

Issue Brief

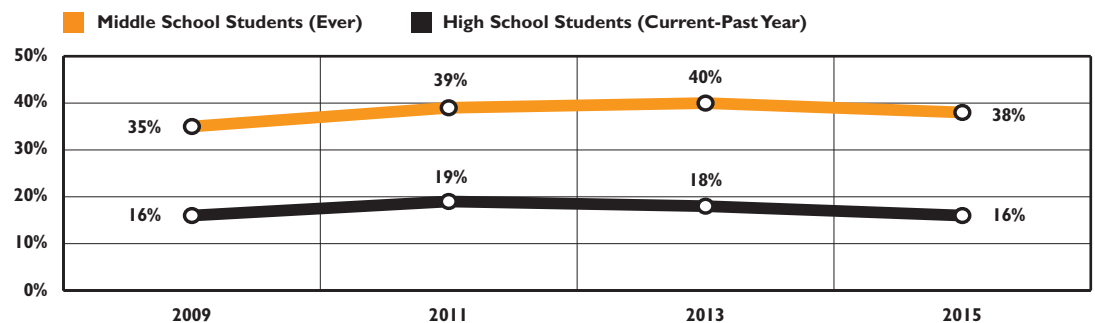
Preventing Bullying in Rhode Island Schools

Bullying behavior is a social, educational, and health problem that affects many children and adolescents in Rhode Island and in the U.S. Youth involved in bullying can experience higher rates of mental health problems, aggression, suicide, drug use, school absence, physical health problems, and deficits in cognitive functioning during childhood and adolescence as well as into adulthood. Bullying incidents among students create a climate of fear and disrespect that can negatively impact student learning.¹

In the U.S. in 2015, 20% of high school students report having been bullied on school property and 16% reported having been electronically bullied. There has been no significant change in either forms of bullying between 2011 and 2015.²

In 2015, more than one-third (38%) of Rhode Island middle school students reported ever being bullied on school property and 21% reported ever being electronically bullied. Among Rhode Island high school students, 16% reported currently being bullied on school property and 12% reported currently being cyberbullied.³

Student Reports of Being Bullied* on School Property, Rhode Island, 2009-2015



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, *Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, 2009-2015.

Notes: *In the YRBS, currently bullied is defined as within the past year. Middle school students self-reported ever being bullied on school property and high school students self-reported current bullying on school property.

- ◆ In 2015, Rhode Island was ranked first in the U.S. for the lowest rate for middle school students reporting being bullied on school property and the fourth lowest for students being electronically bullied. High school students in Rhode Island rank second best for bullied on school property and similarly for being electronically bullied.⁴
- ◆ Preventing, identifying, and addressing bullying behavior requires the complementary and sustained efforts of educators, school administrators, students, parents, health care providers, families, policymakers, and others.⁵

What is Bullying?

- ◆ The term bullying is used to refer to “behavior that is aggressive, is carried out repeatedly and over time, and occurs in an interpersonal relationship where a power imbalance exists.” Being made fun of or called names and being the subject of rumors are the two most common forms of bullying experienced by children and youth in the U.S.⁶
- ◆ In Rhode Island, students experience all types of bullying on and off school property.

The Spectrum of Bullying



Types of Bullying

TYPE	VERBAL BULLYING	RELATIONAL BULLYING	ELECTRONIC/ CYBERBULLYING	COERCION	DAMAGE TO PROPERTY	PHYSICAL BULLYING
DESCRIPTION	Oral or written communication that causes harm	Behavior designed to harm reputation and relationships	Takes place using technology or digital electronic means	Pressuring someone to take an involuntary act, stance, or behavior	Damage to the target youth's property by the perpetrator	Use of physical force
EXAMPLES	Taunting, name calling, offensive notes or hand gestures, verbal threats	Social isolation, rumor spreading, posting derogatory comments or pictures online	Comments, messages, and photos via e-mail, social networks, blogs, online games, chat rooms, instant messaging, Skype, text messages	Use of force, threats, or intimidation to obtain compliance	Theft, alteration, or other damage or destruction of property	Hitting, spitting, pushing, tripping, shoving
2013-2014 RHODE ISLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS	42% reported being teased at school 15% reported being threatened with harm	34% reported having rumors be spread by others 21% reported being excluded from activities on purpose	10% reported having embarrassing picture or rumors be spread by others electronically 12% reported being harassed or bullied on social media	20% reported being coerced	14% reported having their property destroyed on purpose	26% reported being physically bullied
2013-2014 RHODE ISLAND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	33% reported being teased at school 15% reported being threatened with harm	31% reported having rumors be spread by others 17% reported being excluded from activities on purpose	12% reported having embarrassing picture or rumors be spread by others electronically or on social media	18% reported being coerced	12% reported having their property destroyed on purpose	16% reported being physically bullied

Sources: *Preventing bullying through science, policy, and practice*. (2016). Washington, DC: National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Rhode Island Department of Education, *SurveyWorks!*, 2013-2014.

Students Reporting Ever Having Experienced Bullying*, Rhode Island, 2013-2014

CITY/TOWN	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
Barrington	43%	44%	46%
Bristol Warren	55%	60%	52%
Burrillville	53%	59%	51%
Central Falls	45%	60%	38%
Chariho	46%	59%	46%
Coventry	44%	62%	52%
Cranston	41%	52%	47%
Cumberland	38%	57%	57%
East Greenwich	43%	49%	49%
East Providence	51%	61%	56%
Exeter-West Greenwich	50%	59%	40%
Foster	56%	NA	NA
Glocester	47%	NA	NA
Foster-Glocester	NA	61%	45%
Jamestown	46%	61%	NA
Johnston	50%	59%	49%
Lincoln	40%	56%	49%
Middletown	54%	55%	55%
Narragansett	40%	62%	43%
New Shoreham	65%	65%	26%
Newport	50%	60%	51%
North Kingstown	49%	52%	43%
North Providence	48%	52%	54%
North Smithfield	48%	53%	44%
Pawtucket	46%	61%	44%
Portsmouth	43%	58%	46%
Providence	54%	55%	38%
Scituate	52%	57%	50%
Smithfield	42%	56%	50%
South Kingstown	44%	53%	42%
Tiverton	43%	60%	50%
Warwick	44%	63%	51%
West Warwick	44%	57%	50%
Westerly	48%	57%	49%
Woonsocket	53%	55%	56%
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>51%</i>	<i>57%</i>	<i>42%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>46%</i>	<i>57%</i>	<i>49%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>47%</i>	<i>57%</i>	<i>47%</i>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *SurveyWorks!*, 2013-2014. NA indicates that community has no school at that level.

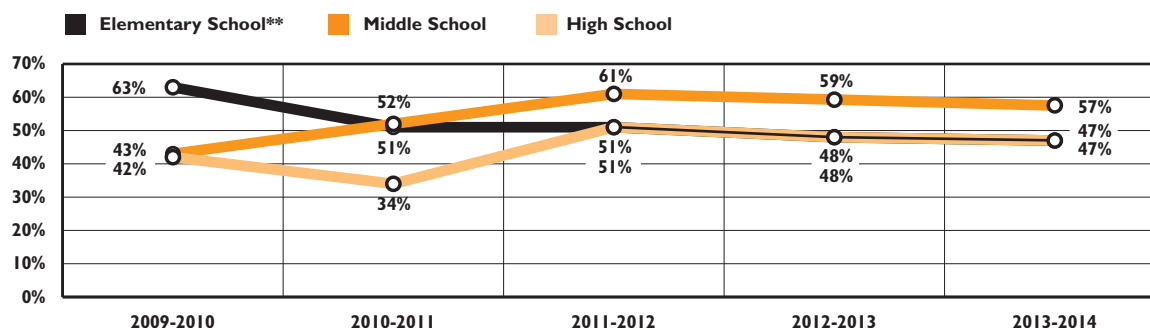
Notes: *In the *SurveyWorks!* survey, *bullied* is defined as experiencing one or more of the following in the past 12 months: purposeful exclusion from activities, being teased at school, being pushed, shoved, tripped or spit on, threatened with harm, having property destroyed on purpose, experiencing coercion, having rumors being spread about self, or experiencing cyberbullying. **Elementary school is defined as students in the 4th or 5th grade. Four Core Cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

- ◆ Children’s experiences with bullying vary significantly according to their age. The experience of both being bullied and perpetrating bullying behavior generally peaks in the early adolescent years (ages 12-14) before decreasing slightly in later adolescence.⁷
- ◆ **Young children** can begin to exhibit bullying-like behavior during preschool years. However, their aggressive behaviors are unique in that they are not as organized or consistent as they are in later childhood, may not reflect an imbalance of power, and often last for a shorter period of time. Therefore, labeling aggressive behavior of very young children as bullying may be inappropriate. In 2014, parents of U.S. children ages two to five reported physical intimidation (19%) and relational aggression (23%) of their child by a peer within the previous year.^{8,9,10}
- ◆ **Rhode Island elementary school students** have reported significant declines in being bullied from 63% in 2009-2010 to 47% in 2013-2014.¹¹
- ◆ **Middle school students** in Rhode Island report having the highest rates of being bullied than any other grade level, but rates decreased from 61% in 2011-2012 to 57% in 2013-2014.¹²
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2013-2014, 47% of **high school students** report being bullied, which is a decline from 51% in 2011-2012.¹³

Who Experiences Bullying?

- ◆ While national and state estimates of bullying prevalence vary, there is consensus that bullying behavior is a serious issue that is experienced by children and youth of all ages. In Rhode Island between 2009-2010 and 2013-2014 students at every grade level reported experiencing at least one form of bullying in the past 12 months.¹⁴

Students Who Report Being Bullied*, Rhode Island, by Grade Level, 2009-2014



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *SurveyWorks!*, 2009-2014.

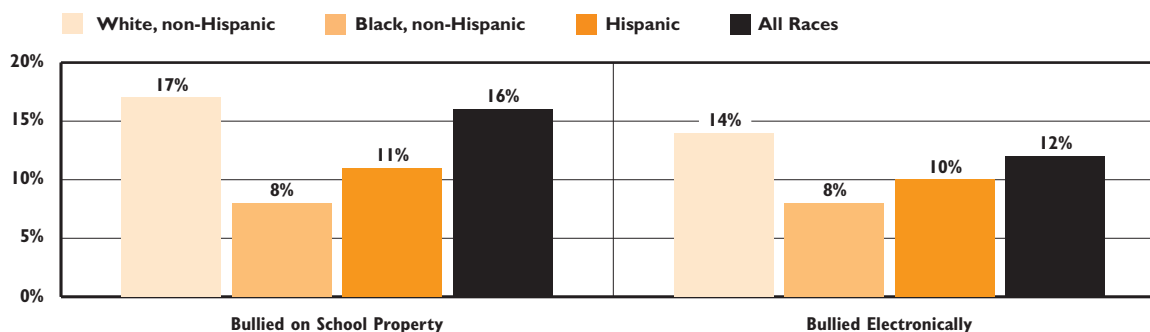
Note: *In the SurveyWorks! survey, bullied is defined as experiencing one or more of the following in the past 12 months: purposeful exclusion from activities, being teased at school, being pushed, shoved, tripped or spit on, threatened with harm, having property destroyed on purpose, experiencing coercion, having rumors being spread about self, or experiencing cyberbullying. **Elementary school is defined as students in the 4th or 5th grade.

- ◆ Forty-two percent (42%) of high school students in the four core cities report bullying in the past 12 months, lower than their peers in the remainder of the state (49%) in 2013-2014.¹⁵

Race & Ethnicity

- ◆ While there is no consistent evidence that any one ethnic group is more or less likely to be the target of bullying, bullying behavior, and related forms of peer victimization can be due to bias and discrimination.
- ◆ National research shows that children of any racial or ethnic background are at increased risk for bullying if a majority of their peers are of another racial or ethnic background. Racially and ethnically diverse schools may reduce rates of bullying behavior because no one racial or ethnic group is dominant.¹⁶
- ◆ Nationally and in Rhode Island in 2015, White, non-Hispanic high school students report higher rates of being bullied on school property than their Hispanic or Black, non-Hispanic peers.^{17,18}

Rhode Island High School Students, Currently Bullied*, by Race/Ethnicity, 2015



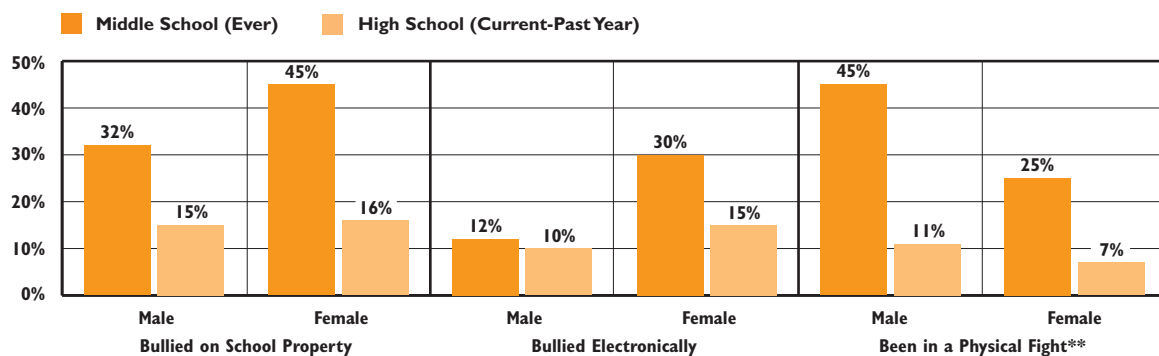
Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, 2015.

Note: *In the YRBS, currently bullied is defined as within the past year.

Gender

- ◆ While boys and girls both experience bullying, there are differences in the frequency and type of bullying behavior they enact or experience. In the U.S., boys are more likely to engage in physical aggression and be both a victim and perpetrator of physical bullying. Girls report higher prevalence of electronic and relational aggression than their male peers.¹⁹
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2015, gender differences of bullying are similar to national rates, with males reporting more physical fighting and females reporting more acts of electronic bullying.²⁰

Bully* Status by Gender and Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2015



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, 2015.

Notes: *In the YRBS, middle school students self-reported ever being bullied and high school students self-reported current bullying. **In the YRBS, physical fight is defined as occurring anywhere in middle school, but only on school property for high school respondents.

- ◆ Between 2009 and 2015 in Rhode Island, reports of physical fighting declined among all grades and genders. Reports of electronic bullying by high school females also declined (from 20% in 2009 to 15% in 2015). However, reports of bullying on school property by middle school females increased (from 35% to 45%) during that time period.²¹

Poly-Victims

- ◆ Poly-victims are children and youth who experience multiple victimizations of different kinds across multiple contexts and perpetrators, including violent crimes, property crimes, child abuse, community stress, and bullying.²²
- ◆ This subset of youth is at increased risk for both short- and long-term negative health outcomes associated with bullying, including depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance use, comorbid disorders, delinquent behavior, and involvement with juvenile justice system.²³
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2013, 15% of middle school students and 11% of high school students reported experiencing five or more types of bullying in the past year, including physical, verbal, relational, and cyber aggression as well as property damage.²⁴

Bystanders

- ◆ Bullying is an act that usually involves bystanders along with the victim and perpetrator. Bystanders may also observe bullying behavior and can instigate bullying behaviors, defend victims of bullying or remain completely uninvolved.²⁵
- ◆ Nationally and locally, little data is collected on this important subgroup involved in bullying.²⁶

Student Subgroups Who Report Higher Rates Of Bullying

Specific student subgroups populations are at increased risk of being bullied, including youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT); youth with physical, emotional, and/or learning disabilities; and youth who are overweight.^{27,28}

Youth who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT)

- ◆ Negative perceptions toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals can put these students at increased risk for experiencing teasing, harassment and experiences with violence. In the U.S., LGBT youth report higher rates of bullying incidents than their heterosexual peers. Half (51%) of LGBT youth have been verbally harassed in school, compared with a quarter (25%) of their non-LGBT peers.^{29,30}
- ◆ Nationally, 64% of LGBT youth have reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and 32% of LGBT students reported missing at least one full day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.³¹
- ◆ In 2015, in Rhode Island, 20% of high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) reported being bullied on school property. Rhode Island male high school students report higher levels of teasing due to LGB perception (15% of Hispanic males, 11% of White males, and 9% of Black males) than their female peers (7% of Hispanic females, 8% of White females, and 6% of Black females) in 2015.^{32,33}

Youth with Disabilities

- ◆ Students with disabilities are overrepresented within the bullying dynamic, whether as children who have bullied, children who have been bullied, or children who have both bullied and have been bullied. National prevalence data show that students with disabilities are up to 1.5 times more likely to be bullied than youth without disabilities throughout their school career, starting in preschool and continuing through adolescence.³⁴
- ◆ In 2015 in Rhode Island, 25% of high school students who had been bullied on school property reported having a long term emotional problem or learning disability.³⁵
- ◆ Youth with disabilities can also perpetrate bullying. In Rhode Island in 2015, physical disability was twice as prevalent among high school students who have ever bullied someone vs. those who have not (15% vs 8%).³⁶

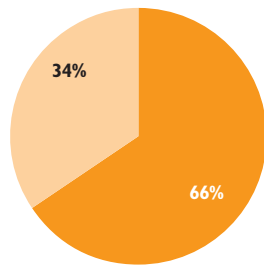
Youth who are Overweight or Obese

- ◆ Children and youth who are overweight or obese are at risk for experiencing weight-based bullying, victimization and bias among their peers, parents, educators, and others. Consequences of weight-based victimization include disordered eating behaviors, reduced physical activity, and increased vulnerability to suicidal ideation.³⁷
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2013-2014, 12% of middle school and 12% of high school students reported being bullied because of their weight. In addition, overweight self perception is more prevalent among Rhode Island middle school students who reported ever being bullied on school property (32%) than were not bullied (22%) during that time period.^{38,39}
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2015, 12% high school students report being obese and 15% report being overweight (data are not available for middle school students).⁴⁰

Bully-Victims

- ◆ Young people who are both a perpetrator and victim of bullying activities are referred to as “bully-victims.” Bully-victims have negative psychological and behavioral outcomes, including elevated levels of depression, poor-self-esteem, heightened aggression, and suicidal ideation and behavior. Bully-victims are also more likely to be rejected by their peers, have poor social skills, be impulsive and easily provoked, display conduct problems, and exhibit difficulties in school engagement and achievement.^{41,42,43}
- ◆ The *Rhode Island Student Survey*, conducted in 2016, asked middle and high school students about bullying and is the only known survey to measure how many Rhode Island students are bully-victims.⁴⁴
- ◆ Among more than 15,000 surveyed students, 55% indicated they were bullied and 48% reported bullying others in the three months prior to the survey. Among those Rhode Island middle and high school students who reported being bullied, 66% reported bullying others. Three in four (76%) students who reported bullying others also reported being bullied themselves.⁴⁵

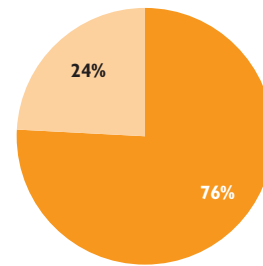
Rhode Island Middle and High School Students Who Are Bullied, 2016



66% ■ Bullied Others
34% ■ Did Not Bully Others

n=8,668

Rhode Island Middle and High School Students Who Bully Others, 2016



76% ■ Are Bullied
24% ■ Are Not Bullied

n=7,536

Source: Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals, *Rhode Island Student Survey*, 2016.

Students Who are Bullied are defined in the *Rhode Island Student Survey* as those who report experiencing any of the following bullying activities in past 3 months: 1) had mean rumors or lies spread about you at school, 2) had pictures or texts that embarrassed or hurt you posted through the internet, 3) had text or picture cell phone messages sent about you that were embarrassing or hurtful, 4) been made fun of.

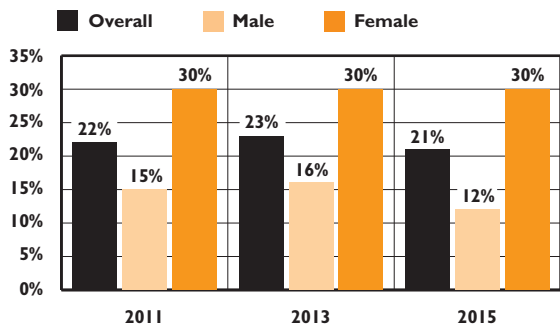
Students Who Bully Others are defined in the *Rhode Island Student Survey* as those who report engaging in any of the following four activities in past 3 months: 1) spread mean rumors or lies about other kids at school, 2) used the internet to post pictures or texts that might embarrass or hurt another student, 3) use a cell phone to send text messages or pictures that might embarrass or hurt another student, 4) made fun of other people.

- ◆ Compared to their middle school peers, Rhode Island high school students report more incidents of being bullied (57% of high school students vs 43% of middle school students) and bullying others (62% vs 39% respectively) in the three months prior to the *2016 Rhode Island Student Survey*.⁴⁶
- ◆ Females self report higher levels of both being bullied (55%) and bullying others (51%) than their male peers (45% and 49% respectively) within the three months prior to the *2016 Rhode Island Student Survey*.⁴⁷

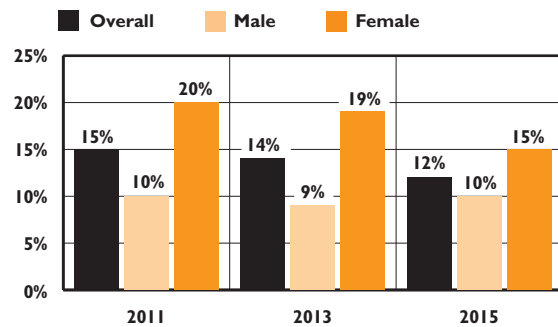
Cyberbullying

- ◆ In the past, bullying primarily occurred where children physically played or learned. New technology has expanded the environments in which children and youth may experience bullying. Children and youth now increasingly interact and connect through an array of electronic platforms, such as texting, instant messaging and chats, email, social media, and others, which can include words, photos, and videos.⁴⁸
- ◆ Cyberbullying (or electronic aggression) includes the sharing of hurtful messages or comments, the spreading of rumors via posts or creation of groups, cyberstalking, outing, trolling, and exclusion by groups of peers online. Electronic aggression is a unique form of bullying in that it can be anonymous, viewed or shared multiple times, and may be perpetrated by peers with less social capital. Cyberbullying appears to peak later than traditional bullying, given older children’s increased access to technology and digital platforms.^{49,50}
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2015, 21% of middle school students reported ever being electronically bullied and 12% of high school students reported being currently electronically bullied in the past year. With both student groups, females self-report experiencing higher levels of electronic aggression than their male peers.⁵¹
- ◆ In 2015, Rhode Island middle school and high school students had the fourth lowest reported rates of cyberbullying among reported states.⁵²

Rhode Island Middle School Students Ever Electronically Bullied* by Gender, 2011-2015



Rhode Island High School Students Currently Electronically Bullied* by Gender, 2011-2015



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, 2011-2015.

Note: *In the YRBS, electronically bullied is defined as bullying through e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, or texting.

- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2015, White students (23% of middle school students and 14% of high school students) reported experiencing higher levels of electronic aggression than did Black (15% and 8% respectively) or Hispanic (16% and 10% respectively) students.⁵³
- ◆ Emotional disability was nearly three times as prevalent (31% vs 12%) among Rhode Island high school students who were bullied electronically in 2015, while physical disability was twice as prevalent (15% vs 8%).⁵⁴

PTSD and Cyberbullying

- ◆ A study of Rhode Island adolescents ages 13 to 17 presenting to Emergency Departments for any reason found almost half (47%) engaged in cyberbullying as either a perpetrator or victim and that 23% reported current symptoms consistent with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is associated with long-term functional impairment, depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use disorders. Cyberbullying showed stronger association to depressive and suicidal ideation symptoms than in-person bullying. When cyberbullying victimization is combined with physical violence, there is a strong correlation with PTSD. Half (50%) of those identified with PTSD reported receiving any outpatient mental health treatment in the past year.⁵⁵

The Implications of Bullying

- ◆ Bullying behavior has a negative impact on all involved, including the victim, the perpetrator, and bystanders. **Students who bully** are likely to engage in other risky behaviors, such as substance use, or exhibit anti-social conduct and poor school adjustment. **Victims of bullying** may experience physical injury, heightened stress, sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, and are at risk of poor academic achievement, absenteeism, and forms of aggression. The long-term consequences of being bullied can be more severe than other forms of child maltreatment. Both **victims and perpetrators** of bullying are more likely to contemplate or attempt suicide. **Bystanders** may experience anxiety, fear, and insecurity, which may inhibit their ability to seek help.^{56,57,58}
- ◆ Middle school and high school students in Rhode Island who were bullied on school property in 2015 reported engaging in more risky behaviors than their non-bullied peers. While these risk factors show association (and not causation or direction), bullied students are more likely to report substance use, mental health issues, unsafe and violent behaviors, unprotected sexual activity, and poor academic achievement.^{59,60}

Negative Behaviors by Bully Status, Rhode Island, 2015

RI Middle School Students

		NOT BULLIED ON SCHOOL PROPERTY	BULLIED ON SCHOOL PROPERTY
ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS	Ever Tried Alcohol	14%	21%
	Ever Tried Marijuana	6%	8%
MENTAL HEALTH	Ever Attempted Suicide	4%	10%
TOBACCO	Ever Tried Cigarettes	5%	11%
VIOLENCE	Ever Been in a Physical Fight	31%	42%
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	Receive Poor Grades	24%	32%

RI High School School Students

		NOT BULLIED ON SCHOOL PROPERTY	BULLIED ON SCHOOL PROPERTY
ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS	Drink Alcohol	14%	21%
	Use Marijuana	6%	8%
	Abuse Legal Drugs	9%	18%
	OTC drugs	3%	11%
INJURY	Never/Rarely Wore Seat Belt	5%	8%
	Rode with Drinking Driver	16%	23%
MENTAL HEALTH	Attempted Suicide	8%	21%
	Experience Acute Depression	21%	55%
TOBACCO	Smoke Cigarettes	3%	13%
	Use E-cigarettes	17%	30%
	Use Any Tobacco	21%	39%
VIOLENCE	Physical Fighting	6%	15%
	Dating Violence	6%	20%
	Forced Sex	6%	17%
	Weapon at School	3%	9%
	No School, Felt Unsafe	4%	14%
SEXUAL ACTIVITY	Unprotected Sex	36%	52%
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	Receive Poor Grades	24%	33%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, 2015.

Notes: All differences and values are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Unless noted otherwise below, all behaviors for high school students occurred within the 12 months prior to taking the survey and all behaviors for middle school students occurred at any point in time prior to taking the survey.

Abused Legal Drugs (use prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription); OTC drugs (take an over-the-counter drug); Acute Depression (sad or hopeless every day for 2+ weeks, past year); Physical Fighting (on school property); Dating Violence (hit by dating partner, 1+ times, past year); Forced Sex (sexual intercourse, ever); Unprotected Sex (no protection, last encounter); Receive Poor Grades (grades in school mostly C's, D's or F's, past year).

School Climate

- ◆ Bullying often occurs at school—the physical setting in which most of childhood is centered and the primary source for peer group formation, as well as other places that children come together. The Rhode Island Department of Education defines “*at school*” to mean: on school premises, at any school-sponsored activity or event whether or not it is held on school premises, on a school-transportation vehicle, at an official school bus stop, using property or equipment provided by the school, or acts which create a material and substantial disruption of the education process or the orderly operation of the school.^{61,62}
- ◆ **School climate** refers to student perceptions of factors such as student-teacher engagement, quality of peer interactions, and family support. School climate defines the character and quality of school life as well as shared beliefs about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Positive school climate has been linked to academic achievement, higher school attendance rates, and fewer aggressive and externalizing behaviors. Negative school climate is associated with school avoidance, depression, suspensions, and a lack of engagement in school activities.^{63,64,65,66}
- ◆ School climate is also associated with bullying. Schools with strong disciplinary structure and consistent student support report a lower prevalence of bullying behaviors. Students in schools with high levels of perceived support from both teachers and school administrators are more likely to report bullying so it can be addressed. Schools with a negative school climate are more likely to report higher rates of school avoidance, behavior problems including bullying, school suspensions and lower student achievement.^{67,68,69}

School Climate Factors, Rhode Island, 2013-2014

	FEEL SAFE INSIDE SCHOOL/HALLWAYS	STUDENTS RESPECT EACH OTHER	STUDENTS RESPECT TEACHERS	TEACHERS TREAT STUDENTS WITH RESPECT
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL				
Four Core Cities	81%	NA	63%	NA
Remainder of State	91%	NA	84%	NA
Rhode Island	89%	NA	78%	NA
MIDDLE SCHOOL				
Four Core Cities	79%	47%	44%	72%
Remainder of State	90%	61%	66%	84%
Rhode Island	87%	58%	60%	81%
HIGH SCHOOL				
Four Core Cities	78%	50%	46%	70%
Remainder of State	85%	53%	53%	75%
Rhode Island	84%	52%	52%	74%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *SurveyWorks!*, 2013-2014.

Four Core Cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket. NA indicates that no question was asked.

- ◆ Teachers’ reactions to bullying behaviors in the classroom also affect the prevalence of bullying incidents. Teachers are unlikely to intervene in any bullying behavior if they have not received training in how to do so. When they do intervene, they are more likely to interrupt physical bullying than verbal bullying.⁷⁰
- ◆ Teachers who have received bullying prevention training have been shown to be more confident in addressing bullying behavior in the school, be more sympathetic to students who are targets of bullying behavior, and feel more empowered to work with parents to address bullying issues.⁷¹

National Trends

- ◆ In the past 15 years, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have adopted anti-bullying laws. The majority of states have supplemented those laws with additional policies. Together with existing federal civil rights and anti-discrimination laws and state civil rights laws, this wave of state anti-bullying legislation provides a mandate to address bullying and its harmful consequences.⁷²

Rhode Island Statewide Bullying Policy

- ◆ In 2011, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed the *Safe Schools Act* charging the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) with creation of a statewide bullying policy to prohibit bullying in schools. The *Safe Schools Act* requires all Rhode Island school districts, charter schools, career and technical schools, approved private day or residential schools, and collaborative schools to prohibit bullying at school through policy implementation. On June 30, 2012, RIDE's Statewide Bullying Policy took effect, addressing procedures for reporting an incident of bullying, responding to and investigating reports of bullying, referral to counseling services, and disciplinary action guidance.^{73,74}
- ◆ The *Safe Schools Act* defines bullying as the use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof directed at a student that:
 - (a) causes physical or emotional harm to the student or damage to the student's property;
 - (b) places the student in reasonable fear of harm to himself/herself or of damage to his/her property;
 - (c) creates an intimidating, threatening, hostile, or abusive educational environment for the student;
 - (d) infringes on the rights of the student to participate in school activities; or
 - (e) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Reports of bullying and responses to bullying incidents are tracked at the school level by the school principal, director or other designee. Bi-annually, summaries of incidents, responses and other incidents related to bullying are to be provided to superintendents and/or school committees.⁷⁵

Guidance for Rhode Island Schools on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students

- ◆ Students need an inclusive and compassionate learning environment to support developmental and academic achievements. In June 2016, RIDE implemented the *Guidance for Rhode Island Schools on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students* to ensure safe and supportive schools.
- ◆ The intention of this guidance is to:
 - (a) foster an educational environment that is safe and free from discrimination for all students, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression;
 - (b) facilitate compliance with state and federal law concerning bullying, harassment, and discrimination;
 - (c) reduce the stigmatization of and improve the educational integration of transgender and gender non-conforming students, maintaining the privacy of all students, and fostering cultural competence and professional development for school staff; and
 - (d) support healthy communication between educators and parent(s)/guardian(s) to further the successful educational development and well-being of every student.⁷⁶

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)

- ◆ With over 35 years of research, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) is the most extensively studied prevention program. OBPP's multi-level approach includes comprehensive ongoing training of teachers on bullying interventions, empowering student bystanders to take action, convening regular small-group class meetings to build positive school culture, and partnering with parents and the larger community to assure that bullying is prevented beyond the school walls.^{77,78}
- ◆ OBPP has been shown to significantly reduce student reports of bullying and related behavior, including fighting, school violence, and truancy. It has also been shown to improve school climate, including improved peer relations and positive attitudes toward school work.^{79,80}

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

- ◆ PBIS is a multi-tiered prevention model for children ages four to 18 that aims to improve school climate by clearly defining positive behavioral expectations, providing incentives to reinforce positive behavior, and encouraging data-based decision making by school staff. PBIS draws upon positive youth development theories and practices that can be locally tailored to prevent student behavior problems systematically and consistently. Randomized evaluations of PBIS have shown significant effects on reducing bullying, peer rejection, suspensions, and other discipline problems as well as improving school climate.⁸¹
- ◆ In Rhode Island, 153 schools have received training on the core features of PBIS through the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College, with a majority of training being provided to elementary schools (72) and early learning programs (40). As of January 2016, 90 schools are implementing PBIS and have a dedicated leadership team to help facilitate school change.⁸²

Restorative Justice

- ◆ Restorative justice is an alternative approach to traditional discipline that incorporates peaceful and non-punitive measures such as respect, responsibility, relationship building and relationship healing to address a variety of problems and acts of victimization, including bullying. It has been shown to reliably reduce student misbehavior and to improve the overall climate for learning. Under the restorative justice model, the offending student is given the chance to make things right through a mediation process, which allows students to learn the impact of their action, how it affects others, and for both parties to negotiate consequences that are both fair and respectful.⁸³
- ◆ Adoption of restorative justice is growing among schools and districts across the U.S. in light of growing evidence of the limitations of zero-tolerance policies, which mandate harsh penalties such as suspension and expulsions for misbehavior. Under zero-tolerance policies, large numbers of youth are suspended or expelled with no evidence of positive impact on school safety. In addition, racial and ethnic disparities in the application of zero-tolerance have been documented and there are strong links between the experience of out-of-school suspension and expulsions with a failure to graduate.⁸⁴
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2015, 8% (1,212) of in-school suspensions and 30% (3,906) of out-of-school suspensions were associated with student bullying infractions, including acts of assault, harassment, hazing, sexual misconducts, threats, and intimidation.⁸⁵

Rhode Island Bullying Reports and Interventions

- ◆ In 2013-2014, Rhode Island elementary school (73%) students who were bullied were the most likely to report being bullied to a teacher or staff member at their school than their middle school (36%) and high school peers (20%). Of those who did report bullying, elementary (40%) and middle school students (46%) were the most likely to report the bullying stopped.⁸⁶

**Bullied* Rhode Island Students Who Reported Incident and Indicated It Stopped
by District and Grade, 2013-2014**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	REPORTED BULLYING**			BULLYING STOPPED AFTER REPORTING IT**		
	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
Barrington	70%	33%	12%	39%	40%	17%
Bristol-Warren	80%	35%	19%	41%	46%	29%
Burrillville	74%	39%	20%	38%	53%	27%
Central Falls	74%	39%	28%	40%	46%	36%
Chariho	70%	39%	21%	37%	52%	30%
Coventry	79%	32%	23%	39%	45%	33%
Cranston	76%	37%	18%	44%	47%	24%
Cumberland	73%	32%	16%	39%	42%	23%
East Greenwich	70%	33%	14%	42%	42%	17%
East Providence	73%	37%	17%	37%	47%	25%
Exeter-West Greenwich	68%	29%	18%	42%	40%	25%
Foster	65%	NA	NA	33%	NA	NA
Glocester	69%	NA	NA	41%	NA	NA
Foster-Glocester	NA	38%	20%	NA	50%	29%
Jamestown	74%	38%	NA	43%	50%	NA
Johnston	70%	35%	18%	42%	45%	26%
Lincoln	78%	47%	18%	40%	59%	23%
Middletown	68%	35%	16%	42%	45%	23%
Narragansett	83%	37%	18%	55%	52%	27%
New Shoreham	69%	53%	25%	23%	76%	50%
Newport	68%	35%	16%	31%	48%	23%
North Kingstown	71%	32%	18%	40%	42%	26%
North Providence	71%	36%	17%	40%	47%	23%
North Smithfield	72%	35%	24%	39%	41%	30%
Pawtucket	74%	34%	24%	41%	42%	33%
Portsmouth	71%	34%	15%	40%	41%	21%
Providence	69%	38%	24%	38%	46%	32%
Scituate	69%	29%	16%	35%	37%	22%
Smithfield	68%	28%	18%	47%	35%	26%
South Kingstown	69%	24%	21%	37%	33%	30%
Tiverton	86%	36%	24%	50%	50%	35%
Warwick	78%	41%	22%	39%	56%	30%
West Warwick	72%	40%	22%	40%	57%	30%
Westerly	71%	36%	18%	34%	50%	27%
Woonsocket	78%	38%	22%	42%	47%	33%
Four Core Cities	72%	37%	24%	39%	45%	33%
Remainder of State	73%	36%	19%	40%	47%	27%
Rhode Island	73%	36%	20%	40%	46%	28%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *SurveyWorks!*, 2013-2014. NA indicates that community has no school at that level.

*In the *SurveyWorks!* survey, bullied is defined as experiencing one or more of the following in the past 12 months: purposeful exclusion from activities, being teased at school, being pushed, shoved, tripped or spit on, threatened with harm, having property destroyed on purpose, experiencing coercion, having rumors being spread about self, or experiencing cyberbullying.

**Reports of bullying and bullying stopped after reporting are asked only of students who have experienced one or more types(s) of bullying. Elementary school is defined as students in the 4th or 5th grade and reporting bullying was defined as to a teacher or parent. In middle school and high school reporting bullying was restricted to school teacher or staff member.

Four Core Cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Bullying Prevention Programming in Rhode Island

Many school-based prevention programs have been developed but more evaluation needs to be performed to maximize outcomes. Multi-component programs appear to be most effective at minimizing incidents of bullying and should be implemented throughout the U.S.⁸⁷

Pawtucket School District

- ◆ In 2015, the Pawtucket School Department and the City of Pawtucket began their partnership with *No Bully*, an anti-bullying non-profit. Pawtucket was the first school district in New England to adopt a district-wide *No Bully* program, with funding from the Hasbro Children's Fund.
- ◆ Employees from all 17 district schools, including 800 teachers and 200 staff members, were jointly trained in the *No Bully* program principles and took an oath to champion and cultivate this effort daily. In Pawtucket, each school creates and enacts its own unique culture of *No Bully*. Schools designate student ambassadors, create solution teams to address problems, and incorporate bullying prevention activities, communications, and events into their daily schedule. Workshops for parents are also offered in which student-led anti-bully content is featured as a means to advance kindness in the community.⁸⁸
- ◆ In Pawtucket, the number of acts of bullying district-wide has decreased from 59 in the 2015 school year to 20 in the 2016 school year, which is the first year *No Bully* was in effect. In addition to the reductions, the manner in which bullying was addressed changed during that time as well to reflect the *No Bully* principles.⁸⁹
- ◆ The *No Bully* program has trained 8,500 teachers in 200 schools across the U.S., impacting 100,000 students. Outcomes show schools trained by *No Bully* in California, Hawaii, Delaware, Massachusetts and Utah were able to remedy over 90% of cases of bullying between 2012-2016. *No Bully* is implemented through four levels of programming including (1) prevent and interrupt student harassment and bullying; (2) check in and refer to a Solution Coach® (3) hold a Solution Team meeting and follow up; and (4) implement an empathy-building action plan to create a culture of acceptance.⁹⁰

South Kingstown and Westerly School-Wide Bullying Prevention Efforts

- ◆ In 2011, Curtis Corner Middle School began implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP). The program has since expanded to both middle schools and all four elementary schools in South Kingstown. Westerly Middle School began implementing OBPP in 2012. In both South Kingstown and Westerly, OBPP is integrated into the district Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) systems, which are designed to foster positive social culture, provide individualized behavioral supports, and enable academic success for all students.⁹¹
- ◆ Westerly Middle School saw a 15% overall reduction in reported bullying between 2012 and 2014. In 2014, 64% of students reported staff and teachers do a “good deal” to reduce bullying in school and 73% reported it is “very important” for adults and students to continue working on bullying prevention.⁹²
- ◆ The Washington County Coalition for Children, the region’s child advocacy organization, works with local schools to support OBPP implementation and to raise community awareness and foster civic engagement around bullying prevention beyond the school walls. The Coalition has developed lesson plan toolkits to support classroom meetings, developed recommended middle and high school book lists to reinforce bullying prevention best practices for use in schools and local libraries, conducted bullying prevention trainings using OBPP curriculum for parents, community groups, and afterschool/camp staff, and organized Chalk It Up Against Bullying community arts events in local downtowns.⁹³

Recommendations

- ◆ **Policies:** Rhode Island should implement and track evidence-based anti-bullying laws and policies at the community-, district-, and school-levels that prevent, identify, and address bullying. Bullying prevention policies at the district level should specifically include LGBT youth and youth with disabilities.
- ◆ **Assessment and Tracking:** Data on the prevalence of all forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, relational, property, cyber, and bias-based bullying, and the prevalence of students involved in bullying (including perpetrators, victims, bully-victims, and bystanders) should be regularly collected, analyzed, and shared. This may be accomplished using the existing *Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (state-level), ensuring that bullying measures are included in the revamped *SurveyWorks!* survey (state-, district-, and school-level) currently being finalized to be fielded in Spring 2017, and/or other instruments that may be developed in the future. District-level bullying data should be to be collected, tracked, and publicly reported by RIDE.
- ◆ **Professional Development:** School districts and early childhood programs should implement and evaluate evidence-based bullying prevention training for adult professionals and volunteers who work directly with children and youth on a regular basis.
- ◆ **Evidence-Based Interventions:** Schools should implement evidence-based interventions and develop benchmarks for measuring effectiveness.
- ◆ **Targeted Interventions:** Schools and communities should explore programmatic opportunities for more specific vulnerable populations, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning youth; youth with disabilities; and youth who are overweight or obese.
- ◆ **Stigma- and Bias-Based Bullying:** Rhode Island should follow national research on stigma and bias in bullying behavior so that schools and/or communities can implement evidence-based programs to address stigma- and bias-based bullying behavior, including the stereotypes and prejudice that may underlie such behavior.
- ◆ **Build Positive School Climate:** Rhode Island should include measures of school climate (such as chronic absence, suspensions, or bullying prevalence) as indicators of ‘school quality’ or ‘school success’ in its accountability system under the federal 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. These school climate measures would also be important to include on school- and district-level report cards.
- ◆ **Suspensions:** In addition to race and ethnicity, Rhode Island should collect, analyze and share district-level data on out-of-school suspensions and track disparities relating to LBTQ youth and youth with disabilities.
- ◆ **Mental Health Screening and Treatment:** School social workers should be encouraged and supported in assessing for PTSD, depression, and suicidal ideation/behaviors when students are involved in bullying situations.
- ◆ **Engage Adults and Youth:** Ensure that youth, parents, teachers, counselors, other school staff and administrators such as school resource officers, lunchroom and recess monitors, bus drivers and aides, cafeteria workers, custodians, staff and volunteers at local community organizations, and health care providers (including physicians and mental health professionals) are involved in bullying prevention and intervention efforts. Youth who have more connections with peers and trusted adults are less likely to be bullied and in some cases may serve as a protective mechanism from targeted bullying. Schools should explore opportunities for peer-led bullying prevention programming.

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