Bullying in U.S. Schools: Report Purpose

This report updates the 2012 Status Report (Limber, Olweus, and Luxenberg 2013) and reflects the status of bullying around the United States during the 2012–2013 school year (August 1, 2012, through June 30, 2013). The researchers and organizations who created the previous report updated this report, including Harlan Luxenberg, M.A., at Professional Data Analysts, Inc.; Susan P. Limber, Ph.D., at Clemson University; Dan Olweus, Ph.D., at Uni Health, University of Bergen, Norway; and the Hazelden Foundation. Using data collected from the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ), a representative sample was created based on more than 200,000 questionnaires administered to students at schools that intended to but had not yet implemented the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, an internationally respected anti-bullying program.

The same questionnaire items were asked of all students in grades three through twelve across the United States. This consistency of questions across grades and regions provides a rare opportunity to view a snapshot of bullying behavior in our nation’s schools, based on the reports of children and youth themselves. A representative sample was used from this dataset to explore the following bullying topics:

- What percentage of students are bullied and/or bully others?
- What are the ways in which students are most often bullied?
- In how many ways are most students bullied?
- How long does bullying last?
- Where are students bullied?
- How is bullying related to liking school?
- Whom do students tell about being bullied?
- How do students respond to bullying?
- Are students afraid of being bullied?
- How do students and adults respond to bullying?

We hope that this report helps teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers, and concerned citizens raise national awareness about bullying and improve school environments so every child can feel safe at school.
DESPITE A DRAMATIC INCREASE in public awareness and anti-bullying legislation nationwide, the prevalence of bullying is still one of the most pressing issues facing our nation’s youth. Bullying affects individuals across ethnicity, gender, grade, and socioeconomic status, whether they live in urban, suburban, or rural communities. Bullying can have serious effects during the school years and into adulthood. One of the best tools that schools have for decreasing the problems associated with bullying behavior is to implement evidence-based prevention programs.

One of the most widely researched and highly regarded of these programs is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), developed by Dan Olweus, Ph.D. This unique program uses a comprehensive schoolwide, systems-change approach that involves teachers, students, parents, and other school and community personnel in an effort to reduce existing bullying problems and prevent future problems from occurring. The program has been used in more than a dozen countries by millions of students worldwide, receiving high accolades in the United States and abroad.\(^1\)

**The Olweus Bullying Questionnaire**

As part of OBPP, school staff administer the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ) (Olweus 1996, 2007), typically at the same time each year, to monitor and measure changes in bullying and antisocial behavior in their schools. This is an anonymous forty-item questionnaire that students in third through twelfth grades fill out about their experiences and observations related to bullying. The questionnaire has two main parts that measure a student’s involvement in nine forms of bullying (as one who has experienced bullying and also as one who has bullied others). The questionnaire also includes questions about students’ reactions to bullying incidents that they have observed, self-reports regarding school climate, and observations of others’ reactions to bullying. The questionnaires can be administered online by using a computer or tablet, by employing an interactive whiteboard in the classroom, or by filling out a paper booklet.

The OBQ has undergone rigorous psychometric testing through the years to ensure the data collected from it can be used to accurately understand a school’s or district’s prevalence of bullying and to assess the effectiveness of OBPP. Multiple studies have demonstrated strong consistency among subgroups of questionnaire items, with alpha reliability coefficients in the 0.80 to 0.95 range (e.g., Pellegrini 2001; Solberg and Olweus 2003; see Olweus 2013 for an overview) as well as evidence of construct validity (Kyriakides et al. 2006; Solberg and Olweus 2003) and criterion-related validity (Olweus 2010, 2012; Pellegrini 2001). Collectively, these measures provide evidence that the results of the questionnaire accurately illustrate the prevalence of bullying in schools.

\[^1\text{OBPP is listed as a Promising Program by Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, and a large, systematic review of anti-bullying programs worldwide concluded that “programs inspired by the work of Dan Olweus worked best” (Ttofi and Farrington 2011, 41–42).}\]
Before students are asked about their bullying experiences, they are provided with a definition of what does and does not constitute bullying. According to OBPP, an individual is being bullied when he or she is the target of aggressive behavior by another student or students (for example, when others say mean things, deliberately and systematically ignore someone, physically hurt others, spread negative rumors, or do other hurtful things), when a power imbalance exists between the individuals involved, and when the bullying behavior happens more than once. All three conditions must be present for the actions to constitute bullying behavior. After reading a clear definition of bullying, students are asked in the OBQ’s question 4, “How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?” and later in question 24, “How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?”

Based on their answers to these corresponding questions, students are classified into four groups. If students answer “2 or 3 times a month,” “About once a week,” or “Several times a week” to question 4, they are considered to be bullied for the purposes of the analyses. If they select these same responses to question 24, they are defined as someone who bullies others. If they select these responses to both questions, they are considered to bully others and also to be bullied (also known as “bully-victims”). If none of these responses are selected for either question, they are considered neither to have been bullied nor bullied others and consequently not involved in bullying (see figure 1).

Dividing students into these groups is helpful because students often share common characteristics within these groups (e.g., Jimerson et al. 2010). For example, students who are bullied are more likely than their nonbullied peers to have low self-esteem, loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Cook et al. 2010; Klomek et al. 2007; Olweus 1993) and experience later depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic problems (Faris and Felmlee 2011; Gini and Pozzoli 2013; Reijntjes et al. 2010; Ttofi et al. 2011). Students who participate in bullying, on the other hand, are more likely than their peers to vandalize property, to drop out of school, and to use alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana (Byrne 1994; Haynie et al. 2001; Olweus 2011; Radliff et al. 2012). Children and youth who are involved in bullying others and are also being bullied may be at particularly high risk of internalizing problems (for example, depression) and externalizing problems (for example, antisocial behavior) (Cook et al. 2010).

It is important to note that the terms victim, bully, and bully-victim should not be used to label individual children. Wherever possible in this report, we use phrases such as “students who were bullied” and “students who bully others,” which are more appropriate terms. The shorthand terms should be used exclusively for research purposes and only when the use of longer terminology would be awkward or confusing.
Characteristics of the sample
Since 2007, the OBQ has been administered more than three million times to students across the United States. During the 2012–2013 school year, more than 200,000 questionnaires were collected from 785 schools that had purchased the OBQ but not yet implemented OBPP. These schools had identified a need but had not yet begun using the program. It was from this collection of questionnaires that a representative sample was drawn for this report so that these data would not be affected by OBPP.

A stratified random sample of 2,000 questionnaires was selected from each grade (third through twelfth) with 1,000 girls and 1,000 boys in each of the ten grades for a total of 20,000 questionnaires in the sample. The sample was purposefully drawn so that the distribution of bullying status (not involved, bullied by others only, bully others only, and bully-victim) within gender and grade was consistent with the distribution for all of the more than 200,000 students surveyed. This means that the 20,000 student questionnaires sampled were representative, with regard to bullying status, gender, and grade, of all the student questionnaires collected in the 2012–2013 school year at schools that had never implemented OBPP.

Just under one-half (46 percent) of the total sample was composed of white students, which greatly exceeded the next largest groups, Hispanic or Latino (16 percent) and black or African American (12 percent). About 17 percent of the sample did not respond to the ethnicity question, and 9 percent identified as an ethnicity not listed among the response options (see figure 2).

Limitations
It is important to keep in mind that, although the sample is representative of the questionnaires collected, it was not extracted from a representative database of the national student body. Although student questionnaires were collected at schools prior to program implementation, only schools that had decided to administer the OBQ (typically an indication that they intend to implement the program) are included in the sample. Therefore, it is possible that schools that administer the OBQ (and intend to implement OBPP) differ somewhat from schools that do not intend to implement OBPP, that use another anti-bullying program, or that do not have any anti-bullying program at all.

Nonetheless, because of the sheer quantity of the questionnaires, the diversity of the schools, and the reliability of the findings due to the large sample size, the authors believe the data presented in this report can be considered a reasonable representation of bullying behavior and related problems nationally. In particular, the patterns of results reported, including age trends and gender differences, are likely to be quite similar to what would be obtained with a large-scale nationally representative sample of students, and, in fact, many trends are consistent with available national data (see Robers et al. 2013).

For a more detailed look at how student data are reported to individual schools, see a sample Olweus Bullying Questionnaire Standard Report, which can be accessed at www.violencepreventionworks.org.
What percentage of students are bullied and/or bully others?
Overall, 15 percent of students report being bullied while 6 percent report bullying others. The percentage of students who report being bullied decreases steadily with increasing grade level (see figure 3). While 23 percent of third graders report being bullied two to three times a month or more, by seventh grade, this decreases to 15 percent, and by twelfth grade, this decreases to 8 percent. On the other hand, the percentage of students who report bullying others is more stable over grade levels, remaining between 5 and 6 percent between third and twelfth grade.

Figure 3. Students who have been involved in bullying 2–3 times a month or more
A strong relationship exists between age (grade) and bullying victimization for both genders. Girls have a slightly higher (2 to 4 percent) prevalence of bullying victimization than boys in the third, fourth, fifth, and eighth grades (see figure 4). In all other grades, the victimization rates by gender are within 1 percentage point of each other.

**Figure 4. Students who have been bullied 2–3 times a month or more, by gender**

![Figure 4](image)

The trends across grades for self-reported bullying behavior are also similar between girls and boys until high school, when the percentage of boys who report bullying others increases with increasing grade while the percentage of girls who report bullying others plateaus (see figure 5). Among elementary and middle school students, there is a 1 to 2 percent difference between boys and girls in bullying behavior, but this difference increases to 4 percent by tenth grade and peaks at 7 percent in twelfth grade. Boys consistently bully other students more than girls do, and they do so at higher rates as they get older.

**Figure 5. Students who have bullied another student(s) 2–3 times a month or more, by gender**

![Figure 5](image)
The amount of bullying perpetrated by students who are also bullied two to three times a month or more (bully-victims) varies more for boys than for girls. Nearly a third of high school boys who are bullied report that they also bully others (see figure 6). This is approximately double the rate that occurs for elementary and middle school boys. On average, 13 percent of girls are both bullied and bully others, and this number stays relatively constant across all grade levels and only slightly increases during the high school years.

Boys report that they were most frequently bullied by other boys, while it was more common for girls to be bullied by both girls and boys (see figure 7). Among bullied girls, nearly half (48 percent) report being bullied by both boys and girls, 32 percent by girls only, and 20 percent by boys only. In contrast, among bullied boys, 40 percent report being bullied by both boys and girls, 50 percent by boys only, and 10 percent by girls only.
As mentioned earlier, to get a reasonable estimate of the percentage of children and youth involved in bullying, it is useful to classify students into one of four categories:

- not involved
- were bullied only (bullied two to three times per month or more but did not bully others)
- bullied others only (bullied others two to three times per month or more but were not bullied)
- bullied others and were bullied (bullied two to three times per month or more and bullied others two to three times per month or more)

The overall percentage of boys and girls who were involved in bullying is the same (18 percent) in grades three through twelve (see figure 8). Thirteen percent of students in grades three through twelve were only bullied by others, 3 percent only bullied other students, 2 percent reported both, and 82 percent were not involved.

The percentage of students involved in bullying behavior is highest among third graders, with about one in
four students reporting that they engage in bullying behavior, are bullied by others, or both (see figures 9 and 10). That percentage steadily declines within each grade for both boys and girls. The vast majority of girls who report involvement with bullying are bullied by others; only a small percentage indicated that they bullied others or are bullied by others and are also bullied. Most boys in elementary and middle school who report involvement with bullying are bullied. However, in high school this is no longer the case; in tenth through twelfth grades, there is a more even split among those who are bullied, bully others, or both.

**Figure 9. Girls involved in bullying in total and by bullying type**

**Figure 10. Boys involved in bullying in total and by bullying type**
What are the ways in which students are most often being bullied?

Many types of behaviors can be classified as bullying if the behaviors meet the definition presented earlier. On the OBQ, students are asked about the frequency with which they are bullied in ten different ways (see figure 11), which are summarized here:

**Verbal:** the student is called mean names or teased in a hurtful way

**Rumors:** the student is the target of false rumors or lies

**Exclusion:** the student is left out on purpose or completely ignored

**Sexual:** the student is bullied with words or gestures having a sexual meaning

**Racial:** the student’s race is the focus of the bullying

**Physical:** the student is hit, kicked, or pushed

**Threat:** the student is threatened or forced to do things against his or her will

**Cyber:** the student is bullied via a cell phone or computer

**Damage:** the student has personal property taken or damaged

**Another way:** a student is bullied in any way not previously discussed

---

Students are most often bullied by being called mean names (verbal), having false rumors spread about them (rumors), or by being left out on purpose (exclusion).
Among all boys and girls, being verbally bullied occurs more often than any other form of bullying, with 16 percent of both girls and boys reporting being verbally bullied two to three times a month or more. The spreading of rumors is the next most common way students report being bullied and differs slightly between girls and boys (15 percent of girls compared to 11 percent of boys). Another gender difference is observed for physical bullying, where 8 percent of boys report being physically bullied compared to 5 percent of girls (see also Harris, Petrie, and Willoughby 2002 for findings of similar gender differences in physical bullying among a nationally representative sample).

Cyberbullying ranks as the least commonly reported form of bullying for boys (4 percent) and one of the lowest for girls (6 percent). This low rate of cyberbullying may seem counterintuitive given the great deal of media attention it has received in recent years, suggesting a more widespread prevalence. These results and a good deal of empirical research, however, suggest that the threat of cyberbullying is exaggerated in the media (see Olweus 2013). Nonetheless, cyberbullying can certainly be very hurtful and devastating and needs to be taken seriously. It is important to keep in mind that even while cyberbullying must be addressed, the key problem facing our nation’s students is the more traditional forms of bullying.

Whereas figure 11 shows the percentage of all students who report being bullied by one of the forms of bullying, the following two figures look at a smaller group of students, only those students who report being bullied two or three times a month or more to question 4 (How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?). In figures 12 and 13, we can see possible changes in how often certain forms of bullying are used at various grade levels as perceived by students who are bullied two to three times a month or more often. In the higher grades, for example, girls are bullied significantly more often through verbal bullying, the spreading of rumors, sexual bullying, and cyberbullying than in the lower grades and bullied less frequently with more physical forms of bullying (physical, racial, threats, and damage). Some of these differences are quite marked: Girls report that they are bullied verbally with a sexual meaning and through cyberbullying more than twice as much in high school as in elementary school…. On the other hand, boys who are bullied report less change in the forms of bullying perpetrated against them than girls as they progress to higher grade levels.
Figure 12. Ways of being bullied for girls who reported being bullied 2–3 times a month or more for question 4 (How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of bullying</th>
<th>Percentage of all students who were bullied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumors</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. Ways of being bullied for boys who reported being bullied 2–3 times a month or more for question 4 (How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of bullying</th>
<th>Percentage of all students who were bullied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumors</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In how many ways are students bullied?

On average, students report being bullied in 3.5 different ways. Only a small minority of students who are bullied (15.8 percent) report being bullied in a single way. Of those who are bullied in one way only, more than half report being verbally bullied (56.5 percent), 13.2 percent report being socially excluded, and 8.5 percent report being bullied through the spreading of rumors (see figure 14). The other forms of bullying occur infrequently in isolation, including cyberbullying. Only 1.7 percent of students who are bullied in a single way are cyberbullied.

The number of different ways that students are bullied depends on whether they are bullied only or if they are bullied and also bully others (see figure 15). Those who are bullied but don’t bully others report experiencing more than three different types of bullying. Students who are both bullied and bully others report being bullied on average about four different ways in elementary and middle school but nearly six different ways in high school.

How long does bullying last?

The length of time that students are bullied varies considerably. Although approximately one-fifth (22 percent) of bullied students indicate that the bullying lasted only one to two weeks, one-quarter (25 percent) of bullied students also report that they have been bullied for several years or longer (see figure 16). Fifty percent of bullied students report that the bullying has lasted six or more months, and an alarming 39 percent indicate that it has lasted for one year or longer.
Where are students being bullied?

The areas where boys and girls are most often bullied at school are in very public places, such as the playground/athletic fields, lunchroom, hallways/stairwells, and in class (with and without the teacher present) (see figure 17). In all of these locations, potential exists for many other students and teachers to be present. This finding suggests that students and educators may benefit from more training about how to observe, identify, and react to a bullying situation. Using a comprehensive bullying prevention program may help students and teachers recognize acts of bullying behavior and learn techniques for how best to help the bullied student.

Although most locations are mentioned by similar numbers of both boys and girls, a few appear more problematic to one gender than to the other. Girls report being bullied more frequently in hallways/stairwells than boys (31 percent compared with 27 percent). Boys report being bullied in gym class or the locker room/shower more than girls (18 percent compared with 15 percent) and in the bathroom more than girls (13 percent compared to 10 percent).

Students who are bullied also report that the bullying typically does not occur in just one place in the school but rather happens in two or more locations (see figure 18). Only approximately one-third of bullied students report that it usually happens in only one place; 45 percent indicate it has happened in three or more locations.
How is bullying related to liking school?
Compared with students who are not involved in bullying, students involved in bullying (as students who are bullied, who bully others, or both) are about twice as likely to dislike school (see figure 19). For students who are involved in bullying, the proportion who dislikes school dramatically rises with increasing grade levels across bullying types. In elementary grades, 18 percent of students who are bullied (only) dislike school. This number increases to 20 percent in middle school and 30 percent in high school. This difference is even greater for students who are bullied and also bully others. In elementary grades, 22 percent of students who bully others and also are bullied dislike school, and this number more than doubles to 50 percent in high school.

Figure 19. Students who dislike school, by bullying type and grade level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Bullied by others</th>
<th>Bully others</th>
<th>Both bully and are bullied</th>
<th>Not involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd-5th</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th-8th</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th-12th</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whom do students tell about being bullied?
Among almost all students, siblings or friends are the number one group in whom students confide about being bullied, followed closely by parents or guardians (see figure 20). Teachers or other adults at school are the least likely to be told that a student is being bullied. Girls are more likely than boys to tell siblings/friends or parents/guardians.

Of particular concern are the numbers of boys and girls who do not tell anyone about being bullied. Boys are more likely than girls to have told no one about being bullied. For both boys and girls, the percentage who tell no one increases substantially as they get older. For instance, while 17 percent of third- through fifth-grade girls have not told anyone about being bullied, this number increases to 23 percent among sixth through eighth graders and 27 percent among ninth through twelfth graders. Similarly, 22 percent of third- through fifth-grade boys have not told anyone about being bullied, but this increases to 29 percent among sixth through eighth graders and 43 percent among ninth through twelfth graders.

Figure 20. Students (who have been bullied 2–3 times per month or more) tell these people that they are being bullied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Sibling or friend</th>
<th>Parent or guardian</th>
<th>Teacher or other adult at school</th>
<th>Have not told anyone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd-5th</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th-8th</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th-12th</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Stu dents could select more than one location.*
How do students respond to bullying?

Empathy, at its core, is the ability to put oneself in someone else’s shoes. Although empirical research is needed to investigate potential effects that empathy might have on reducing the prevalence of bullying, it is nevertheless encouraging that most students in this sample do report feeling sympathy for students who are bullied. Across grade levels, more than 90 percent of girls feel sympathy for bullied students. Among boys, empathy rates are somewhat lower and drop more dramatically with age (see figure 21). Although 89 percent of third- through fifth-grade boys report feeling sorry for bullied students, this falls to 83 percent among sixth through eighth graders and 75 percent among ninth through twelfth graders.

A high level of empathy provides some indication that the vast majority of students do not approve of bullying. However, despite high levels of empathy, many students do not report helping bullied students (see figure 22). Across all age groups, girls are more likely to try to help a bullied student than boys are, but those numbers drop sharply for both genders after elementary school. Among students in high school, fewer than half indicate that they try to help bullied students. This disparity between empathy and action indicates that students need the right tools to help respond to bullying. Giving students tools to respond to bullying in appropriate and safe ways is an important focus of OBPP. One of the four simple rules students learn as part of the program is “We will try to help students who are bullied.”

Similar age and gender trends are seen for students who admit that they “just watch” and do not respond to bullying that they witness or are aware of (see figure 23). Boys are more likely than girls to “just watch” and not respond, and the percentage increases with age. More boys than girls also indicate that they could join in bullying a student whom they did not like (see figure 24), and the percentage increases markedly with age. The number of students who report they could participate in bullying others (see figure 24) is higher than the number of students who admit that they have actually bullied others (see figure 5). This finding suggests there are other students who feel willing to bully others but are not currently doing so.
Are students afraid of being bullied?

One of the fundamental functions of a school is to provide a safe learning environment for all students. One way to measure a safe and healthy school climate is to determine the proportion of students who are fearful while at school. Findings indicate that 11 percent of all students are often afraid of being bullied at school. Not surprisingly, students’ involvement in bullying is strongly related to their fear of bullying. In fact, 42 percent or more of students who are bullied are often afraid of being involved in future incidents of bullying (see figure 25). This fear is likely to have negative effects on their learning and academic achievement.

Students who have been bullied are at least two times more likely to be afraid of being bullied than students who bully others, and they are at least three times more likely to be afraid than those who are not involved in bullying. By high school, nearly one in two students (49 percent) who are bullied and who also bully others are frequently afraid of being bullied.

Some students who are not involved in bullying are also afraid of being bullied, but to a far lesser extent. In third through fifth grade, 15 percent of students not involved in bullying are often afraid of being bullied, a number that decreases with age. That 15 percent of elementary school students not involved in bullying are nonetheless afraid of being bullied is a strong indicator of the omnipresence of bullying and how much it can affect even those not directly involved.
How do students and adults respond to bullying?

One indicator that shows how well schools are addressing bullying is the degree to which students indicate others in the school (fellow students and adults) respond appropriately to bullying. As shown in figure 26, a minority of students report that fellow students frequently try to stop bullying, and this number decreases in higher grades. Students report that teachers are much more responsive than students when they witness bullying, although this number also decreases in higher grade levels.

Students report that high school teachers are nearly twice as likely as elementary teachers to do little or nothing to reduce the amount of classroom bullying (see figure 27). Although bullying occurs less frequently during the high school years than when students are younger (see figure 4), nearly one in ten students are still bullied at least two or three times a month in high school grades, so it is of concern that such high percentages of students do not feel their teachers appropriately address bullying.

©2014 by Hazelden Foundation. All rights reserved. Duplicating this material for personal or group use is permissible.
THIS REPORT reviews key findings related to children’s self-reported observations about the nature and prevalence of bullying across the United States during the 2012–2013 school year. Some findings are worrisome but others are more positive. These analyses indicate that bullying continues to affect a great number of children in all age groups, with the highest prevalence observed in third and fourth grades, where roughly 22 percent of schoolchildren report that they are bullied two or three times or more per month. Bullied students are more likely to dislike school and feel afraid of being bullied than uninvolved students. Roughly 45 percent of bullied students feel afraid of being bullied.

Cyberbullying, despite high media attention and elevated concerns in our communities, is not as common as many other forms of bullying. In fact, only 4 percent of boys and 6 percent of girls report being cyberbullied two or three times a month or more. Although cyberbullying can be devastating to those who experience it, the small number of children it affects compared with other forms of bullying suggests it is important not to sensationalize this phenomenon. Moreover, just 1.7 percent of all students who were bullied using a single form of bullying report being bullied through cyber technology alone. This very low percentage is supported by empirical research that has shown that those who are bullied via cyber technology are very often also bullied by more traditional means (Olweus 2012). These findings suggest that systematic efforts to address traditional forms of bullying will have positive effects with regard to cyberbullying.

Students who are bullied report that they are usually not the targets of only one form of bullying, but are bullied in almost four different ways on average. The frequency with which these forms of bullying are reported change depending on the students’ grade level. For instance, there are four forms of bullying that are more likely among girls in higher grades than lower grades (verbal, rumors, sexual, and cyber) and four forms that are more likely among girls in lower grades compared with higher grades (racial, physical, threats, and damage). Boys also report that they are bullied more in high school than elementary school grades for four types of bullying (sexual, racial, cyber, and damage). Cyberbullying and verbal bullying with a sexual meaning are the only overlapping forms of bullying that affect both genders more often in high school than in lower grades. These numbers showcase the complexity of bullying and how, despite the overall reduction in bullying behavior by high
school, certain forms of bullying become more prevalent with age and must be effectively addressed.

While just 19 percent of boys who are bullied and 13 percent of girls who are bullied also report bullying others, this group of students is bullied in more ways than students who self-report as being bullied only. In addition to their known risk for internalizing and externalizing problems, a larger proportion of these students report disliking school than those who are bullied only. These numbers suggest that the school environment may be especially difficult for these students and demonstrate a need for school personnel to adequately distinguish and address the needs of these youth.

One of the positive trends to emerge from these analyses is the large proportion of students who feel empathy toward students being bullied. On average, 93 percent of girls and 81 percent of boys across all grade levels feel sorry for bullied students. However, even though an overwhelming majority of students empathize with bullied students, far fewer report actually reaching out to help them. To teach students how to help other students who are bullied, we need to provide them with the appropriate tools and guidance. One of the best ways to help students help others, as well as to reduce the overall prevalence of bullying, is to implement a schoolwide anti-bullying program, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (e.g., Olweus and Limber 2010). According to two recent, partly overlapping meta-analyses reviewing the effects of anti-bullying programs throughout the world (Ttofi and Farrington 2009, 2011), researchers noted that anti-bullying programs are an effective way to reduce victimization, with an expected reduction of 20 percent to 23 percent.

A good evidence-based anti-bullying program will have the power to restructure and strengthen the school environment by teaching everyone how to identify acts of bullying, how to react to bullying, and how to work together to reduce opportunities and rewards for bullying behavior. The results from this report show that bullying is a major issue facing a large number of our nation’s students and that further commitment is needed from schools and communities around the country to work together to systematically counteract bullying and make schools a safe place for all students to learn.

For more information about the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program or the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, visit www.violencepreventionworks.org or call Hazelden Publishing at 1-800-328-9000.
Bullying in U.S. Schools: References


Since 2007, Professional Data Analysts Inc. (PDA) has been providing reports for a fee to schools and school districts that use the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* about their prevalence of bullying recorded using the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. PDA also received a small fee from the Hazelden Foundation for its work on this report.

For more information about the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* or the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, visit [www.violencepreventionworks.org](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org) or call 1-800-328-9000.