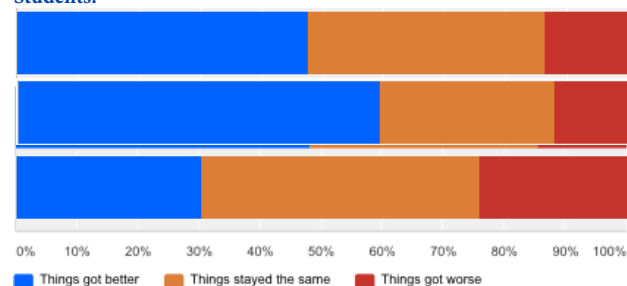
Outcome: Things got better.

- 64% Stepped in to help.
- 47% Told the person being hurtful to stop.
- 38% Punished the person being hurtful.
- 37% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 31% Reported the incident to the office.

Expanded Analysis: The differences between those students who are More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable.

Analysis: The responses to Question 4 were analyzed to determine any differences between reported staff responses for More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable Students.

Chart 5. If you talked to a staff member, what happened? Row 1: All students. Row 2: Less Vulnerable Students. Row 3: More Vulnerable Students.

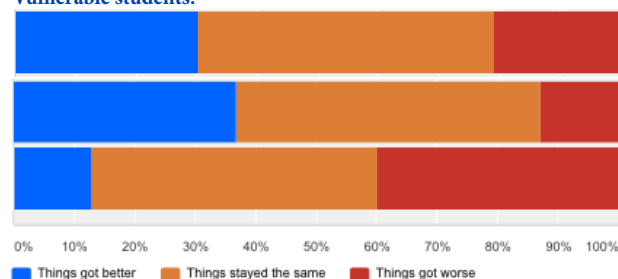


Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
36% Stepped in to help.	43% Told the person being hurtful to stop.
33% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.	40% Ignored the situation.
32% Told the person being hurtful to stop.	35% Punished the person being hurtful.
28% Ignored the situation.	33% Stepped in to help.
24% Just watched.	32% Just watched.
N: 90 of 163 or 55%.	N: 102 of 147 or 69%.

Analysis: An assessment of the outcomes reported in Question 28 were analyzed to determine any differences in outcomes for More Vulnerable or Less Vulnerable Students.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
38% Things got better.	13% Things got better.
50% Things stayed the same.	47% Things stayed the same.
12% Things got worse.	40% Things got worse.

Chart 4. What happened after the school staff member did this? Row 1: All students. Row 2: Less Vulnerable Students. Row 3: More Vulnerable students.



Analysis: What made things worse as reported by the More Vulnerable Students.

- 54% Ignored the situation.
- 46% Just watched.
- 43% Made me feel as if I were at fault.

Discussion

Note that the current level of effectiveness of staff members responding to the situations they witness, that is, an outcome resulted in things getting better, is only 30%.

The reported staff responses that made things worse for all students were ignoring the situation, just watching, and appearing to support the student who was hurtful. Ignored the situation and just watched also appeared in the outcome category of things stayed the same. Both of these outcome categories included some responses that

one would assume should be more likely to make things better, such as talking with both to resolve the situation.

Unfortunately, the analysis of reported staff responses related to outcomes does not provide a clear indication of what actions might make things worse, stay the same, or better. Note, for example, that “told the person being hurtful to stop” and “talked with us both to resolve the situation” were among the top five responses in all three outcome categories.

As will be discussed later, when evaluating the staff responses to students who were hurtful, there is strong reason to believe that telling a hurtful student to stop is not generally going to be very effective.

Other than clearly knowing what makes things worse, there is a lack of clarity in determining what staff responses might make a difference in outcomes between things staying the same and things getting better based solely on a consideration of the action itself.

However, note the percentages associated with the described responses which reflect the level of attention to the hurtful situation. Students were able to note all possible responses by staff. It appears that when staff responded more assertively and comprehensively, this contributed to things getting better. Note, for example, that those students who reported things stayed the same, reported that staff responded by stepping in to help only 30% of the time, whereas those who reported that things got better reported that staff stepped in to help 64% of the time.

It is possible there are also differences in the level of staff skills in executing the identified responses. For example, staff may have a wide range of skills in talking with both students to resolve the situation.

However, for More Vulnerable Students, note that staff members were present 69% of the time. For these More Vulnerable students, things got better only 13% of the time--and got worse 40% of the time. Given the challenges faced by these students, this level of ineffectiveness in the responses of staff witnesses is deeply disturbing. The second most frequent response by school staff when witnessing these hurtful situations was “ignored the situation.”

Students Who Told a School Staff Member and the Effectiveness of the Staff Response

Question 6: Did you talk with a school staff member about this incident?

- 32% Yes.
- 68% No.

Expanded Analysis: Whether students talked with a school staff member about this incident.

Analysis: This finding was extensively analyzed to seek to identify factors related to the percentage of students who told a staff member. The following are “yes” responses.

- 32% Targeted students who had not also been hurtful.
- 32% Targeted students who had also been hurtful.
- 35% Students who reported someone was hurtful to them once or twice a week or almost daily.
- 29% Students who reported someone was hurtful to them once or twice a month.
- 36% Students who indicated they were upset or very upset.
- 27% Students who indicated they were not that upset or not at all upset.
- 33% Students who indicated it was very difficult or they felt powerless to get this to stop.
- 32% Students who indicated they were easily able or it was challenging but possible to get this to stop.
- 36% Students who were More Vulnerable.
- 26% Students who were Less Vulnerable.
- 36% Male students.
- 30% Female students.
- 18% Flexible or prefer not to say students.

Question 7: What best describes how any school staff member you talked with responded? (Check any response by any staff member you talked to about this incident.)

This question was asked of those students--32%--who responded “yes” to the question to Question 6 on talking with staff.

- 43% Told the student being hurtful to stop.
- 40% Punished the student who was hurtful.
- 40% Helped me figure out ways I could handle the incident.
- 38% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 31% Talked with both of us apart to resolve the incident.
- 31% Told me if I were ever upset I could come and talk.
- 31% Checked in with me later to make sure things were all right.
- 29% Helped me think about things I could do to stop these incidents.
- 20% Made changes that I wanted in my schedule or activities.
- 18% Made changes in the other student's schedule or activities.
- 17% Ignored me.
- 13% Appeared to support the student being hurtful.
- 12% Made me feel as if I were at fault.
- 10% Told me to stop what I was doing
- 9% Made changes that I did not want in my schedule or activities.
- 9% Also said or did something hurtful.
- 7% Other response by a staff member.

Question 8: If you talked with a staff member, what happened?

- 48% Things got better.
- 39% Things stayed the same.
- 14% Things got worse.

Expanded Analysis: For those students who talked with staff, how students reported that staff responded and the effectiveness thereof.

Analysis: The first five reported staff responses for each outcome category were determined.

Outcome: Things got worse.

- 34% Ignored me.
- 31% Made me feel as if I were at fault.
- 29% Told me to stop what I was doing.
- 29% Appeared to support the student being hurtful.
- 26% Told the person being hurtful to stop.

Outcome: Things stayed the same.

- 36% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 36% Helped me figure out ways I could handle the incident.
- 36% Punished the student who was hurtful.
- 33% Told the student being hurtful to stop.
- 30% Checked in with me later to make sure things were all right.

Outcome: Things got better.

- 56% Told the student being hurtful to stop.
- 50% Helped me figure out ways I could handle the incident.
- 49% Punished the student who was hurtful.
- 47% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 40% Talked with both of us apart to resolve the incident.

Expanded Analysis: The differences in the reported staff responses between those students who are More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable.

Analysis: The responses to Question 7 were analyzed to determine any differences between reported staff responses for More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable Students.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
50% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.	53% Told the student being hurtful to stop.
48% Told the student being hurtful to stop.	43% Helped me figure out ways I could handle the incident.
45% Helped me figure out ways I could handle the incident.	43% Told me if I was ever upset I could come and talk.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
36% Punished the student who was hurtful.	43% Checked in with me later to make sure things were all right.
31% Helped me think about things I could do to stop these kinds of incidents from happening.	42% Punished the student who was hurtful.

Analysis: An assessment of the outcomes reported in Question 8 were analyzed to determine any differences in outcomes for More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable Students.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
60% Things got better.	30% Things got better.
29% Things stayed the same.	45% Things stayed the same.
12% Things got worse.	25% Things got worse.

Analysis: Determining what reported staff responses made things better, stay the same or get worse for the More Vulnerable students.

Outcome: Things got worse.

- 54% Ignored me.
- 46% Made me feel as if I were at fault.
- 38% Told me to stop doing what I was doing.
- 38% Appeared to support the student being hurtful.
- 38% Also did something hurtful.

Outcome: Things stayed the same.

- 50% Told the student being hurtful to stop.
- 42% Helped me figure out ways to handle the situation.
- 42% Told me if I were ever upset I could come and talk.
- 42% Checked in with me later to see if things were okay.

Outcome: Things got better. (Displaying more because they were all over 50%.)

- 75% Told the student being hurtful to stop.
- 75% Punished the student who was hurtful.
- 75% Talked with both of us apart to resolve the situation.
- 68% Helped me figure out ways I could handle the situation.
- 63% Told me if I were ever upset I could come and talk.
- 63% Checked in with me later to see if things were okay.
- 56% Talked with us both to resolve the situation.

Analysis: The data on reporting and what happened after such report was combined to provide an assessment of the overall effectiveness of the “tell an adult” approach.

For all students:

- 68% Did not tell a staff member.
- 15% Told a staff member and things got better.
- 12% Told a staff member and things stayed the same.
- 4% Told a staff member and things got worse.

For Less Vulnerable Students:

- 74% Did not tell a staff member.
- 16% Told a staff member and things got better.
- 7% Told a staff member and things stayed the same.
- 3% Told a staff member and things got worse.

For More Vulnerable Students:

- 64% Did not tell a staff member.
- 11% Told a staff member and things got better.
- 16% Told a staff member and things stayed the same.
- 9% Told a staff member and things got worse.

Discussion

The key insight from this data is a sobering realization that the current “tell an adult” approach to address bullying and other hurtful behavior appears to be effective 15% of the time for all students and only 11% of the time for More Vulnerable Students.

Given that the approach most schools are using to respond to the concerns of bullying, required in many state statutes, is an approach that relies on students reporting to a school staff member, with the assumption that when they do things will get better, the effectiveness of this approach must be reevaluated.

Based on student responses, adult responses to student reports that are most likely to make things worse include:

- Ignored me.
- Told me to stop what I was doing.
- Made me feel as if I were at fault.
- Also said or did something hurtful.
- Appeared to support the student being hurtful.

However, beyond this clarity, the difference between adult interventions that results in things getting better or remaining the same is more unclear. The actions that school staff members took that resulted in situations remaining the same were actions that also resulted in things getting better for all students and for those students who were More Vulnerable.

However, in like manner to the insight from the outcomes of the responses by staff who witnessed hurtful situations, the difference in outcomes appears to be related to the intensity and comprehensiveness of the staff response. The reported level of response for the “things stayed the same” outcome were in the 30% range, where as in the “things got better” outcome they were in the 40% and 50% range.

Of great concern is that for 25% of the More Vulnerable students who reached out for help from an adult and for whom things got worse, the most common responses to those students by that adult were ignoring the student, making this student feel as if he or she were at fault, telling this student to stop doing what he or she was doing, appearing to support the student being hurtful, and also engaging in hurtful actions.

Reasons Why Students Did Not Tell a Staff Member

Question 9: Why didn’t you talk to a school staff member? (Check any reasons that were important to you.)

This question was asked of those students who responded “no” to Question 6 regarding talking with staff.

- 44% Was a minor incident.
- 38% Did not think a school staff member would do anything to help.
- 36% Resolved the incident by myself.
- 33% Thought that a school staff member might make things worse.
- 25% The student stopped.
- 22% Resolved the incident with help from my friend(s).
- 22% Thought I would be blamed.
- 20% Telling means I can’t handle my own problems.
- 20% Other students would have looked down on me for reporting.
- 19% The student being hurtful would likely have retaliated.
- 18% I probably deserved it.
- 14% A school staff member saw this and did nothing.
- 6% Other reason you did not talk to a staff member.

Expanded Analysis: The differences between More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable Students on why they did not report.

Analysis: The responses to Question 9 were analyzed to determine any differences why More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable Students did not report.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
62% Was a minor incident.	50% Did not think a school staff member would do anything to help.
54% Resolved the incident by myself.	44% Thought that a school staff member might make things worse.
32% The student stopped.	35% Thought I would be blamed.
32% Did not think a school staff member would do anything to help.	35% I probably deserved it.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
25% Thought that a school staff member might make things worse.	33% The student being hurtful would likely have retaliated.

Discussion

The top four responses of Less Vulnerable Students reflect the fact that these students often do not report because they have resolved the hurtful situation by themselves--which is at it should be. However, even these students also apparently do not think that a school staff member would do anything to help or might make things worse.

The reasons that students who were More Vulnerable did not report raise significant concerns. The reasons reflect a lack of trust that reporting will result in making things better. Given the assessment of these Most Vulnerable students who did report on the outcome of reporting, specifically that things got better only 30% of the time and got worse 25% of the time, students' concerns about the potential for not resolving the situation or making things worse appear to be, unfortunately, very well justified.

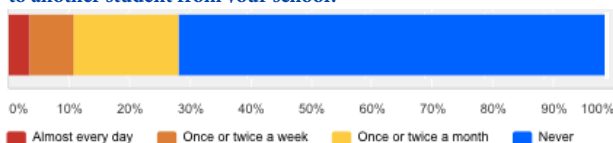
Note the discussion in the **Research Insight** that set forth the reasons that students did not report. Nowhere on this list are the real reasons students do not report--because this most often does not make things better and could very well make things worse.

Students Who Reported They Were Hurtful

Question 10: In the last month, how frequently have you been hurtful to another student from your school?

- 4% Almost every day. (Male: 5% Female: 3% Prefer not to say: 4%)
- 7% Once or twice a week. (Male: 9% Female: 6% Prefer not to say: 5%)
- 18% Once or twice a month. (Male: 17% Female: 18% Prefer not to say: 18%)
- 71% Never. (Male: 69% Female: 73% Prefer not to say: 73%)

Chart 6. In the last month, how frequently have you been hurtful to another student from your school?



Students who responded that they had been hurtful to someone were asked to think of the most significant incident and respond to the following questions based on that incident.

Question 11: What best describes what happened after this incident?

- 21% I realized that I should not do this, so I stopped.

- 16% Truthfully, I have not stopped being hurtful.
- 13% I just decided to stop for no specific reason.
- 12% The person I was hurtful to and I resolved the difficulty.
- 12% Other reason I stopped.
- 7% A friend told me to stop, and so I did.
- 6% The person I was hurtful to told me to stop, and so I did.
- 5% Another student told me to stop, and so I did.
- 5% My parents told me to stop, and so I did.
- 3% A school staff person told me to stop, and so I did.

As noted above, the questions asked on this survey used a definition of “hurtful” that is more broad than questions that often appear on surveys on “bullying,” and thus the rate of reported hurtful behavior is greater than on other surveys. If this survey is delivered by a school annually, schools can track the responses on this question to determine a decline in reports of students being hurtful.

There is a significant gender effect for frequency of engaging in hostile behavior, $\chi^2(3) = 11.61, p < .01$. Students engaging in hurtful behavior were more likely to be male.

Question 11 provides positive news about the aftermath of these hurtful incidents. However, the response to this question may be less valid because students even on an anonymous survey, students may have been inclined to report more positively on their behavior than was the reality. However, a positive interpretation of these responses is an expressed intent by the majority to have stopped being hurtful.

Note that 34% of the students indicated that they decided to stop on their own and 30% stopped after either resolving the incident or after being told by another student to stop.

The important insight relates to the apparent level of influence of parents and school staff on the decision by students to stop. Consider this finding in light of the research on developmental priorities--secondary students want to independently resolve these situations by themselves--not because they have been told to stop by an adult.

Staff Who Witnessed This

Question 11: If any school staff member saw this happen, how did he or she respond? (Check anything that any staff member did. Skip this question if a staff member did not see this.)

- 34% Ignored the situation.
- 32% Told me to stop.
- 27% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 26% Stepped in to help.
- 25% Just watched.
- 23% Punished me.

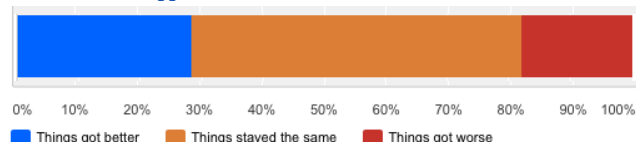
- 22% Talked with both of us apart to resolve the situation.
- 20% Appeared to support me.
- 15% Reported the incident to the office.
- 12% Helped the student I was hurtful to.
- 8% Other response by a staff member.

Note: A total of 444 students reported they had been hurtful and 348 students responded to the question on how a staff member responded. This indicates that, from the student perspective, a staff member saw this happen 78% of the time. There may be differences between student perspectives and staff perspectives on whether or not staff actually saw and interpreted the situation accurately.

Question 12: What happened after the school staff member did this? (Skip this question if a school staff member did not see this.)

- 28% Things got better.
- 54% Things stayed the same.
- 18% Things got worse.

Chart 7. What happened after the school staff member did this?



Expanded Analysis: Regarding staff responses to students who are hurtful and the effectiveness thereof.

Analysis: The first five staff responses for each outcome were determined.

Outcome: Things got worse.

- 33% Just watched.
- 30% Ignored the situation.
- 28% Told me to stop.
- 26% Appeared to support me.
- 26% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.

Outcome: Things stayed the same.

- 39% Ignored the situation.
- 31% Told me to stop.
- 29% Just watched.
- 23% Punished me.
- 22% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.

Outcome: Things got better.

- 44% Stepped in to help.
- 42% Told me to stop.
- 41% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 34% Talked with both of us apart to resolve the situation.
- 33% Punished me.

Discussion

Consider the responses in “things got worse.” Students who were hurtful thought that what made things worse was when staff “ignored the situation,” “just watched” and “appeared to support me.” Then consider what hurtful students thought made things get better, which included efforts to help resolve the situation but also “told me to stop” and “punished me.” These are all positive disciplinary responses designed to stop the one being hurtful. And from the perspective of the student who was being hurtful, these responses led to things getting better.

Many would presume that students who are hurtful want to be hurtful and that they would not want staff to ignore or stop them. Based on these responses, this presumption appears to be inaccurate. It appears that hurtful students valued the responses by staff that sought to stop the hurtful situation, not responses that ignored the situation or that supported them in continuing to be hurtful.

This understanding should guide staff interactions with students who are hurtful. Efforts should be focused on helping students who are hurtful to better understand what contributed to their actions, how to stop this from happening in the future, taking responsibility for what they did and deciding how best to remedy the harm caused to the other student.

However, note that “told me to stop” led to all three outcomes. As will be discussed in the following section, the overwhelming majority of students who were hurtful did not indicate that they stopped because they are told to do so by an adult.

These responses provide important insight for school staff on how to improve the effectiveness of school responses in hurtful situations when interacting with the student who was hurtful.

“Telling a hurtful student to stop” can be replaced by a conversation with the student who was hurtful that leads this student to make a decision to stop. This approach requires school staff to shift their thinking from the concept that they, “the adult authority,” can control student behavior to a role as a wise mentor who can effectively assist students in making appropriate decisions about their own behavior and relationships.

92 US Department of Education, *supra*.
93 *Robers, supra*.

Nature of Hurtful Behavior and Prior Relationships

Bidirectional Cycles of Hurtful Acts

Expanded Analysis Determining the association of being hurtful (Question 10) on being the target of hurtful acts (Question 1).

Response: Those who reported they had Frequently been hurtful (Question 10--once or twice a week, or almost daily) reported the following rates of someone being hurtful to them (Question 1):

- 24% Almost every day.
- 37% Once or twice a week.
- 20% Once or twice a month.
- 18% Never.

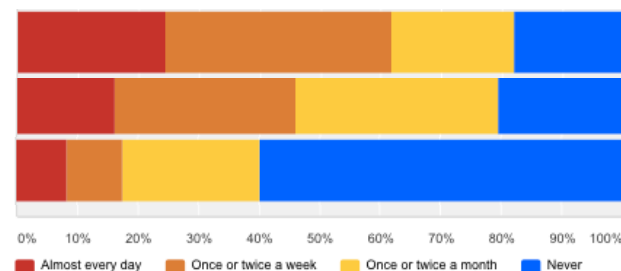
Response: Those who reported they had Ever been hurtful (Question 10--once or twice a month, once or twice a week, or almost daily) reported the following rates of someone being hurtful to them (Question 1):

- 16% Almost every day.
- 30% Once or twice a week.
- 23% Once or twice a month.
- 31% Never.

Response: Those who reported they had Never been hurtful (Question 10--never) reported the following rates of someone being hurtful to them (Question 1):

- 8% Almost every day.
- 9% Once or twice a week.
- 23% Once or twice a month.
- 60% Never.

Chart 8. Comparison of responses on Question 1 with responses on Question 10. Row 1: Those who were Frequently hurtful. Row 2: Those who were Ever hurtful. Row 3: Those who were Never hurtful



Another way to consider this data is:

- 81% Students who reported they were Frequently hurtful also reported someone was hurtful to them.
- 69% Students who were Ever hurtful also reported someone was hurtful to them.
- 40% Students who were Never hurtful also reported someone was hurtful to them.

Expanded Analysis Determining the association of having someone be hurtful to you (Question 1) on whether or not you were hurtful to another (Question 10).

Response: Those who reported they had Frequently experienced someone be hurtful to them (Question 1--once or twice a week or almost daily) reported the following rates of being hurtful (Question 10):

- 9% Almost every day.
- 18% Once or twice a week.
- 25% Once or twice a month.
- 49% Never.

Response: Those who reported they had Ever experienced someone be hurtful to them (Question 1--once or twice a month, once or twice a week, or almost daily) reported the following rates of being hurtful (Question 10):

- 6% Almost every day.
- 12% Once or twice a week.
- 27% Once or twice a month.
- 56% Never.

Response: Those who reported they had Never experienced someone be hurtful to them (Question 1--never) reported the following rates of being hurtful (Question 10):

- 1% Almost every day.
- 3% Once or twice a week.
- 8% Once or twice a month.
- 88% Never.

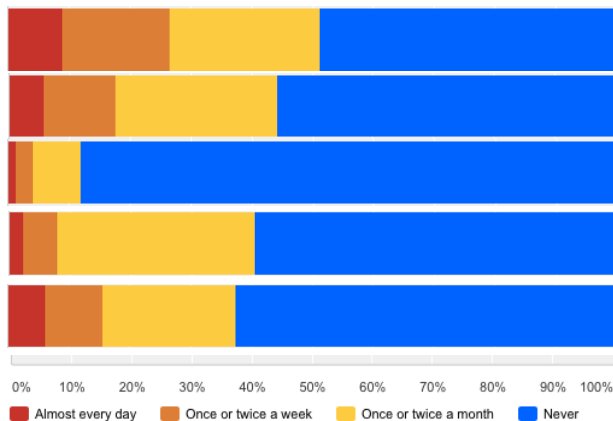
Response: Those who were Less Vulnerable reported the following rates of being hurtful (Question 10):

- 2% Almost every day.
- 6% Once or twice a week.
- 33% Once or twice a month.
- 60% Never.

Response: Those who were More Vulnerable reported the following rates of being hurtful (Question 10):

- 6% Almost every day.
- 10% Once or twice a week.
- 22% Once or twice a month.
- 63% Never.

Chart 9. Comparison of responses on Question 10 with responses on Question 1. Row 1: Those who were Frequently targeted. Row 2: Those who were Ever targeted. Row 3: Those who were Never targeted. Row 4. Less Vulnerable. Row 5. More Vulnerable



Discussion

- There is clearly a relationship between being hurtful and having someone be hurtful to you. A risk estimate was computed for these findings. Being hurt is the risk factor. Engaging in hurtful behavior is the outcome. Students who have ever engaged in hurtful behavior were 3.6 times more likely to have been treated badly than students who have never engaged in hurtful behavior.

As will be reported in the next section in Question 27, students who reported they were hurtful were also asked what they were thinking at the time. The second and fourth highest responses were: “This student had been hurtful to me or a friend of mine.” “This student deserved it because of what he or she did.” These response also raise attention to the concerns of hurtful acts in retaliation because one has been treated badly.

It is also not possible to clearly determine whether this data is reporting on what should be considered “conflict” between students who have a similar level of “power” or hurtful acts by someone who has been treated badly that should more appropriately be considered “retaliation.” This data suggests that some of the hurtful incidents are occurring between students with more equivalent levels of personal power who may be battling to achieve social status or dominance.

Clearly, many of these incidents are one directional in nature. It is very important to note that 60% of Less Vulnerable students and 63% of those students who are considered to be More Vulnerable did not report being hurtful to another student. There may be a social desirability response bias factor at work in these numbers. Students may have been more willing to report someone was hurtful to them than they were to report they were hurtful to others.

Based on this data, it is clearly necessary for schools to address the concern of retaliation and cycles of hurtful

acts and not focus solely on those hurtful situations that meet the statutory or academic definition of “bullying.”

These bidirectional incidents can be just as disruptive of the school climate and just as distressing emotionally for these students as what would have more typically been called “bullying.” As the discussion in the **Research Insight** identified, both guidance provided to educators and the state statutes focus solely on one type of hurtful situation, unfortunately defined in totally different ways. Educators must also gain effective skills in responding to what are apparently frequent bidirectional cycles of hurtful acts.

Expanded Analysis: Determining the association between being hurtful and targeted, telling a staff member, and the outcomes.

As reported above, 32% of targeted students who had not also been hurtful told an adult and 32% of targeted students who had also been hurtful told an adult.

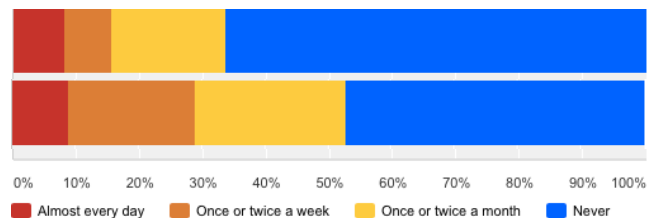
Response: How frequently students were hurtful (Question 10), based on whether someone had been hurtful to them (Question 1), they told a staff member (Question 6), and things got better (Question 8--things got better):-

- 8% Almost every day.
- 7% Once or twice a week.
- 18% Once or twice a month.
- 66% Never.

Response: How frequently students were hurtful (Question 10), based on whether someone had been hurtful to them (Question 1), they told a staff member (Question 6), and things got better (Question 8--things stayed the same or got worse): 9% Almost every day.

- 20% Once or twice a week.
- 24% Once or twice a month.
- 47% Never.

Chart 10. Comparison of responses on Question 10 based on outcomes reported on Question 8 Row 1: Those who whom things got better. Row 2: Those for whom things stayed the same or got worse.



Discussion

There appears to be no difference in reporting rates based on whether or not the student who is being targeted had also been hurtful. This is interesting because one might anticipate that students who were also hurtful would have been less likely to tell a staff member.

However, the outcome of telling an adult if someone has been hurtful, whether things get better, appears to have a

significant relationship with being hurtful. This could mean that if things did not get better after telling a school staff member, the student retaliated. Alternatively, this could mean that the staff member was less effective in resolving situations where both students were being hurtful.

Relationships

Question 13 (Asked of Students who reported someone was hurtful to them - Question 1): What best describes your relationship with the key person being hurtful before this happened?

- 38% We had no real connection.
- 29% We were good friends.
- 25% Things were fine between us.
- 20% This person has been hurtful to me for a long time.
- 19% We have had ongoing problems.
- 18% We had gotten into a recent argument.
- 11% We were dating or going together.
- 7% I had done something hurtful to this person.
- 7% I had said something hurtful about this person to someone else.
- 7% Other kind of relationship.
- 6% I had done something hurtful to a friend of this person.

Question 14 (Asked of Students who reported they were hurtful - Question 10): What best describes your relationship with the other student before this happened?

- 30% We were good friends.
- 28% We had no real connection.
- 26% Things were fine between us.
- 23% This person had been hurtful to me.
- 22% This person had been hurtful to a friend of mine.
- 19% We have had ongoing problems.
- 17% We had gotten into a recent argument.
- 15% We were dating.
- 10% I have been hurtful to this person for a long time.
- 10% Other kind of a relationship.

Expanded Analysis: Comparing the relationships (Questions 13 and 14) described by those students who reported they were hurtful (Question 10) and those who reported someone was hurtful to them (Question 1).

Engaged in Hurtful Acts	Someone Hurtful To Me
30% We were good friends.	38% We had no real connection.
28% We had no real connection.	29% We were good friends.
26% Things were fine between us.	25% Things were fine between us.

Engaged in Hurtful Acts	Someone Hurtful To Me
23% This person had been hurtful to me.	20% This person has been hurtful to me for a long time.
22% This person had been hurtful to a friend of mine.	19% We have had ongoing problems.

Expanded Analysis: Comparing the relationships (Question 13) between students who are Less Vulnerable and those who are More Vulnerable (Question 1--differential analysis).

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
38% We had no real connection.	35% We had no real connection.
29% We were good friends.	35% This person has been hurtful to me for a long time.
26% Things were fine between us.	26% We have had ongoing problems.
19% We had gotten into a recent argument.	25% We had gotten into a recent argument.
19% We have had ongoing problems.	24% We were good friends.

Expanded Analysis: Comparing the relationships (Question 13) described by More Vulnerable students (Question 1--identifying More Vulnerable), based on whether they had Ever been hurtful or Never been hurtful (Question 10--differential analysis).

Ever Hurtful	Never Hurtful
27% This person has been hurtful to me for a long time.	43% We had no real connection.
25% Things were fine between us.	39% This person has been hurtful to me for a long time.
25% We had gotten into a recent argument.	30% We have had ongoing problems.
22% We had no real connection.	26% We were good friends.
22% We were good friends.	25% We had gotten into a recent argument.

Expanded Analysis: Comparing the relationships (Questions 14) described by those students who reported they were hurtful (Question 10) based on whether they had Ever Or Never had someone be hurtful to them (Question 1).

Someone Hurtful Ever	Someone Hurtful Never
32% We were good friends.	30% We had no real connection.
28% We had no real connection.	24% We were good friends.
28% Things were fine between us.	20% Things were fine between us.
27% This person had been hurtful to me.	18% We have had ongoing problems.
24% This person had been hurtful to a friend of mine.	15% Other kind of relationship

Discussion

There are different kinds of relationships that might be involved in hurtful situations, including hurtful behavior between close friends. Effectively reducing these kinds of hurtful situations requires a recognition of how the students had been relating to each other prior to the hurtful incident and their objectives for a continuing relationship.

There appear to be no significant differences in how students who were hurtful and those treated in a hurtful manner described the prior relationships when looking at the overall data.

Note that only 10% of the students who were hurtful and 20% of those who someone had been hurtful to reported hurtful behavior that more closely fits the current understanding of “bullying”--that is, repetitive hurtful acts over a period of time. Note also that both those who were hurtful and those who had someone be hurtful to them described bidirectional situations, that they also had been hurtful, although at different rates.

Much greater insight into the distinctions between Less Vulnerable students and those who are More Vulnerable emerges when considering the prior reported relationships. While the top response from both was that of no real relationship, the subsequent two responses demonstrate a clear difference.

Students who are More Vulnerable have quite obviously been experiencing this hurtful relationship for a longer time. However, even for the More Vulnerable students, these hurtful incidents are occurring with someone who had been considered a good friend prior to this hurtful situation.

Additional interesting patterns of relationships emerge when extending the analysis in relation to those students who were More Vulnerable and those who had Ever or Never been hurtful as well as those who were hurtful and had Ever or Never experienced someone being hurtful to them. Essentially, there is no consistent reporting of types of prior relationships.

These findings raise significant concerns about the approach currently recommended to school administrators, which is that after a situation of alleged “bullying” has occurred, their analysis should seek to determine if there have been repeated hurtful acts and an imbalance of power (academic definition) or repeated hurtful acts that have caused distress and interference with student learning (common statutory definition).

The reduction of focus to a quest to determine whether a specific incident meets the definition of “bullying,” however defined, so that a disciplinary consequence can be applied may be a major factor in the students’ reports regarding the lack of effectiveness of school staff responses.

These hurtful situations involve a wide range of prior relationships and potentially also involve bidirectional hurtful acts. Reducing an investigation to an assessment of whether “bullying” occurred will take the administrator’s attention away from the kinds of questions that are necessary to determine what is happening that is hurtful to one or both students and how best to resolve the hurtful situation in a manner that supports the emotional well-being of all of the involved students.

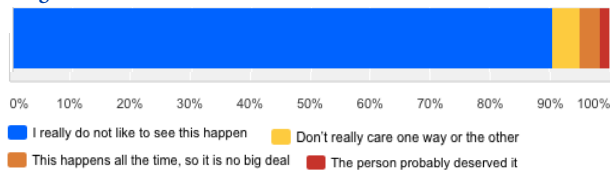
Student Insight Into Hurtful Behavior

Student Perspectives on Hurtful Behavior

The *Embrace Civility Student Survey* asked all students questions about hurtful behavior. As noted, hurtful behavior was defined as: “Hurtful incidents could be called bullying, harassment, disrespect or ‘put-downs,’ conflict or ‘drama,’ fighting, and the like.” This was an intentionally broad definition.

- Question 15: What is your normal reaction if you see a student being hurtful to another?
- 89% I really do not like to see this happen.
- 5% Don’t care one way or the other.
- 4% This happens all the time, so it is no big deal.
- 2% The person probably deserves it.

Chart 11. What is your normal reaction if you see a student being hurtful to another?



Question 16: What are the three most important reasons you would not be hurtful to another?

- 78% How I would feel if someone did this to me.
- 50% How I would feel about myself.
- 36% What my parents would think.
- 33% That I might hurt my future opportunities.
- 29% That I might get into trouble.
- 19% What this would do to my reputation.
- 14% What my friends would think.
- 9% Other reason that is important to you.

(Based on an analysis of the “other reasons” it is clear that one of the answer options on this question should be “how I would make the other person feel.” This answer option has been added in the updated and expanded version of the *Embrace Civility Student Survey*.)

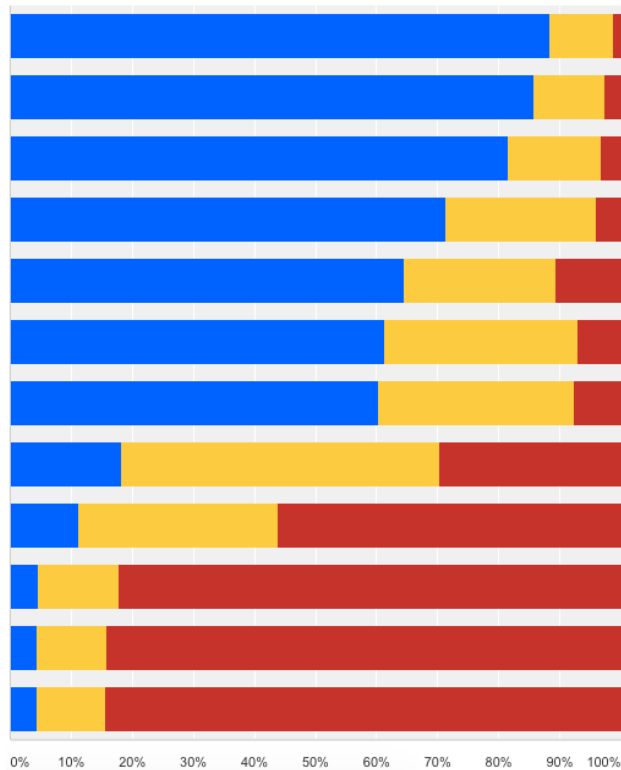
Question 17: People act in different ways. You might form opinions about them based on how they have acted. What do you think of these actions?

- A: Admire.
- NO: No opinion one way or the other.
- NA: Do not admire.

Action	A	N O	N A
Are respectful and kind to others.	88%	10%	1%

Action	A	N O	N A
Reach out to help someone who is treated badly.	86%	12%	3%
Tell someone who is being hurtful to stop.	81%	15%	3%
Help someone who was hurtful decide to make things right.	71%	25%	4%
Were treated badly and responded in a positive way.	65%	25%	11%
Report serious concerns to an adult.	61%	32%	7%
Were hurtful, but stopped and made things right.	60%	32%	8%
Were treated badly and retaliated.	18%	52%	30%
Ignore hurtful situations involving others.	11%	34%	56%
Laugh when seeing that someone is being treated badly.	5%	13%	82%
Create hurtful "drama" to get attention.	4%	11%	84%
Think it is "cool" to be disrespectful to others.	4%	11%	84%

Chart 12. What do you think of these actions?



Discussion

These questions were designed to solicit student insight into their norms and values around hurtful behavior. As is obvious from this data, the vast majority of students hold negative views about students being hurtful to others, as well as those who support those being hurtful.

Students hold very positive views about peers who are kind and respectful and step who in to help those who are treated badly, as well as those respond to hurtful situations in a positive manner and who take steps to remedy situations if they were hurtful.

These questions solicit what researchers would call “socially desirable responses.” This data is not as much for “research purposes,” where the concern of social desirability response bias would be present. This data is for instructional purposes--to help students learn about the positive norms of their peers. This is in accord with the social norms approach to youth risk prevention, which is more fully described in *Embrace Civility: Fostering Positive Relations in School*.

However, a very significant finding emerged. This is the response to the answer option “Were treated badly and retaliated.” Note that 52% of the students had mixed feelings about this and 30% thought this was something to admire.

As will be presented in the responses to Question 24, which asked students why, at the time they were hurtful, they thought this was okay, two of the four top responses were: “This student had been hurtful to me or a friend of

mine,” “This student deserved it because of what he or she did.” Essentially, retaliation appears to have played a significant role in the decision to be hurtful.

The fact that all students appear to have mixed feelings about the appropriateness of retaliation is of great interest. If students support the appropriateness of retaliation, at least in some situations, then it is possible they will be less likely to speak out against such hurtful acts. This is an issue that will be addressed in respect to a variety of additional questions throughout this section.

Perspectives on Stepping in to Help

Question 18: What words would you use to describe a person who steps in to help when he or she sees someone being hurtful to another?

Chart 3. What words would you use to describe a person who steps in to help when he or she sees someone being hurtful to another? (Word Cloud)

Awesome **Brave** Amazing Nice
 Confident **Strong** Kind Friend Responsible
Caring Respectful **Hero** Leader
Courageous Smart Admirable

Question 19: If you wanted to tell a person who was being hurtful to stop, what would you likely say or post? (The following uses the student spelling and punctuation.)

This is an example of the qualitative responses:

- Can you just please leave this person alone because he hasn't done anything to and he does not deserve to be treated this way.Would you like to be treated like that?
- Stop doing what your doin
- Hey stop my friend
- Hey bro, chill out
- Hey stop,that's not cool
- Knock it off
- Treat others the way you want to be treated
- I would say back the f up and tell someone
- That is no way to treat a person
- how would you like if someone was doing that to you
- you wouldn't want that to be done to you
- stop you arnt cool leave them alone
- Please stop
- If you want to play this game, then think again.
- Imagine if it was you
- To stop because they are being really hurtful.
- Please stop
- Why are you picking on this person what did they ever do to you
- Not sure
- I would most likely say that that person must stop hurting others
- Reflect

- treat others the way you want others to treat you
- Slow down, think about consequences because they're people too
- You need to cut that out
- "You are being so childish, grow up and treat people like humans, because this kinda stuff will not fly when you get into the real world, you'll be left alone and crying like the little baby you are."

Question 20: If you wanted to reach out to be kind to someone who has been treated badly or was being left out, what would you do or say? (The following uses the student spelling and punctuation.)

This is an example of the qualitative responses:

- I would go to reconciliation he or she and include him or her in what I was doing.
- Dont do anything about it
- is okay
- You Should join us over here man
- Wanna hang?
- Hey I'm here if u wanna talk
- Ask them to hang out
- I would say u can hang with us
- Try to invite them somewhere
- you are important
- It doesn't matter what others say
- What's good
- hey are you ok wanna hang out
- Hey. It's ok. Want to talk?
- Hey I noticed that they were going that. You all right fam? Want me too go talk to them?
- That im sorry for how they were treated and i hope in some kinda way i can help
- Come join us we could use another person
- I don't know
- Are you ok ?
- Try to let them fit in.
- I know how you feel
- what's wrong
- Hey I know you might be really sad right now but things will get better and I'd like to help if that's ok I was in this position once myself
- Do whatever I can to inspire them to be strong and keep their head up.
- I would talk to the person and be friends with him/her
- Im with you

Discussion

The words used to describe students who step in to help provides additional strength to the the findings in Question 15 regarding who students admire.

However, as will be identified in Question 26, the primary reason given for not stepping in to help when hurtful situations are witnessed is "I didn't know what I could do." The student responses on Questions 19 and 20 demonstrate that they do, indeed, know some very good

things they could do. Strategies to handle this instructionally are set forth in the discussion following Question 31.

Perspectives on How to Respond if Someone is Hurtful to You

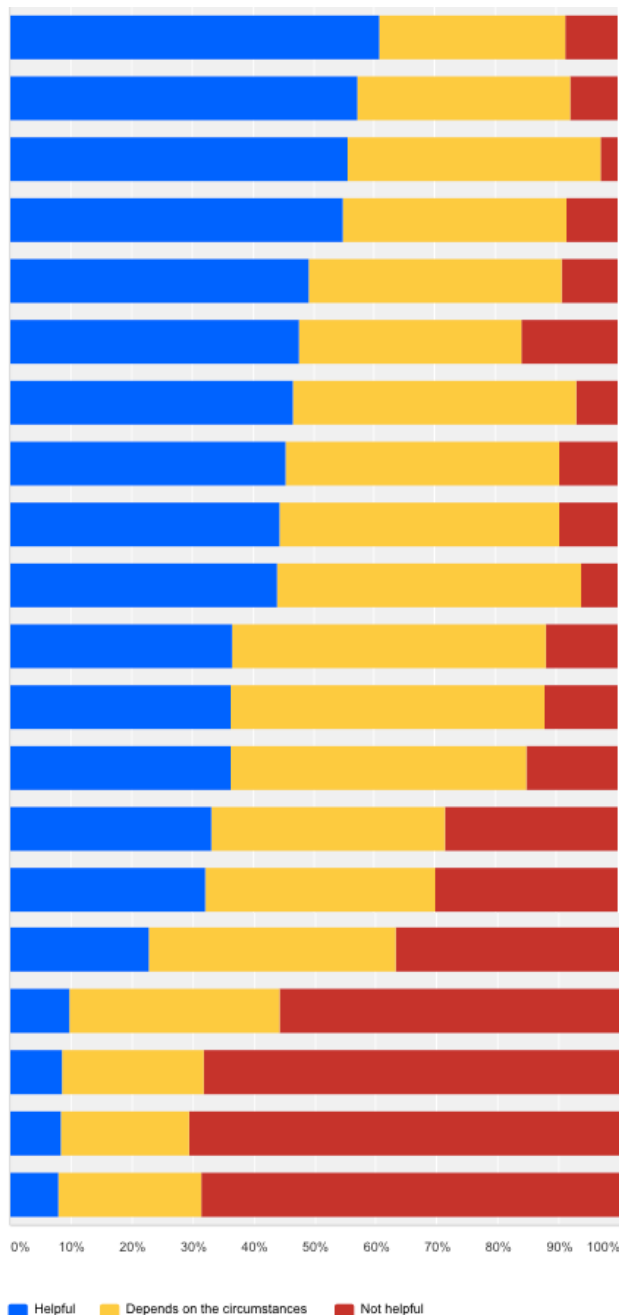
Question 21: How helpful do you think these responses are if someone is treated badly?

- H: Generally helpful
- D: Depends on the circumstances
- N: Generally not helpful

Response	H	D	N
Tell themselves they will not give this person the power to make them feel bad.	61%	31%	8%
Apologize if they have also been hurtful.	57%	35%	8%
Immediately respond.	56%	42%	3%
Calmly tell the hurtful person to stop.	55%	37%	8%
Report the incident to the school.	49%	42%	9%
Walk away or get offline.	48%	37%	16%
Talk with a parent before doing anything.	47%	47%	7%
Confront the hurtful person.	45%	45%	9%
Talk with a school staff member before doing anything.	45%	46%	9%
Take time to calm down before doing anything.	44%	50%	6%
Asked a mutual friend to try to help.	37%	52%	12%
File an abuse report online.	37%	52%	12%
Talk with a friend before doing anything.	36%	49%	15%
Ignore hurtful messages they receive.	33%	39%	28%
Ignore hurtful material that has been posted online.	32%	38%	30%
Ignore the person.	23%	41%	37%
Get into a fight with the hurtful person.	10%	34%	56%
Say hurtful things about the hurtful person to others.	9%	23%	68%
Publicly post hurtful material about the hurtful person.	8%	21%	71%

Response	H	D	N
Send hurtful messages to the hurtful person.	8%	24%	69%

Chart 13. How helpful do you think these responses are if someone is treated badly?



Expanded Analysis: Responses of students who reported someone was hurtful to them or they were hurtful.

Response: Those who reported someone was hurtful to them (Question 1) responded:

- 61% Tell themselves they will not give this person the power to make them feel bad.
- 57% Apologize if they have also been hurtful.
- 55% Calmly tell the hurtful person to stop.

- 52% Immediately respond.

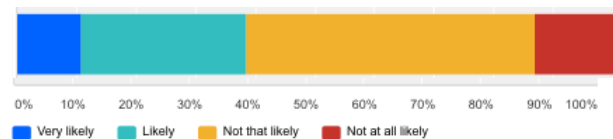
Response: Those who reported they had been hurtful (Question 10) responded:

- 54% Tell themselves they will not give this person the power to make them feel bad.
- 50% Immediately respond.
- 48% Apologize if they have also been hurtful.
- 45% Calmly tell the hurtful person to stop.
- 45% Walk away or get offline.

Question 22: How likely are students in your school to report to a school staff member when someone is being hurtful?

- 11% Very likely.
- 28% Likely.
- 49% Not that likely.
- 13% Not at all likely.

Chart 14. How likely are students in your school to report to a school staff member when someone is being hurtful?



Discussion

The response to Question 21 reveals that students think it is important to respond to hurtful behavior in a positive and powerful manner, including taking responsibility of your hurtful actions were part of this. Note the first four key responses--those gaining over 50% approval--were:

- Very positive thought regarding personal empowerment, not letting what others do impact how you think of yourself.
- The importance of taking responsibility and apologizing if you have been hurtful.
- Immediately responding, which will require a sufficient level of personal empowerment.
- Calmly telling the hurtful person to stop.

Note also that both those students who reported they were hurtful and those who were treated badly shared the same thoughts on the most helpful ways to respond.

Often school staff are told that students who have been bullied should never be expected to face the child who bullied as this could cause them distress. The perspective that students who are treated in a hurtful way are incapable of standing up for themselves should be reconsidered.

The highest rated positive response is grounded in Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy.⁹⁴ A key underlying premise is that harmful consequences are not just caused by the adversities that happen to us, but also by our beliefs about those adversities. While it is not possible to change what might happen to us, it is possible to be in control of

how we react to what has happened, and thus have greater control over the resulting impact.

The fact that students ranked apologizing if hurtful so highly provides encouragement for messaging students of the importance of accepting personal responsibility for their wrongdoing and making amends.

It has already been revealed that retaliation is a significant reported reason why students are hurtful (Question 24) and, as discussed above (Question 15), students appear to have mixed feelings about retaliation.

However, in Question 21, it appears that most students recognize the importance of apologizing if one has been hurtful. They also have strong feelings that responses such as getting into a fight with the hurtful person, saying hurtful things about this person, posting hurtful material about this person online, and sending hurtful messages to this person, are not generally a helpful way to respond.

Thus, significant and critical questions should be posed to students around the issues of retaliation and their support thereof. It may be that the general term “retaliation” is perceived as more neutral, whereas when retaliatory acts are more clearly defined, they are less supported.

Another important finding of Question 27 is that the top ranked reason for being hurtful was “I acted too fast when I was angry and really did not ‘think.’” Note that in Question 18, students think that immediately responding is preferable to taking the time to calm down before doing anything.

This clearly is an issue that should be discussed with students. A helpful conclusion following such discussion will be that it is generally helpful to immediately respond, but only if they can do so by calmly telling the hurtful person to stop and not if they are inclined to get into a fight or say or post hurtful things about or to this person.

Note also the discrepancy between thinking it is generally helpful to report the incident to the office and the perspective on how likely students are to do this. Student’s actual reporting to the school when someone is hurtful, reported on Question 6 more closely matches students’ perspectives on how likely students are to report.

The issue of telling an adult at school should obviously be discussed with students. However, this discussion should be viewed as a “teachable moment” for school staff to identify reasons why students at their school do not report.

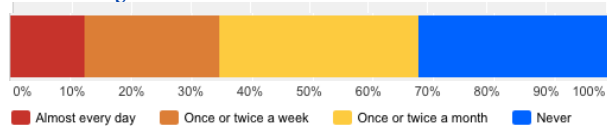
Perspectives on Helping Those Who Have Been Treated Badly

Question 23. In the last month, how frequently have you witnessed a student being hurtful to another student at school?

- 12% Almost every day.
- 22% Once or twice a week.

- 33% Once or twice a month.
- 32% Never.

Chart 15. In the last month, how frequently have you witnessed a student being hurtful to a student at school?



Question 24: What did you do when you saw this hurtful incident? (Skip this question if you did not see a hurtful incident.) (N: 1,032)

- 63% Tried to help resolve the situation.
- 56% Immediately reached out to the student who was treated badly.
- 54% At a later time reached out to the student who was treated badly.
- 51% Publicly told those being hurtful to stop.
- 47% Told a school staff member.
- 46% Privately told those being hurtful to stop.
- 38% Ignored the situation.
- 29% Filed an abuse report online.
- 24% Watched with interest.
- 23% Encouraged the student being hurtful.

Question 25: In the last month, if a friend of yours was hurtful to someone, what did you do? (If a friend of yours was not hurtful, skip this question.) (N: 794)

- 70% Privately told my friend to stop.
- 67% Helped my friend and the other person resolve the situation.
- 66% Helped the person my friend treated badly.
- 66% Helped my friend make things right.
- 50% Publicly told my friend to stop.
- 40% Reported to a school staff member.
- 39% Decided not to be friends any more.
- 37% Supported my friend.
- 27% Ignored what was happening.

Question 26: In either of these two situations, if you wanted to do something that would have been helpful, but didn't, what stopped you? (N: 1,216)

- 59% I didn't know what I could do.
- 34% It was none of my business.
- 32% I could have failed and embarrassed myself.
- 28% Other students might have teased me if I tried to help.
- 28% School staff is supposed to handle this.
- 27% The student being hurtful could have retaliated.
- 18% It wasn't that bad.
- 14% Others thought it was funny.
- 11% The student being treated badly deserved it.
- 10% Other reason.

Discussion

In general, students reported that they engaged in very positive responses when they witnessed hurtful behavior. However, as will be seen in Question 31, the manner in

which students reported they responded must be assessed by also considering the perspectives of those who were treated badly. The responses on Questions 24 may be biased due to the socially desirable response bias, as the responses are not in accord with the reports of peer assistance by those who were treated badly.

A positive interpretation is that these are the actions that students want to take. That is, these responses indicate their positive intent. The responses to Question 26 reflect the barriers that get in the way between intent and action.

Note that the first identified barrier is that they did not know what to do. The validity of this barrier could potentially be called into question based on the very excellent qualitative responses to Questions 19 and 20. Nevertheless, the responses to Question 26 demonstrate the importance of empowering students with a range of possible options for positively intervening in hurtful situations.

The following three barriers--it was none of my business, I could have failed and embarrassed myself, and other students might have teased me if I tried to help--all reflect social norms related to peer intervention. This raises questions related to what the identified norms are in the school community.

The first norm, “mind your own business,” is often imparted by adults, as well as the message that school staff should handle these situations. Schools should ascertain whether school staff regularly advise students not to try to help and to discuss when and how they can step in to help.

The fears of failure and embarrassment can be best addressed both by emphasizing the positive norms of the majority of their peers, as demonstrated in Questions 3 and 4, and helping students learn effective skills.

The Discussion following Question 31 will set forth proposed way to discuss this with students.

(Unfortunately, a question was inadvertently dropped from this survey for those who were hurtful, regarding whether any of their friends tried to help them stop and make things right. This has been added to the updated and expanded version of the *Embrace Civility Student Survey*.)

Students Who Reported They Were Hurtful

Note that in Question 10, first reported above, students reported being hurtful to another student from their school at the following level:

- 4% Almost every day.
- 8% Once or twice a week.
- 18% Once or twice a month.
- 71% Never.

Question 27: Why - at the time you did this - did you think this was okay? (Check anything that you thought at the time)

- 47% I acted too fast when I was angry and really did not "think."
- 44% This student had been hurtful to me or a friend of mine.
- 30% What I did wasn't that bad.
- 24% This student deserved it because of what he or she did.
- 24% It was just a prank.
- 21% Everybody does it.
- 17% This student deserved it because of who he or she is.
- 14% Someone else told me to do this.
- 11% Other thought.

Discussion

The finding on Question 27 provides incredibly helpful insight into how schools can effectively reduce a significant amount of hurtful behavior of students by focusing on the issues of impulsive behavior and retaliation.

The most significant reason students said they were hurtful was that they had acted in an impulsive manner. This is consistent with other research findings.

There is a growing movement in schools in the U.S. to implement programs that focus on mindfulness practices. Research has documented effectiveness of mindfulness training and practice in addressing stress-related concerns of children and adolescents, with documented positive results in students' physical health, psychological well-being, social skills, emotional regulation, and academic performance.⁹⁵

There are no published studies that specifically address the use of the mindfulness approach for students who have challenges with bullying, either being bullied or engaging in bullying. Based on this data, lack of impulse control is clearly an identified challenge for students who engage in hurtful behavior.

Considering this data further, two of the top four responses focus on the concerns of retaliation. Other data also supports the conclusion that often students are hurtful because they perceive that someone has been hurtful to them. Research related to an effective approach to reduce retaliation was outlined in **Research Insight**.

Other things students indicated they were thinking when they were hurtful, that it was not that bad, it was just a prank, everybody does it, the student deserved it because of who he or she is, and that someone else told them to do this, are all grounded in Bandura's theory of the mechanisms of moral disengagement.⁹⁶

Moral disengagement describes the process by which people convince themselves that certain ethical standards do not apply to them in particular situations. Through the moral disengagement processes, people create rationalizations to support their self-opinion that they are ethical, while engaging in behavior that is unethical. Educating students about how they might rationalize hurtful behavior may help to decrease such hurtful behavior.

Question 28: What best describes what happened after this incident?

- 21% I realized that I should not do this, so I stopped.
- 16% Truthfully, I have not stopped being hurtful.
- 13% I just decided to stop for no specific reason.
- 12% The person I was hurtful to and I resolved the difficulty.
- 12% Other reason I stopped.
- 7% A friend told me to stop, and so I did.
- 6% The person I was hurtful to told me to stop, and so I did.
- 5% Another student told me to stop, and so I did.
- 5% My parents told me to stop, and so I did.
- 3% A school staff person told me to stop, and so I did.

Discussion

Question 28 provides positive news about the aftermath of these hurtful incidents. It appears that many times students do stop themselves. However, it is necessary to consider that some of these responses may reflect a socially desirable response bias. That is, they wanted to report that they had stopped. These positive responses can be interpreted as a perspective that these hurtful students want to stop.

Note that 34% of the students indicated that they essentially decided to stop on their own and 30% stopped after either resolving the incident or after being told by another student to stop.

The key challenge relates to the apparent level of influence of parents and school staff on the decision by students to stop. Given that telling a hurtful student to stop is a frequent response of staff, the finding on this question provides insight into how effective this might be.

Students Who Reported Someone Was Hurtful

Note that in Question 1, first reported above, students reported that a student in their school had been hurtful at the following level:

- 11% Almost every day.
- 15% Once or twice a week.
- 26% Once or twice a month.
- 49% Never.

In Question 2, they reported the following levels of upset:

- 28% Very upset.

- 32% Upset.
- 30% Not that upset.
- 10% Not at all upset.

In Question 3, they reported the following levels of effectiveness in responding:

- 29% I was easily able to get this to stop.
- 36% It was challenging, but possible, to get this to stop.
- 15% It was very difficult to get this to stop.
- 20% I felt powerless to get this to stop.

The Expanded Analysis identified students who were More Vulnerable as those who were treated badly once or twice a week or almost daily, were upset or very upset, and felt it was very difficult or they were powerless to get the hurtful acts to stop. Those who were identified as Less Vulnerable were treated badly once or twice a month, were not that or at all upset, and were able to easily or with some challenges get the hurtful acts to stop.

Reaching Out for Help

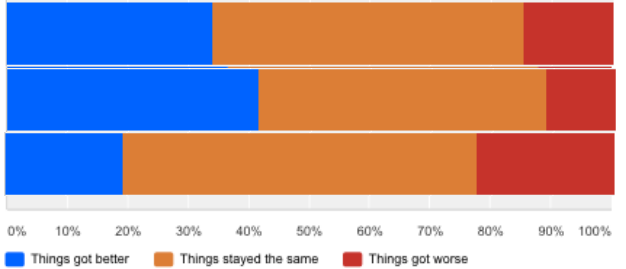
Question 29: If you talked with a friend about this incident, what happened? (Skip this question if you did not talk with a friend.) N: 562 of 797 or 71%.

- 34% Things got better.
- 51% Things stayed the same.
- 15% Things got worse.

Expanded Analysis: The differences in outcomes between More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable Students.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
38% Things got better.	19% Things got better.
50% Things stayed the same.	58% Things stayed the same.
12% Things got worse.	22% Things got worse.
N: 106 of 163 or 65%.	N: 98 of 147 or 67%.

Chart 16. What happened after they talked with a friend? Row 1: All students. Row 2: Less Vulnerable Students. Row 3: More Vulnerable students.



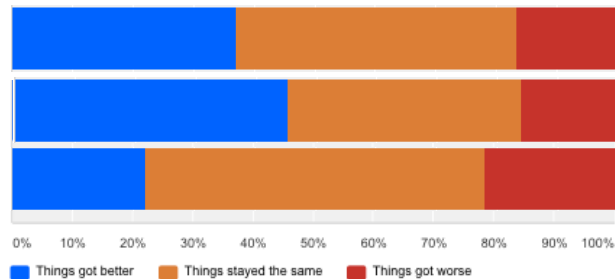
Question 30: If you talked with your parent about this incident, what happened? (Skip this question if you did not talk with a parent.) N: 473 of 797 or 59%.

- 37% Things got better.
- 46% Things stayed the same.
- 17% Things got worse.

Expanded Analysis: The differences in outcomes between More Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable Students.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
45% Things got better.	22% Things got better.
39% Things stayed the same.	56% Things stayed the same.
16% Things got worse.	22% Things got worse.
N: 75 of 163 or 46%.	N: 86 of 147 or 59%.

Chart 17. What happened if they talked to a parent? Row 1: All students. Row 2: Less Vulnerable Students. Row 3: More Vulnerable Students.



Discussion

Overall, the level of effectiveness of friends and parents in helping students resolve these situations is quite low. Obviously, efforts to increase the effectiveness of friends and parents must be integrated into a comprehensive approach to address these concerns.

Less Vulnerable Students and More Vulnerable Students talked with a friend at a comparative level. However, for More Vulnerable Students, talking with a friend was less likely to make things better (19% compared to 38%).

More Vulnerable Students were more likely to talk with a parent, but unfortunately doing so was less likely to make things better than for Less Vulnerable Students (22% compared to 45%).

This demonstrates that the More Vulnerable Students fair much worse in terms of lack of effective support from friends or parents.

Responses of Other Students

Question 31. Did any other student do the following? (Reporting “yes” responses.)

- 47% Reached out to be helpful to me.
- 37% Publicly told the person being hurtful to stop.
- 29% Helped both of us resolve the situation.
- 26% Reported the incident to a school staff member.

Expanded Analysis: How other students say they responded compared to how the student who reported someone was hurtful to them .

Analysis: What student witnesses said they did (Question 24) compared to what targeted students reported others did (Question 31).

What student witnesses said they did	What targeted students said someone did
56% Reached out to be helpful to me.	47% Reached out to be helpful to me.
51% Publicly told the person being hurtful to stop.	37% Publicly told the person being hurtful to stop.
63% Tried to help resolve the situation.	29% Helped both of us resolve the situation.
47% Told a school staff member.	26% Reported the incident to a school staff member.

Analysis: How students responded to More Vulnerable Students as compared to Less Vulnerable Students analyzing responses to Question 31 based on level of vulnerability.

Less Vulnerable Students	More Vulnerable Students
47% Reached out to be helpful to me.	38% Reached out to be helpful to me.
37% Publicly told the person being hurtful to stop.	28% Publicly told the person being hurtful to stop.
33% Helped both of us resolve the situation.	28% Reported the incident to a school staff member.
20% Reported the incident to a school staff member.	16% Helped both of us resolve the situation.

Discussion

Clearly, there are differences in how student witnesses say they responded as compared to how students who reported someone was hurtful to them say others responded. Obviously, the responses of those who reported someone was hurtful to them about how others responded have more credibility.

As mentioned earlier, it is possible that the responses of students to Question 24 reflected a socially desirable response--that is, they think it is a good thing to step in to help and therefore they reported on the survey that they did so. The most positive way to address this finding is to applaud students for their expressed desire to help and then shift to a discussion of how to overcome the barriers to helping.

These are some thoughts on how a discussion might be approached:

There appears to be a difference between how students reported they responded when they saw someone being treated badly and what those students who were treated badly said others did.

Clearly, based on your own data, you do not like to see students being treated badly, you admire those who step in to help, and would like to step in to help.

So let's dig deeper and think more about the barriers to stepping in to help when you see someone being treated badly.

You have indicated that one key reason you did not respond when you saw a hurtful situation was because you did not know what to do. But your responses to these questions indicate that most of you have very good ideas on what to do. It may be that you were not sure what to do in response to the specific situation you witnessed. What kinds of situations do you witness that lead you to be concerned about whether you know of things you can do?

The next three most significant barriers were it was none of my business, I could have failed and embarrassed myself, and other students might have teased me if I tried to help. All of these barriers are related to what we could call social norms--basically what you think others might think. Clearly, based on other data from your survey, the majority of students truly admire those who step in to help. Let's discuss these perceived norms that act as barriers in order to determine what students really think about the importance of helping and what they think of those who do.

In addition to receiving less effective support after talking to a friend, students are less likely to step in to help those students who are More Vulnerable. This, along with the responses to Question 27, regarding what happened after talking with a friend, and that “things got better” only 19% of the time, demonstrates the degree to which students who are More Vulnerable lack helpful connections with friends who can assist them. Helping these students forge better peer relations would clearly be of assistance to their well-being. The lack of helpful friends likely reflects some deficiencies in social skills that must be better addressed.

94 Ellis, A. (1994) Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy: Comprehensive Method of Treating Human Disturbances : Revised and Updated. New York, NY: Citadel Press; Ellis, Albert (2003). Early theories and practices of rational emotive behavior theory and how they have been augmented and revised during the last three decades. Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy, 21(3/4).

95 Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., and Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in youth organizations – A systematic review and meta-analysis. Frontiers in Psychology, 5, 603. See also research noted at: <http://www.mindful.org/the-mindful-society/mindfulness-in-education-research-highlights>. See also, The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care & Society. <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/>.

96 Bandura, A. (1991). Social cognition theory of moral thought and action. In W. M. Kurtines and J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), Handbook of moral behavior and development (Vol. 1, pp. 45-96). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Conclusions

Student Perspectives on Effectiveness of Staff Interventions and Reporting Hurtful Incidents

The results of the *Embrace Civility Student Survey* raise significant concerns about the effectiveness of school staff responses to hurtful situations, including the responses of staff who witness hurtful situations and the interventions of those to whom such situations are reported.

As noted earlier, the common components of bullying prevention efforts are staff intervention in the situations they witness and advising students to report if someone has been hurtful. These common components are necessary--but must be executed in a manner that achieves effective results.

The fact that the predominant approach to training for school staff as described on the StopBullying.gov web site ,as follows, is clearly a major part of the problem:

To ensure that bullying prevention efforts are successful, all school staff need to be trained on what bullying is, what the school's policies and rules are, and how to enforce the rules.⁹⁷

This is an authoritarian, rules-and-punishment-based approach that mistakenly assumes that “bullying” can be effectively stopped by making rules against such behavior and punishing students who violate the rules. There should be no surprise to find that this approach is only minimally effective, if that.

As noted earlier, it is presumed that school staff do want to respond to these situations in an effective manner and will be dismayed by these findings. Based on extensive research on these issues, it is suggested that the following are the key factors that are likely playing a significant role in the lack of effectiveness of staff of staff interventions and the lack of student reporting.

The Focus on “Bullying” as a Violation of a School Rule, Rather Than a Social Skills Challenge

The authoritarian, rules-and-punishment-based approach that assumes that “bullying” can be effectively stopped by making rules against such behavior and punishing students who violate the rules. This approach dramatically shifts the focus away from important life lessons and learning opportunities present for all three parties: The student(s) being the hurtful; The student(s) treated badly; The school community.

For the student who was hurtful, the important learning opportunities are to determine why he or she engaged in hurtful behavior, how to stop such behavior from continuing or occurring in the future, and how to remedy the harm that was caused to another.

For the student who was treated badly, the learning opportunity is how to effectively respond if someone has been hurtful in a way that does not lead to continuing harm to his or her well-being.

For the educator responding to this situation, the learning opportunity relates to the quality of the school climate and how aspects of this climate may need to be shifted to discourage hurtful acts by students, encourage restoration and resilience, increase positive peer intervention, and improve the effectiveness of school staff in fostering positive relations.

Dillon wisely suggested school staff ask themselves:

Do we want to stop a negative behavior, bullying, or do we want to promote and strengthen the positive behaviors that will ultimately create the conditions where bullying becomes incompatible with the cultural and social norms of the school.⁹⁸

By treating these situations as disciplinary matters, the school staff member usurps the position of the student who was treated badly, for whom remedy is deserved, and turns the matter into a violation of a rule that is imposed by the adult authority. Most often, the student who was treated badly is not even informed what disciplinary consequence was imposed on the student who was hurtful, because of privacy protections. Imposing punishment does not effectively engage the hurtful student in self-inquiry of why he or she was hurtful, how to stop such hurtful behavior from occurring in the future, and how to take steps to remedy the harm that was done and restore relationships.

The focus for general staff must shift to providing strategies to help students resolve a wide range of hurtful situations and identify the more serious situations that will require greater involvement by a designated staff person.

The designated staff person, who must investigate and intervene in the more serious, ongoing hurtful situations, requires insight into how to helpfully guide all students involved to achieve a successful resolution and to identify aspects of the school climate that require additional attention.

For all staff, this requires shifting from acting in the role of an “authority” who enforces school rules to that of a

“mentor” who helps students learn important life skills to foster positive relations.

What Educators are Taught About the Nature of Bullying and Other Hurtful Behavior

Much of what educators are taught about students who engage in bullying is incomplete. Most instruction for educators focuses solely on the concerns of students who have significant challenges and are also aggressive. The following insight is from a slideshow for staff development that is currently on the StopBullying.Gov Web site:

Children and youth who bully others are more likely than their peers to:

- *Exhibit delinquent behaviors (such as fighting, stealing, vandalism)*
- *Dislike school and drop out of school*
- *Drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes*
- *Bring weapons to school*
- *Think about and attempt suicide⁹⁹*

Recent research has demonstrated that the students who most frequently engage in hurtful behavior, especially at the secondary level, are the socially-skilled “popular” students who are engaging in hurtful behavior to achieve social dominance. Because these “social climbers” have excellent social skills, they are very effective at being hurtful to their peers using strategies that are not as easily detected by school staff.

Because of the lack of effective professional development on the predominant source of hurtful behavior, it is no surprise that staff may not recognize the hurtful acts of these socially competent students.

Educators require greater insight into the various forms of hurtful behavior, specifically including how to recognize and intervene in hurtful situations that involve these more socially powerful students.

If the students who are being hurtful have also had adverse experiences, these students will require more intensive interventions to help them recover from the harms they have suffered and to stop being hurtful. The approach to stop the hurtful behavior of socially dominant students must reflect an understanding of the purpose for such behavior and seek to shift these students onto a path of more positive leadership.

The Failure to Focus on the Empowerment of Targeted Students

The most common description of students who are “bullied” presents these students as lacking in sufficient strength to positively and powerfully respond. Educators are told these students must be “protected.” Certainly, staff must be attentive to the safety of these students, however, believing these students are incapable of becoming

empowered and effectively responding when someone treats them badly supports their continued victimization.

While there are an overwhelming number of research studies that document the long-lasting emotional and physical harm suffered by such students, there is an abject lack of research guidance within the field of bullying prevention on how to help them to overcome the harms they have suffered and more effectively empower these students. There is, however, helpful insight from other areas of research, including from the fields of traumatic distress and positive psychology.

Rather than view these targeted students as inherently lacking in personal strength, intervention efforts must be shifted to a focus on empowering them to better respond to hurtful situations on their own and addressing the harm that was caused.

Other contributing factors likely are:

- **Developmental Priorities of Secondary Students** Secondary students are at an age where they seek to establish independence, competence, and personal control. Teens want to manage their own personal relationship challenges.
- **The Approach Staff are Taught Regarding How to Intervene.** Professional development guidance for staff on how to effectively intervene when they witness hurtful incidents is lacking or sometimes woefully out of accord with the reality of how staff can respond in school, given their other job responsibilities. Guidance on how to effectively respond must reflect the reality that these hurtful situations most often occur in classrooms, hallways, or the cafeteria--when school staff have other pressing job responsibilities. This requires that staff have strategies to quickly intervene to stop the hurtful incident from continuing, as well as insight into how to investigate further to determine an appropriate response or referral.
- **Telling Hurtful Students to Stop.** Clearly, most students do not stop being hurtful because they are told to stop by an adult. It is necessary for adults to shift from acting like an adult authority who will deliver punishment, to that of a mentor who can help students accept personal responsibility, remedy the harm, and restore relationships. Again, the focus on addressing bullying as a disciplinary matter is related to this challenge.

The Legal Dimension

As was outlined in the **Research Insight**, the concern of the effectiveness of staff responses must also be considered from the legal perspective. Public school districts violate federal and state civil rights laws when discriminatory harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability is sufficiently serious to create a hostile

environment, and school staff encourage, tolerate, do not adequately address, or ignore such harassment.¹⁰⁰

These cases will generally involve the Most Vulnerable students. Based on the data from this survey, 64% of these students do not generally report when they are being treated badly, which occurs quite frequently, and that things get better for only 30% of those who do report--an overall effectiveness of only 11% of the “we responded whenever it was reported” approach.

It appears that sole reliance on this “we responded whenever it was reported” approach clearly should not be deemed sufficient to defend against a charge that the school was “deliberately indifferent.”

It is therefore recommended that when hurtful situations are reported to them, far more comprehensive, positive strategies must be implemented to ensure that the hurtful situation stops and harm suffered is remedied. Followup evaluation in all reported situations should be implemented.

It is further recommended that schools regularly survey their students to determine the effectiveness of their school approach to these situations. The survey used for the *Embrace Civility Student Survey* is available for schools for use in determining local effectiveness and the effectiveness of changes implemented to improve practices.

Student Insight Into Hurtful Behavior

This survey revealed insight into a number of factors that hold great promise in the implementation of positive strategies to reduce hurtful behavior and increase positive peer intervention.

Positive Youth Norms

The vast majority of students disapprove of their peers being treated badly, and admire those who treat others with respect, reach out to help someone who is hurtful, tell someone who is hurtful to stop or help them decide to stop, were treated badly and responded in a positive way, report serious concerns to an adult, and if they were hurtful stopped and made things right. Students also use very positive words to describe those who step in to help.

As is more fully discussed in *Embrace Civility: Fostering Positive Relations in School*, the social norms theory suggests that people misperceive the attitudes and behaviors of others and this influences their own actions.¹⁰¹ When people learn about the actual positive norms of their peer group, they are more willing to abide by those norms. Ensuring accurate understanding of the disapproval of bullying and other hurtful behavior and admiration of those who respect those who are “different” and step in to help is a core component of an approach to foster positive relations. Use of students’ own data strongly reinforces the positive peer norms approach.

Impulsive Retaliation

The majority of students appear to have very mixed feelings about the role of retaliation. The importance of the student perspectives on retaliation is amplified when it is recognized that impulsive retaliation appears to be a very significant contributing factor when a student engages in hurtful behavior. The importance of this student norm is also emphasized when considering the percentage of students who said someone was hurtful to them who also reported being hurtful to another.

As this data was being analyzed, the following headline appeared in the New York Times: *France Strikes Syria in Retaliation for Attacks*.¹⁰² One obviously does not have to look far to determine how students might gain their perception regarding the appropriateness of retaliation in certain circumstances.

As was addressed in the **Research Insight**, it appears that people who hold a fixed mindset are more likely to engage in retaliation.¹⁰³ The research of Dr. Yeager provides profoundly helpful guidance and demonstrates that helping students shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset reduces retaliatory hurtful behavior.¹⁰⁴ Teaching students about the growth mindset, with a specific focus on the fact that people can change--that those who made a mistake and were hurtful can stop themselves, acknowledge wrongdoing, and take steps to remedy the harm--should help to reduce retaliation.

Additionally, schools that have implemented mindfulness/self-regulation activities with students have seen an increase in self-regulation and a decrease in impulsive negative behavior.¹⁰⁵

The thoughts expressed by students on the question of why they would not be hurtful, where thinking based on reciprocity (the Golden Rule) was predominant as a reason, but including a discussion of all of the reasons, may assist in this process.

Further, the data from students regarding responses they think are generally helpful or not helpful can be integrated into this discussion. As noted, hurtful responses were not generally considered a helpful way to respond. However, students did recommend an immediate response, which can lead to an impulsive hurtful act.

Desire for Cessation and Restoration

Students who indicated they were hurtful also reported a significant level of cessation of their hurtful behavior. This finding was likely biased as a social desirability response. However, the finding can also be interpreted as a desire of these students to stop.

Most notably however, only a very small minority of students indicated they stopped being hurtful when told to stop by a parent or a school staff member. What is likely a developmental priority for these students is that they decided to stop on their own or because of the actions of

friends, not that they were doing so because an adult told them to stop.

In interventions with students who have been hurtful, shifting from the perspective of “you must stop because I (the adult) am telling you to stop” to a process that is focused on influencing the hurtful student to “decide” on his or her own (with adult assistance) to stop would appear to hold promise.

In other words, if the adult shifts from presenting the demand to stop as “the authority” to presenting him or herself as a “mentor” who is assisting the student in making a proper choice, this hold promise to increase the effectiveness of the staff intervention.

The Challenges of More Vulnerable Students

Schools must be attentive to the concerns of those students who are More Vulnerable. Note that 9% of the students surveyed are considered to be More Vulnerable. These students are upset and they are not able to get the hurtful situations to stop. They are also much more frequently treated badly.

The challenges faced by More Vulnerable Students are quite evident in an analysis of what happens after they talk with friends or a parent. Unfortunately, after doing so, they report that things get better only 20-21% of the time. Additionally, other students do not step in to help these students as frequently as those who are Less Vulnerable.

Note also that many of these students also report engaging in hurtful behavior. Whether this is behavior they instigated, which resulted in them being treated badly or being hurtful, in response to someone being hurtful to them is not clear. However, this reflects insight into the overall challenges faced by these students.

Overall, the insight into the challenges faced by these students only reaffirms the need for schools to ensure that interventions with these students are more effective in making things better.

It is strongly recommended that schools implement an approach grounded in MTSS that considers these students as requiring a Tier II or III level intervention. The focus of this intervention would not be on the degree to which they are compliant with staff directions, rather a focus that seeks to assist these students in overcoming the harmful impact of these hurtful situations and shifting to a more positive future.

Recommendations

The following specific strategies are recommended:

- Reconsider current staff intervention approaches and provide more effective professional development for staff for when they witness hurtful situations. Special attention must be paid to identifying those students who are More Vulnerable and ensuring appropriate

follow-up to ensure the hurtful situations are resolved.

- Improve the effectiveness of interventions when students reach out to request assistance from staff. Simply repeatedly telling students to “tell an adult” and setting up new reporting systems are not approaches that will lead to greater numbers of students reporting--if when they do so there is not a significant likelihood that things will get better. This will require a shift from intervention responses that are disciplinary in nature to approaches that seek to resolve and restore relationships that have gone amiss and address the social skills challenges of all involved students.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in more serious situations. A district-wide post-incident evaluation system is strongly recommended. This system should support a determination of which situations require continued staff involvement, as well as the ability to assess the effectiveness of various intervention approaches in each school.
- Address the concerns of those students who are more frequently hurtful and those who are More Vulnerable using an approach grounded in Multiple Tier System of Supports (MTSS). Generally, a Tier II or III MTSS approach is implemented to address student misbehavior. However, ongoing intervention strategies that provide support, including a routine, positive-focused check-in/check-out, can be developed to provide essential support to students who experience relationship challenges. For students on Individual Education Plans or 504 Plans, this can be integrated into the plans.
- Focus efforts on seeking to strengthen and better communicate the positive norms and values held by the majority of their students and empower all students with more effective skills to resolve hurtful incidents as participants or witnesses.
- Implement research-based approaches to address both impulsive behavior and retaliation, as well as restorative approaches that seek to help students who have been hurtful to acknowledge their wrongdoing and remedy the harm.

97 Federal Partners for Bullying Prevention Staff Training on Bullying Prevention. StopBullying.Gov web site. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/educate/index.html>.

98 Dillon, *supra* at 118.

99 Bullying Prevention Training Module. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/training-center/>

100 Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681-1688; Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d-2000d-7; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. 29 U.S.C. § 794; The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. 42 U.S.C. §§ 12131-12134; and related state statutes.

101 Berkowitz, *supra*.

102 Rubin, A.J. & Barnard, A. (Nov. 15, 2015) France Strikes ISIS Targets in Syria in Retaliation for Attacks. New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/16/world/europe/paris-terror-attack.html>.

103 Yeager, D.S., Miu, A., Powers, J., & Dweck, C.S. (2013). Implicit theories of personality and attributions of hostile intent: A meta-analysis, an experiment, and a longitudinal intervention. *Child Development*, 84, 1651-1667; Yeager, D.S., Trzesniewski, K., & Dweck, C.S. (2013). An implicit theories of personality intervention reduces adolescent aggression in response to victimization and exclusion. *Child Development*, 84, 970-988.

104 Yeager, et. al. *supra*.

105 Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., and Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in youth organizations – A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 603. See also research noted at: <http://www.mindful.org/the-mindful-society/mindfulness-in-education-research-highlights>.

Staff Maltreatment of Students

Research Insight

The findings of this survey indicate that the issue of staff maltreatment of students is a significant concern.

In April, 2014, the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council held a 2-day workshop titled *Building Capacity to Reduce Bullying and Its Impact on Youth*.¹⁰⁶ The last session included a panel of students. These students were asked to identify issues that were not raised by the professionals during the workshop presentations and that were missing from the overall discussion.

A key issue raised by the students was “Teachers and Adults as Bullies.” Student comments were:

Teachers can be bullies too.

If teachers are giving the impression that this kind of behavior is okay, the kids are going to think this kind of behavior is okay.

*We cannot be having teachers and coaches being okay with bullying kids in addition to the students who are doing so.*¹⁰⁷

There is additional evidence that the issue of staff maltreatment of students is a neglected concern. The StopBullying.Gov web site is a key resource on issues related to bullying.¹⁰⁸ There is no insight presented on this site for how to address the concern of hurtful school staff members. Additionally, neither the National Crime Victimization Survey School Crimes Supplement nor the Center for Disease Control’s Youth Risk Behavior survey ask students about staff maltreatment.¹⁰⁹

State statutes either specifically focus on the hurtful acts of students or define bullying with a focus on the target and is silent regarding the perpetrator.¹¹⁰ However, these statutes are generally considered to call for policies against harmful student behavior. It does not appear that most bullying state departments or education or school districts have effective or well communicated policies or procedures to follow in these situations. Of note, there is a group on Facebook called No More Teacher Bullies that has close to 41,700 members.¹¹¹

While there is very little research, recent studies have documented that sexual minority students quite frequently hear disrespectful statements by school staff and report that school staff often ignores situations where students are disrespectful.¹¹² Students who are obese have also reported being treated in a hurtful way by school staff and coaches.¹¹³ Certainly, the differential rate at which minority students and those with disabilities are

disciplined points to challenges.¹¹⁴ Recently, anti-Islamic hurtful behavior by staff or students is a concern.¹¹⁵

In a study by Dr. Twemlow and colleagues, 116 teachers from seven elementary schools completed an anonymous survey about staff bullying.¹¹⁶ A definition provided by Dr Twemlow, that unfortunately focused solely on teachers and not all staff, was:

*Bullying teacher was defined as a teacher who uses his/her power to punish, manipulate, or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure.*¹¹⁷

Dr. Twemlow’s work identified two kinds of teachers who engage in bullying: ** Those seen as humiliating students, hurting student’s feelings and being spiteful and those seen as being frequently absent, failing to set limits and letting others handle problems.

Notably, 45% of the sample of teachers admitted to bullying a student. Teachers who reported that they observed other teachers bullying students were more likely to believe that bullying teachers were “burned out, untrained and envious of smart students” The teachers felt that bullying behaviors by teachers resulted from a lack of support from the administration in addition to a multitude of other causes such as a lack of training and classes that are too large. Teachers also said that bullying teachers lacked the ability to effectively manage their classrooms.

Delfabbro and colleagues investigated the prevalence and nature of victimization and bullying by students and teachers in 25 South Australian public and private schools.¹¹⁸ More than 1,200 students completed a survey that contained questions about teacher and student related bullying in addition to psychosocial adjustment and personality measures. More than 40% of students reported being bullied by a teacher. The students who had been bullied by teachers were more likely to rate themselves as having poor academic skills, had less intent to finish school, and were more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as under-age drinking, drug use, and gambling. Students who were socially isolated and less academically successful were noticeably more likely to be bullied by teachers.

McEvoy defined bullying by teachers as “a pattern of conduct, rooted in a power differential, that threatens, harms, humiliates, induces fear, or causes students substantial emotional distress.”¹¹⁹ According to McEnvoy, like student-on-student bullying, staff bullying is an abuse of power that tends to be chronic and involves degrading a student in front of others.

There are usually no negative consequences for teachers who engaged in bullying. Those who are targeted often have some manner of vulnerability because they are unable to stand up for themselves, others will not defend them, or they have some devalued personal attribute. Frequently, there are references to how this student differs from other students who are more capable or valued. As a result, the student may also become a target by peers.

Teachers who bully feel their abusive conduct is justified and will claim provocation by their targets. They often will disguise their behavior as “motivation” or as an appropriate part of the instruction. They also disguise abuse as an appropriate disciplinary response to unacceptable behavior by the target. The target, however, is subjected to deliberate humiliation that can never serve a legitimate educational purpose.

Students who are bullied by teachers typically experience confusion, anger, fear, self-doubt, and profound concerns about their academic and social competencies. Not knowing why he or she has been targeted, or what one must do to end the bullying, may well be among the most personally distressing aspects of being singled out and treated unfairly. Over time, especially if no one in authority intervenes, the target may come to blame him or her self for the abuse and thus feel a pervasive sense of helplessness and worthlessness. ...

Bullying by teachers produces a hostile climate that is indefensible on academic grounds; it undermines learning and the ability of students to fulfill academic requirements.¹²⁰

McEnvoy conducted structured interviews with both school staff and students among his findings:

- In many schools at least one or more teachers can be identified as abusive toward students. Students and colleagues know who these teachers are and express frustration at feeling powerless to stop the hurtful behavior.
- Those who bully students are not generally new teachers. The fact that these teachers have greater longevity creates barriers in addressing the situation. There tends to be a long history of inaction.
- There are seldom negative sanctions applied to teachers who bully students. The teachers often justify how they treat students. Further, the absence of school policies that specifically address the problem, and the absence of an effective institutional response, mean that there is not likely to be effective accountability. Schools are not perceived as providing meaningful and predictable redress for such complaints.
- Even if there is a complaint process in place, there is a lack of faith in the integrity of the process. It is often difficult to provide “proof” of the misbehavior. There

is great fear of retribution. The result seems to be a profound sense of injustice and a weakening of bonds to the school.¹²¹

An aspect of this situation that must be raised to the attention of educators is their requirements under mandatory reporting statutes. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum:

Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.¹²²

Emotional abuse is defined as:

A sustained, repetitive pattern of behavior that demonstrably impairs a child’s emotional development or sense of self-worth. This can include constant criticism, threats, rejection or confinement, as well as withholding love, support or guidance.¹²³

All states require teachers and school personnel to report suspected child abuse. Usually the standard is a reasonable suspicion, or a reasonable cause to believe is enough to require a teacher to report according to the law. Failure to report can result in a criminal or civil liability.¹²⁴

Staff Maltreatment of Students and its Association with Student Hurtful Behavior and Effectiveness of Staff Interventions

Hurtful Behavior

As was explained earlier, students were asked about frequency of “hurtful” incidents. The definition provided was: “Hurtful incidents could be called bullying, harassment, disrespect or ‘put-downs,’ conflict or ‘drama,’ fighting, and the like.”

This was an intentionally broad definition and as predicted, the reported rates of hurtful behavior were higher than those reported in other surveys that ask about “bullying.”

In addition to questions about witnessing students be hurtful to each other, being hurtful, someone being hurtful to them, students were asked how frequently they witnessed a school staff member be hurtful to a student.

The intent of this survey was not to focus specifically on the issue of hurtful staff behavior. Therefore, only one question was asked related to this issue. An analysis of the responses on other questions based on whether or not students had witnessed staff being hurtful to students revealed disturbing insight. Because only one question on this issue was asked, the following data should be perceived as preliminary and indicative of the need for further research.

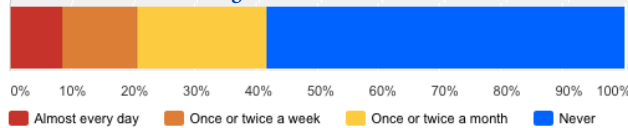
Witnessing Staff Be Hurtful to a Student

The overall findings on these five questions were as follows:

Question 33: In the last month, how frequently have you witnessed a school staff member be hurtful to a student?

- 9% Almost every day.
- 12% Once or twice a week.
- 21% Once or twice a month.
- 58% Never.

Chart 1. In the last month, how frequently have you witnessed a school staff member being hurtful to a student?



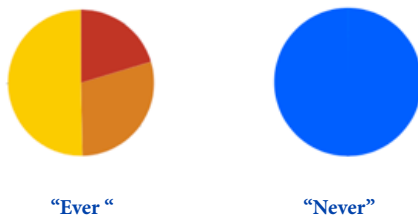
Findings Comparing Staff Maltreatment of Students & Student Hurtful Behavior

The results on questions about student on student hurtful behavior were then analyzed based on the responses to the question about witnessing staff being hurtful to students. The Chi-square test of independence was used to determine whether witnessing staff maltreatment of students influenced student responses to these questions.

Students were classified as “Ever” or “Never” having witnessed staff being hurtful to a student. For those who reported they had “Ever” seen a staff member be hurtful this included those who witnessed such hurtful behavior once or twice a month, once or twice a week, or almost daily.

The results of all four chi-square analyses were significant. That is, “Evers” and “Nevers” responded significantly differently to these questions. “Evers” were significantly more likely to report witnessing or being engaged in the above four acts of hurtful behavior.

Chart 5: Response to question of witnessing staff be hurtful. “Ever” includes “Once or twice a month,” “Once or twice a week, or “Almost daily.”



In the following Charts 7 through 10, the pie charts set forth in Chart 6 designate the data from students who had reported they “Ever” or “Never” saw staff maltreating a student.

Expanded Analysis: Student report of how frequently they had witnessed a student being hurtful to another student at school analyzed based on whether student had “Ever” or “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student.

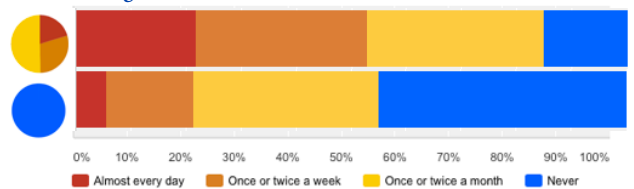
Response: In situations where students had “Ever” witnessed staff members be hurtful to a student:

- 22% Almost every day.
- 31% Once or twice a week.
- 32% Once or twice a month.
- 15% Never.

Response: In situations where students had “Never” witnessed staff members be hurtful to a student:

- 6% Almost every day.
- 16% Once or twice a week.
- 34% Once or twice a month.
- 45% Never.

Chart 6. In the last month, how frequently have you witnessed a student being hurtful to another student at school?



Note that 85% of students who “Ever” witnessed a staff member be hurtful to a student witnessed a student being hurtful to a student at school, whereas, only 56% of students who “Never” witnessed a staff member be hurtful to a student had witnessed a student being hurtful to another student at school. Chi-square (3) = 223.94, $p < .001$.

Expanded Analysis: Student report of how frequently they had been hurtful to a student analyzed based on whether student had “Ever” or “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student.

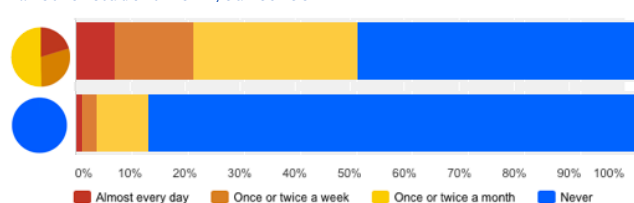
Response: In situations where students had “Ever” witnessed staff members be hurtful to a student:

- 7% Almost every day.
- 14% Once or twice a week.
- 29% Once or twice a month.
- 50% Never.

Response: In situations where students had “Never” witnessed staff members be hurtful to a student:

- 1% Almost every day.
- 3% Once or twice a week.
- 9% Once or twice a month.
- 87% Never.

Chart 7. In the last month, how frequently have you been hurtful to another student from your school



Note that 50% of students who “Ever” witnessed a staff member be hurtful to a student engaged in hurtful behavior directed at another student, whereas, only 13% of students who “Never” witnessed a staff member be hurtful to a student engaged in hurtful behavior directed at another student. Chi-square (3) = 241.14, $p < .001$.

Expanded Analysis: Student report of how frequently a student had been hurtful to them analyzed based on whether student had “Ever” or “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student.

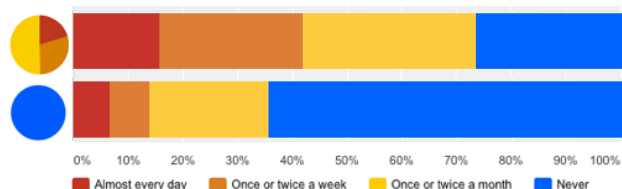
Response: In situations where students had “Ever” witnessed staff members be hurtful to a student:

- 16% Almost every day.
- 26% Once or twice a week.
- 31% Once or twice a month.
- 27% Never.

Response: In situations where students had “Never” witnessed staff members be hurtful to a student:

- 7% Almost every day.
- 7% Once or twice a week.
- 22% Once or twice a month.
- 64% Never.

Chart 8. In the last month, how frequently has any student from your school been hurtful to you?



Note that 73% of students who “Ever” witnessed a staff member be hurtful to a student reported that someone had been hurtful to them, whereas, only 36% of students who “Never” witnessed a staff member be hurtful to a student reported that someone had been hurtful to them. Chi-square (3) = 259.75, $p < .001$.

Findings Comparing Staff Maltreatment of Students, Responses to Hurtful Incidents & Outcomes

Students who reported they were involved in hurtful incidents, either as the one who was hurtful or the one treated in a hurtful way, were then asked how staff responded, if present. As set forth in the prior section, for this question, students were asked to identify staff responses from a list that was provided to them and were also asked what happened after the school staff member responded--whether “things got better,” “things stayed the same,” or “things got worse.”

Expanded Analysis: Staff responses to hurtful situations reported by students who reported that they had been hurtful, and the outcomes thereof, based on whether they had “Ever” or “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student.

Analysis: The top three reported responses of staff who had “Ever” been hurtful in these situations were:

- 35% Ignored the situation.
- 32% Told me to stop.
- 26% Just watched.

Analysis: The top three reported responses of staff who had “Never” been hurtful in these situations were:

- 32% Stepped in to help.
- 32% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.
- 30% Ignored the situation.

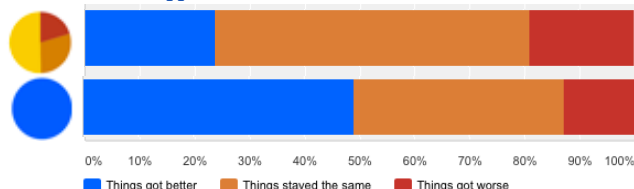
Analysis: After staff responded, students who had been hurtful and had “Ever” witnessed staff be hurtful reported the following outcome:

- 24% Things got better.
- 57% Things stayed the same.
- 19% Things got worse.

Analysis: After staff responded, students who had been hurtful and had “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful reported the following outcome:

- 49% Things got better.
- 38% Things stayed the same.
- 13% Things got worse.

Chart 9. What happened after the school staff member did this?



Note that when students had “Ever” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student, things got better after a response by staff only 24% of the time. However, when students had “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student, things got better after a response by staff 49% of the time. Chi-square (2) = 14.01, $p < .001$.

Expanded Analysis: Staff responses to hurtful situations reported by students who reported someone had been hurtful to them, and the outcomes thereof, based on whether they had “Ever” or “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student.

Analysis: The top three reported responses of staff who had “Ever” been hurtful in these situations were:

- 37% Ignored the situation.
- 30% Told the person being hurtful to stop.
- 29% Just watched.

Analysis: The top three reported responses of staff who had “Never” been hurtful in these situations were:

- 55% Stepped in to help.
- 48% Told the person being hurtful to stop.
- 34% Talked with both of us together to resolve the situation.

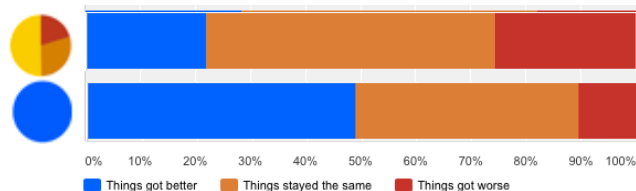
Analysis: After staff responded, students to whom someone had been hurtful and had “Ever” witnessed staff be hurtful reported the following outcome:

- 22% Things got better.
- 53% Things stayed the same.
- 26% Things got worse.

Analysis: After staff responded, students to whom someone had been hurtful and had “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful reported the following outcome:

- 49% Things got better.
- 41% Things stayed the same.
- 10% Things got worse.

Chart 10. What happened after the school staff member did this?



Note that when students had “Ever” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student, things got better after a response by staff only 22% of the time. However, when students had “Never” witnessed staff be hurtful to a student, things got better after a response by staff 49% of the time. Chi-square (2) = 37.84, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The results of this survey demonstrate that the maltreatment of students by school staff appears to have a significant impact on the frequency of student-on-student hurtful behavior. Further, where such maltreatment occurs, school staff intervention appears to be significantly less effective.

This data demonstrates a correlation, and does not establish causation. Other factors could be implicated in the issue of causation, specifically a school climate that support hurtful behavior by both staff and students. It is possible that community norms may also be implicated. However, given this evidence, the most critical question is who bears the primary responsibility for ensuring a positive school climate and fostering positive relations at school?

A question may arise: When students reported they had witnessed staff being hurtful, was this actually “hurtful” staff behavior or just “firm discipline?”

There are reasons to believe that what students reported was hurtful behavior. Consider the findings:

- Those students who reported witnessing staff be hurtful, also reported a higher level of hurtful student behavior. Thus, if these hurtful staff acts are considered to be “discipline,” this disciplinary approach is quite clearly not having a positive effect.

- Those students who reported staff were “Ever” hurtful, also reported that among the top responses to witnessed hurtful student incidents were to ignore the situation or just watch. These staff responses are not considered to be appropriate “disciplinary” responses. Nor did the staff responses lead to a positive outcome.
- Those students who reported staff were “Never” hurtful, also reported that the top common responses to hurtful student incidents were actions that would be deemed appropriate disciplinary responses. There was also a much higher level of reported effectiveness in responding to the incidents.

The results of this survey should serve as a wake-up call of the need to better assess the role of school staff and other adults present in schools in perpetuating bullying and other hurtful behavior.

In his excellent article, McEnvoy provided the following guidance on steps schools could take to address these concerns:

- *Every school should have a clear statement in its policy and its code of professional ethics that specifies bullying behaviors as inappropriate, unprofessional, and worthy of sanction. Such a statement could parallel the institution’s sexual harassment policy, with comparable adjudication procedures and due process considerations.*
- *Each school should develop guidelines for the tracking of complaints against teachers who are alleged to bully students. Evidence may include the number of formal grievances filed and other letters of complaint over time. It may also include a pattern of informal complaints registered with department chairs or other teachers, the principal, or district officials. Finally, evidence should include student evaluations of teachers, particularly where patterns of questionable conduct are identified time and time again. Course evaluation forms should allow students the opportunity to identify bullying behaviors by teachers.*
- *Schools should provide opportunities for students whose allegations are substantiated to withdraw from a class without penalty, or to complete the class under the direction of another qualified teacher. No reference to the withdrawal should be included on the transcripts. (The author personally disagrees with this guidance because this very likely will be translated by other students as evidence that the student, not the staff member, was in the wrong.)*
- *Orientation of new students and of new teachers should include information about bullying as a violation of policy and hence an “actionable” offense.*
- *A consideration of bullying should be part of retention and promotion processes.*

- *Periodic peer review of teaching practices should be done for all faculty, including those who are of senior rank.*
- *In making the bullying of students a violation of policy, bystanders who are not the targets, including other teachers and students, should be allowed to file a complaint. Because targets often are reluctant to take such action, the offensive behavior should be called into question by any person who is in a position to know. Similar to sexual harassment or racist incidents, the school has an obligation to act even if the victim is reluctant to become involved in a grievance process.*
- *Protection of the complainant and witnesses against retribution by the alleged bully should be addressed. Bullies often will use institutional or other legal processes to claim victim status and to punish those who challenge their conduct.*
- *Sanctions for bullying should not be limited to "counseling." A panoply of sanctions should be available, including dismissal.¹²⁵*

This author recommends a similar approach, but with some different nuances that specifically focus on the use of restorative practices.

- Initiate an analysis of this concern at the level of a state departments of education. This analysis should include conducting anonymous statewide surveys of students and staff. Parents should be provided with the opportunity to complete an online survey. The surveys should include open-ended questions that allow for the solicitation of "stories" that are likely to both increase understanding and the importance of attention to the concern. The staff survey should also ask questions about workplace bullying, which may be implicated.
- A statewide leadership team that includes school leaders, union representation, administrator representation, teachers, support staff, parents and students should be charged with the task of evaluating the state-level data and creating recommendations for positive action.
- Policies and procedures must be implemented at the district level. Legislation requiring this is advisable. There should be a way for parents, students, and/or staff witnesses to report concerns at two levels above the school. The first level should be the district. The second level should be at the state department of education.
- Specific guidance must also be provided to educators on their obligations under mandatory reporting statutes that require a report be filed if they witness a staff member maltreating a student, including emotional abuse. In any situation where a student has been maltreated by a school staff member any staff members who knew of this situation and failed to report should also be held accountable.
- It should not be considered a violation of school policy for a student to digitally record, either audio or video, an incident of staff maltreatment of a student as long as the digital recording is provided to a proper authority.
- Unless the situation involves egregious staff behavior that clearly will call for the removal of the staff member, interventions in these situations should be conducted in accord with the restorative practice referred to as a full conference. This will provide the opportunity for the targeted student and his or her parents to fully explain what has happened and the harmful impact thereof. The student and his or her parent/guardian should be provided with the assistance of a staff member whose sole responsibility is to support them throughout this process. The results of this restorative conference should be an educational intervention with the staff member that will fully address the source of the concerns that have led this staff member to engage in such hurtful behavior. Ongoing monitoring of any reported situation will be necessary.
- The new Every Student Succeeds Act encourages the use of additional assessments to ensure the effectiveness of schools. This includes student surveys. Once the preliminary assessment and development of recommended strategies has occurred at a state level, ongoing assessment of this concern should be conducted at the school level.

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