DIFFERENCES OF PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING BETWEEN STUDENTS IN SMALL SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS IN LARGE SCHOOLS

By

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Submitted to

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Submitted in Fulfillment of Graduation Requirements for

61-683 Research Paper

Spring 2011

July 18, 2012
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if school size affects bullying in the schools. For this study 41 recent graduates completed a brief survey giving their viewpoints in several areas of bullying in their high school. Twenty graduates were from large high schools which had over 1000 students. Twenty-one graduates were from smaller high schools with less than 500 students. The data was analyzed using Chi-Square Analysis with ASP Software. The results of the study indicated that the larger schools had more bullying issues than smaller schools. Understanding how school size affects bullying may help districts make decisions regarding school size.
Introduction

Background, Issues and Concerns

Bullying has a major effect on the lives of the victims and the perpetrators of bullying. Bullying also affects those who witness acts of bullying. Bullying affects a victim’s self-esteem, grades, and extra-curricular participation. Those who bully have problems later in life in social skills, personal relationships, and the ability to hold a job. This study analyzes the differences between bullying in smaller schools (500 students and under) and larger schools (over 1000 students) to find which schools have a larger bullying issue.

Practice Under Investigation

The practice under investigation is bullying and if the size of the school has an influence on the frequency of bullying.

School Policy to be Informed by Study

The practice under investigation is districts that let schools become very large or very small. How the school size affects the bullying statistics will be investigated.

Conceptual Underpinnings

Many students engage in or witness bullying at school. This can cause immediate and long term problems in the lives of those involved and witnessing the bullying incidents. At times it is easier to give the bully a detention or suspension rather than educate the student in bullying prevention methods. These practices have proven ineffective and may even increase the rate of bullying. Bullying prevention training can help a school eradicate or lessen the numbers of bullying incidents.
Statement of the Problem

If bullying is allowed to continue in our schools, victims and the bullies will suffer long
term damage. Students’ grades will suffer, drop-out rates will rise, and graduates may have
problems holding a job. It could also affect the victim’s and bully’s ability to focus on their
education and cause a gap in the students’ education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if smaller schools or larger schools have more
bullying issues or more severe bullying issues.

Research questions

RQ 1. What is the overall opinion of bullying in large and small schools?

RQ 2. Is there a significant difference in the perceptions of bullying between students of
large and small schools?

Null hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the perceptions of bullying between students in large
and small schools.

Anticipated benefits of the study

The results of the study will inform educators about the tendencies of bullying.

Definition of terms

Large school – 1000 students and over (Rizzolo, 2002)

Small school – 500 students and under (Rizzolo, 2002)

Recent graduate – a student who graduated from high school in 2011 or 2012.
Bullying – “A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself.” (Munson, 2012, p. 8A)

Victim – The person being bullied.

Summary

Students were contacted through Facebook and by an anonymous paper survey with a self-addressed stamped envelope for return of the survey. The survey was sent to 60 recent graduates. Students from small schools (500 students and under) and large schools (1000 students and over) were asked to complete the survey. Differences in the bullying issues between small schools and large schools were investigated.
Review of Literature

The review of literature looked at the prevalence of bullying in the public schools system, the long-term effects of bullying for the bully and victim, and the efficacy of anti-bullying programs currently used in the schools. A description of bullying and current state laws regarding bullying will also be provided.

Major concepts were reviewed, and these included looking at current bullying issues schools are dealing with today. Several studies were done that looked at the long term factors of bullying and early risk factors for bullies. These studies also looked at long term effects of bullying on the victims.

The website stopbullying.org defines bullying as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.” Olweus adds that a person is bullied “when . . . he or she has trouble defending himself or herself.” (Munson, 2012, p.8A)

In 2011 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System looked at our nation’s students and found that 20% of students in grades 9-12 were bullied. (“Stopbullying.gov,” 2012) National studies of high school students show that at least one-fifth are bullied. (Munson, 2012) Jansen states that “Bullying is a serious problem in schools all over the world. Studies show that 20% to 54% of school children are repeatedly involved in bullying as perpetrators and/or as victims.” (Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst & Reijneveld, 2011, p.1)

The Superintendent of Sioux City Community Schools Paul Gausman is concerned about the prevalence of bullying. His school district is profiled in the movie Bully by director Lee Hirsch. Incidents of bullying in the Sioux City Community Schools were videotaped by Hirsch.
Gausman states, “A child that does not feel safe does not learn.” (Munson, 2012, p. 8A) Students across our country are not learning because they do not feel safe.

The movie *Bully*, directed by Lee Hirsch, shows the stark reality of school life for the victims of bullies. Alex Libby is a seventh grader in the Sioux City Community Schools. He has Asperger’s syndrome which is a form of autism. (Beeman, 2012) He was tortured by other students on a daily basis. Alex, whose . . . “daily routine includes being teased, humiliated and assaulted (especially on the school bus), cannot bear to tell his parents what is going on. He even sticks up for his tormenters, who he says are ‘just messing around’ when they stab him with pencils and call him vile names.” (Scott, 2012, p. 1) Alex’s parents have moved their family to Oklahoma because they were not happy with the way the Sioux City administration dealt with the bullying situation. (Munson, 2012)

The movie tells the story of other teens who are bullied. Kaleb Gass, a seventh grader, states, “A knife up against my throat is not a joking matter.” (Munson, 2012, p. 1A) Chase Dunn, a senior, was once a bully. When other students found out that he was gay, they began to bully him. As a result of the bullying, Chase transferred to another school. (Munson, 2012) The tragic death of Kenneth Weishuhn, Jr., a gay freshman in Paullina, Iowa, occurred at the same time as the movie’s release. Weishuhn . . . “hanged himself April 14 after he had endured a month of relentless bullying online and in school hallways.” (Munson, 2012, p. 8A)

Laws have been created to prevent bullying. The Iowa Safe Schools Law was enacted in 2007 to make sure that all districts had policies in place to prevent bullying and harassment. (Munson, 2012) According to the Iowa code 280.28 Harassment and bullying prohibited – policy – immunity, “The general assembly finds that a safe and civil school environment is necessary for students to learn and achieve at high academic levels. Harassing and bullying behavior can
Perceptions of Bullying

seriously disrupt the ability of school employees to maintain a safe and civil environment, and
the ability of students to learn and succeed. Therefore, it is the policy of the state of Iowa that
school employees, volunteers, and students in Iowa schools shall not engage in harassing or
bullying behavior.” (State of Iowa p.1) At least eighteen characteristics or traits are protected by
this law. The characteristics or traits are not limited by this list which is as follows: age, color,
creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity,
physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference,
political belief, socioeconomic status, or familial status. (State of Iowa)

There are problems with the law. The law does not mention how the law should be
enforced or what punishment bullies should get. Mike Manthorne, a sergeant and head of the
youth services division of the Sioux City Police, would like to see additions to the law that would
include enforcement and punishment issues. He stated, “We have to make a bullying case fit into
an assault case now, or fit into a harassment case.” (Munson, 2012, p.8A)

Studies show that bullying causes problems later in life for the bullies and victims. The
differences in problems for the bullies and victims are vast. In 2011 Olweus studied the
convictions of young men who were bullies in high school. The study looked at these young men
for 8 years when the men were between the ages of 16-24. The study found that “the number of
convictions for the ‘average bully’ was thus more than four times higher than that for the
‘average non-bully’.” (Olweus, 2011, p.154) When the study isolated for violent crimes, “the
relation between bullying status and outcome was even stronger than for the Total crime
variable.” (Olweus, 2011, p.154)

Bullying has long term consequences for the victim as well. This study and other studies
have shown “that bullies and victims are ‘over-users’ of society’s health, support and control
systems (but for very different reasons) . . .” (Olweus, 2011, p.155) The victim’s reasons for seeking help include depression, loneliness, anxiety, low self-esteem, feelings of sickness, and suicidal thoughts. (Sjostrom, 2010) Olweus finds that “. . . it is obvious that society can save large amounts of money by effective prevention of such problems in school.” (Olweus, 2011, p.155)
Research Methods

The problem under investigation is to examine the difference between recent graduates’ perceptions of bullying in large schools and small schools to determine where bullying is a greater issue.

Research Design

A survey was given to two groups of students. Various questions were asked about bullying in their high school. A chi-square analysis was done to determine significant difference at the .25 Alpha level to challenge the null hypothesis. This study will compare two groups and determine the overall opinion of bullying and whether there is a difference in perceptions of bullying in small schools versus large schools.

There are two variables used in this study. The independent variable is the school size. The large schools have over 1000 students. The smaller schools have under 500 students. The dependent variable is the answer to each question. The two options were yes and no.

RQ 1. What is the overall opinion of bullying in large and small schools?

RQ 2. Is there a significant difference in the perceptions of bullying between students of large and small schools?

Null hypothesis. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of bullying between students in large and small schools.

Study Group Description

The study involves 41 high school graduates. These students were at least 18 years of age, graduated in the 2011 or 2012 school year, and attended Midwest high schools which had over 1000 students or fewer than 500.
Data Collection and Instrumentation

Recent graduates were contacted through Facebook and asked to participate in the survey. Recent graduates were sent the survey in the manner each requested of the following: a paper copy hand delivered, a paper copy delivered through the U.S. Postal mail, an electronic version on Survey Monkey, or an electronic version on Facebook. Only the Survey Monkey option was not requested. Those who filled out the survey were given the option to return the survey to me through Facebook, email, U.S. Postal mail, or hand delivered. All return options were utilized. Survey results were then tallied on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Statistical Analysis Methods

Using ASP software, frequency plots were performed to determine the overall opinion of bullying in large and small schools. In addition chi-square analyses were performed to determine if there was a significant difference in the perceptions of bullying in large and small schools. The results showed the percentages of how each group of recent graduates answered each survey question.

This study utilizes frequency plots and chi-square crosstab analysis. The analyses were done based on results from a survey given to recent high school graduates. The analysis described, compared, and analyzed the perceptions of bullying between the two groups of recent graduates – those from large schools and those from small schools.
Findings

A survey was given to two groups of students. Various questions were asked about bullying in their high school. A chi-square analysis was done to determine significant difference at the .25 Alpha level to challenge the null hypothesis. This study will compare two groups and determine the overall opinion of bullying and whether there is a difference in perceptions of bullying in small schools versus large schools.

ASP Software was used to conduct the analysis of the survey results. When looking at the first research question, “What is the overall opinion of bullying in large and small schools?” the frequency plot shows that the bullying is occurring in the majority of schools.

Survey Statement #1 Bullying happened at my school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable: Did bullying happen in school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRQ. CUM. % CUM. FREQUENCY PLOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x &lt; 1 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x = 1 36 36 87.8 87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x = 2 5 41 12.2 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x &gt; 2 0 41 0 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL 41 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key #1= yes  #2= no

The frequency plot shows that the overall opinion is that bullying does happen in the majority of schools. When asked whether bullying happened at their school, 87.8% said yes, and 12.2% said no. The majority of participants did see bullying happen at their school. The effect is believed to be negative. Some recent graduates stated that the bullying occurred verbally,
mentally, emotionally, physically, and electronically. When asked, “In what way have you seen bullying happen?” some of the specific forms mentioned are name calling, pushing, using put-downs and racial slurs, fighting, mocking a person’s looks, hitting with paddles, hazing, teasing, picking on another continually, and being rude.

*Survey Statement #2* I have been a victim of bullying at school or at a school event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE: I have been a victim of bullying.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRQ. CUM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x &lt; 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x &gt; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key #1= yes    #2= no

The second question asked if the recent graduate had been a victim of bullying at school or at a school event. Those saying yes accounted for 24.4%, and those who said no accounted for 75.6%. This means that approximately 63% of the participants have observed bullying while not having it happen to them. This shows that bullying is prevalent in both large and small schools though more so in the large schools. The 24.4% who responded yes stated specific bullying techniques used on them. Answers included the following: name calling, mental abuse, emotional abuse, put-downs, fighting, mental and physical abuse for belonging to a certain group
Perceptions of Bullying

(racial group or participatory group like ROTC), cyber bullying through texting and Facebook, and negative and rude comments.

*Survey Statement #3 I have been a bully.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE: I have been a bully.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRQ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key #1= yes #2= no

A fewer number of recent graduates answered yes when asked if he or she had been a bully in high school. Thirty-five percent answered yes while 65% answered no. One recent graduate gave this answer when asked if he or she had been a bully, and to explain how if the answer was yes. “I think I would be lying if I said no. I have never consciously per say, ‘bullied’ someone. But I have without a doubt been rude and inconsiderate of others and left them with hurt feelings. I don’t think anyone can say that they haven’t. It is something that I strive not to do.” Another graduate was a student in the ROTC program and felt the he or she had taken his or her leadership too far. Other examples of bullying include name calling, making rude remarks, making fun of others, saying mean things to teammates during sports, teasing, and making mean and judgmental comments.
The second research question “Is there a significant difference in the perceptions of bullying between students of large and small schools?” was analyzed through a chi-square test. There is a significant difference between bullying in large and small schools if the p-value was less than alpha-level .25. A significant difference was noted, and the null hypothesis was rejected. There is no significant difference in the perceptions between students in large and small schools.

*Survey Statement #1 Bullying happened at my school.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
<th>Summary of Chi Square Analysis by Column</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>100% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Bullying</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked if the graduates encountered bullying in their school, 100% in the large school said yes, and 76.2% in the small school said yes, leaving 23.8% saying that they had never experienced bullying. This led to a chi square value of 5.423 with a degree of freedom of 1. This gave us a p-value of .02. Using an alpha of 0.25, the null hypothesis, there is no significant difference in the perceptions of bullying between students in large and small schools, is rejected. One hundred percent of the students in large schools have experienced bullying. In the small schools, 76.2% of the students experienced bullying while 23.8% did not.
Survey Statement #2 I have been a victim of bullying at school or at a school event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Chi Sq</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>35% (7)</td>
<td>14% (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Victim</td>
<td>65% (13)</td>
<td>86% (18)</td>
<td>2.383</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sign = or < 0.25

The next question asked whether recent graduates had been a victim of bullying in high school or not. In the large schools, only 35% of students admitted to being a victim of bullying and only 14% of graduates in the small school admitted the same. This led to a chi square value of 2.383 with a degree of freedom of 1. This gave us a p-value of .123. Using an alpha of 0.25, the null hypothesis, there is no significant difference in the perceptions of bullying between students in large and small schools, is rejected. In large schools 35% of the students were victims of bullying whereas in small schools, only 14% of the students were victims of bullying.
Survey Statement #3 I have been a bully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Chi Sq</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>45% (9)</td>
<td>25% (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Bully</td>
<td>55% (11)</td>
<td>75% (15)</td>
<td>1.758</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sign = or < 0.25

The final question asked if students have been a bully in high school or not. Of the large school participants 45% said that they had been a bully while only 25% of the small school participants said they had been. This led to a chi square value of 1.758 with a degree of freedom of 1. This gave us a p-value of .185. Using an alpha of 0.25, the null hypothesis, there is no significant difference in the perceptions of bullying between students in large and small schools, is rejected. The number of students who had been bullied was almost double the number of bullies in small schools. Forty-five percent of students had been a bully in large schools while 25% of students were bullies in small schools.

Bullying occurs in both large and small schools. The prevalence is higher in the large schools. Bullies and victims are about twice as prevalent in large schools as in small schools. Based on this study, there is a significant difference in the perceptions of bullying in small and large schools.
At the end of the survey students were asked if they wanted to share anything about bullying. Many of them took the opportunity. Some of the responses follow.

“You are powerless. Most of the time the bully has teachers or other classmates on their side and is able to talk their way out of things. Even if a teacher knows about the bullying there is little they can do. Telling a teacher can also make the bullying worse.” Large School Graduate 1

“What a lot of people don’t understand is that bullies are generally bullied at home or used to be bullied at school. Putting others down is often the only way they feel better about themselves. If more families encouraged and supported them, bullying could be stopped. Unfortunately that may never happen so we need to educate children (while they are young) on self-esteem and compassion. Also, a large number of teenage suicide is due to bullying. The bullies need to be held accountable for their actions.” Large School Graduate 1

“When I was in 9th grade, a girl (who was my friend) had inappropriate pictures of herself spread out thru the whole school. It was sad.” Large School Graduate 2

“Bullying is around when there is an imbalance in attention at home – so the person turns to bullying.” Large School Graduate 3

“I was going to plan an anti-bullying assembly type deal once as a project for STOP the Violence, but never got around to it. One time we had a group come do different skits about bullying, but nobody took it seriously, not even me and I’d seen it a few times. Anyhow, bullying is bad.” Small School Graduate 1

“Bullying does not really happen at my school or I am just oblivious to it. We are a small enough school that everyone gets along with everyone. We do not have the factor of different groups picking on others or people not getting along. We learn about bullying in health class and
I think we had a presentation to the entire school about it. I feel that as the generations grow there might be more bullying issues in the future. I do not think that it will get better for schools that do have bully issues.” Small School Graduate 2

“Bullying not only affects the victim. It affects the victim’s family, the victim’s friends, and the victim’s schooling. If a student goes to school knowing that he will be bullied then eventually he won’t want to go to school. When he doesn’t go to school he starts to lose friends. When he loses his friends then his parents should start to notice that something is going wrong but the victim won’t say anything about it because he is too scared. The victim will hold in all of the hateful feelings that he had to deal with every single day. Or worse . . . those feelings will get the best of him and something bad will happen. The victim goes to school with a loaded gun and loses control (we all know what happens after that) or even worse than that. Instead of the victim taking someone else’s life, he takes his own. And then the bullying never gets solved or remedied. I am not saying that the better option would be for the victim to go to the school and start shooting anyone and everyone. I am also not saying that the victim taking his own life would be a good idea. I say that when a student gets bullied and the teacher can sense that something is wrong with that particular student then they should do something about it. Not just sit aside and watch.” Small School Graduate 3

“I believe the kids these days should stick up for themselves and hit somebody. And then NOT get in trouble for defending/sticking up for themselves. That’s a major problem. Kids can’t stick up for themselves because they are instantly in trouble if they do. That’s the problem with the system.” Small School Graduate 4

“One girl actually moved away because people didn’t stop being rude to her.” Small School Graduate 5
Conclusions and Recommendations

For the most part, bullying seemed to more prevalent in the large schools. The number of victims in the large schools was more than double of the number of victims in the small school. The number of bullies was almost doubled in the large school as compared to the small school. By providing assistance to victims and education for students, the number of bullying incidents could decrease.

Bullying occurs in both large and small schools. The prevalence is higher in the large schools. Bullies and victims are about twice as prevalent in large schools as in small schools. Based on this study, there is a significant difference in the perceptions of bullying in small and large schools. Consideration should be given to keeping schools smaller so that bullying can be recognized and dealt with efficiently.

The biggest concern is that, according to this study, bullying is worse in the large schools. In terms of bullying, the policy of letting schools grow larger than 1000 students would need further research. Bullying does happen in the schools. Administrators and teachers need to be vigilant in stopping and preventing bullying in their schools. They also need to be trained in how to deal with bullying so that their interventions do not make matters worse.

Studies should look at the different types of bullying in large schools versus those in the small schools. Another research topic is to compare and contrast students’ opinion of bullying with the opinions of the teachers in the school building. This comparison would show if teachers had realistic opinions of bullying in the school. It would also help to show if victims were reporting bullying or not.
An additional topic that would benefit this topic is to compare the bullying in medium size schools with those of small schools to see where there is less bullying. Finally, bullying prevention programs and the effectiveness of these programs should be analyzed and discussed.

Students were contacted through Facebook and by an anonymous paper survey with a self-addressed stamped envelope for return of the survey. The survey was sent to 60 recent graduates. Students from small schools (500 students and under) and large schools (1000 students and over) were asked to complete the survey. Differences in the bullying issues between small schools and large schools were investigated.

This study utilizes frequency plots and chi-square crosstab analysis. The analyses were done based on results from a survey given to recent high school graduates. The analysis described, compared, and analyzed the perceptions of bullying between the two groups of recent graduates – those from large schools and those from small schools. This study shows that bullying occurs in both large and small schools. The prevalence is higher in the large schools. Bullies and victims are about twice as prevalent in large schools as in small schools. Based on this study, there is a significant difference in the perceptions of bullying in small and large schools.
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bullying/definition/index.html
APPENDICES

Bullying Survey

Please circle an answer or fill in the short answer. Answer these questions about the high school that you recently graduated from. You can be a graduate of 2011 or 2012. Participation is voluntary. You may stop participation at any time. You do not need to answer all the questions. The information that you contribute will be completely anonymous and confidential. I will not be able to tell who filled out each survey. Please do not write your name. By filling this out, you are acknowledging that you are at least 18 years old. Thank you!

1. Please X one: Is your high school . . 
   _____ Large (1000 students and over)  
   _____ Medium (501-999 students)  
   _____ Smaller (500 students and under)  

2. Bullying happened at my school. Yes No 
   If yes, what way have you seen bullying happen? 

3. I have been a victim of bullying at school or at a school event. Yes No 
   If yes, in what way have you been bullied? 

4. I have been a bully. Yes No  
   If yes, please explain how? 

5. What is a bully?
6. I feel safe at school. Yes No

If no, why not?

7. I have been the victim of cyberbullying (mean behavior on Facebook, texting, email, etc.) ("Excellence & Ethics" 8) Yes No

If yes, how many times a month?

8. My school disciplines bullies effectively so the bullying stops. Yes No

9. If a student reports bullying or any kind of hurtful behavior, a teacher or the school does something right away to try to stop it. ("Excellence & Ethics" 8) Yes No

10. My school has an anti-bullying program. Yes No

If yes, is the program effective? Why or why not?

11. The school teaches students specific things they can do when they see someone bullying others. ("Excellence & Ethics" 8) Yes No

12. Anything else that you want to say about bullying?