



**Bullying in Minnesota Schools:  
An analysis of the Minnesota Student Survey, 2010  
Brief: School Factors**

In 2010, the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) included two questions regarding relational bullying and over 130,000 sixth-, ninth- and twelfth-grade students responded to those questions. The responses were analyzed in relation to other questions regarding risk and protective factors, including experiences of victimization across environments, school factors, community connections and interpersonal relationships, family characteristics and environment, and personal characteristics. This analysis is organized into separate briefs for each category, and includes a literature review, the MSS data, as well as recommendations for bullying prevention and intervention in schools.

The student categories presented in this report are based on the response patterns to the following questions:

- *During the last 30 days, how often has another student or group of students made fun of or teased you in a hurtful way, or excluded you from friends or activities?*
- *During the last 30 days, how often have you, on your own or as part of a group, made fun of or teased another student in a hurtful way or excluded another student in from friends or activities?*

Of those students participating, 42.9 percent reported no involvement in bullying. Thirty percent (30.7%) said they had made fun of, teased, or excluded others once or twice in the last month, and 27.2% said they had experienced those things once or twice in the past month, which does not constitute bullying or victimization at this rate.<sup>1</sup> Of those remaining, 12.6 percent were classified as *victims* (were made fun of, teased in a hurtful way, or excluded from friends or activities by others with a frequency of weekly or more), 9.3 percent were classified as *bullies* (engaged in the actions listed above toward victims with a frequency of weekly or more), and 3.1 percent were *bully/victims* (bullied and victimized at least weekly).

Throughout the reports in this series, several findings emerged consistently.

- Students regularly involved in bullying incidents, whether victim, bully or bully/victim (*bullying-involved students*), have high rates of associated experiences, most of them negative.
- The data in these reports indicate that those classified as bullies have been victims of maltreatment themselves, in many cases.
- Nearly half of all students responding had *no* involvement with bullying as a victim or a bully. Across analyses, the “never involved” group had the lowest incidence of risk factors and the highest frequency of protective factors.

Further information regarding the Minnesota Students Survey can be found in the *Brief: Methodology*, and include the definitions of the terms used in all the briefs.

### ***Literature Review***

Public awareness of bullying in schools has steadily increased as research and high profile cases continue to gain public attention. Concerns regarding bullying in school and its effect on students and school climate were highlighted for school staffs as the result of the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Secret Service reports on the school rampage shootings that occurred at the end of the 1990's. One of the 10 findings of the first report, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative* was "Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack" (Vossekuil, B, et. al. 2002). Preventing bullying was identified as one element in preventing school violence.

According to a recent study by The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the U.S. Department of Justice, 160,000 students of all ages stay home from school every day to avoid the stress that comes from being confronted by a bully or bullies. Students who are bullied report not feeling safe in school (Stockdale, Hangaduambo & Duys, 2002). This stress and fear has academic consequences. Peer exclusion is linked to reduced classroom participation; chronic peer abuse results in an increase in school avoidance. Children who experience bullying may have poor school performance and attendance (Dempsey & Storch, 2008, Espelage & Holt, 2001). Reduced classroom participation and school avoidance predict lower academic achievement (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). Youth who experience multiple victimizations earn lower grades (Holt, et al 2006).

Several studies indicate that students who are bullied, students who bully and bully/victims were more likely to carry a weapon, (Stein, 2007) were more likely to say that it was not wrong to take a gun to school (Glew, 2008), or to report carrying weapons to school and setting fires (Srabstein, 2008). Nationally, 6 percent of US students reported carrying a weapon on school property in the last 30 days and more boys (9%) than girls (3%) did so (Dinkes, Kemp, Baum & Snyder, 2009, CDC YRBS 2009).

### ***School Factors***

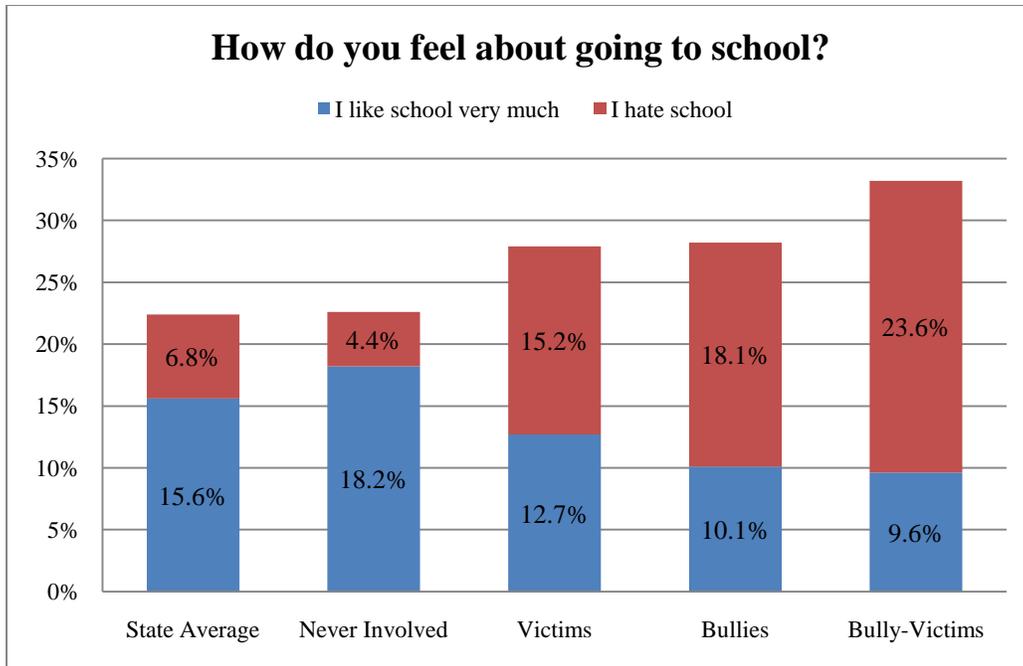
The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) includes questions about student behaviors and attitudes related to school, including academics—grades and school plans, truancy and enrollment, perceptions of care from adults and peers, perceptions of physical and emotional safety in school, experiences of victimization and carrying a weapon in school.

Students regularly involved in bullying incidents (bullying-involved students), whether victim, bully or bully/victim, have high rates of associated experiences, most of them negative. A comprehensive review of the associations of bullying to other forms of victimization, and understanding of how bullying can affect a student's perceptions of care from the people they most need support from—caring adults and caring peers—will aid school administrators, family members and staff in creating safe school environment for all students.

### ***Attitudes Towards School***

Students were asked "How do you feel about going to school?" The response options included "I like school very much", "I like school quite a bit", "I like school a little", "I don't like school", "I hate school."

Given the level of reported victimization of bullying-involved students, it is not surprising that these students also report hating school at a high level. The percent of students across Minnesota reporting, "I hate school" is 6.8 percent. Bullying-involved students indicated hating school at the rate of between 15 percent and 24 percent. Only 4.4 percent of students who were never involved in bullying reported hating school (Chart: How do you feel?).



### ***School Plans***

Students were asked about their school plans—whether they plan to quit school, “as soon as I can”, finish high school, go to a trade or vocational school, go to college or go to college and then go on after college to graduate or professional school. The state average for reporting the desire for quitting school is 1.3 percent. The students who reported that they had never experienced or participated in bullying are more likely to say that they will continue on with education, 91.4 percent plan to attend college or more. A lower percentage of the students involved in bullying have such plans (82.4% for victims, 79.7% for bullies and 75.7% for bully/victims). A small but significant percentage bullying-involved students want to quit school, (4.9% of victims, 5.1% of bullies), especially the bully/victim, where 9.2 percent want to drop out of school as soon as they can. This number is especially significant when considered in the context of statewide numbers. In 2009, the four-year dropout rate in Minnesota was 5.5 percent (Minnesota Department of Education, 2009).

### ***Truancy***

Students were asked, “how many days have you skipped school in the last 30 days?” The response options were: “Never”, “once or twice”, “3-5 times”, “6-10 times”, “more than 10 times.” In addition, they were asked, “during the last 30 days, how many days did you not go to school because you felt you would be unsafe at school or on your way to or from school?” The response options were: “0 days”, “1 day”, “2-3 days”, “and 4-5 days”, “6 or more days.”

Bullying experiences appear to have an effect on attendance. Across the state, 25.1 percent of students reported skipping at least one day of school in the last month. Victims, bullies and bully/victims were more likely to report skipping school. Of students who were classified as victims, 30.9 percent reported skipping a day or more of school in the past month. Forty-one percent of bullies and 42.7 percent of bully/victims have skipped a full day. These numbers are somewhat interesting, as one might suspect that victims are especially likely to skip school out of fear for safety (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010).

While this certainly does happen, the data from this survey suggest that bullies and bully/victims are more likely to skip school on a semi-regular basis. Those who are victims of bullying at school are more likely to skip school due to fear for their safety, but less likely to skip school overall, when compared to bullies. As usual, bully/victims have the worst outcomes and are most likely to skip school out of fear or for other reasons (Table 1).

**Table 1: Truancy**

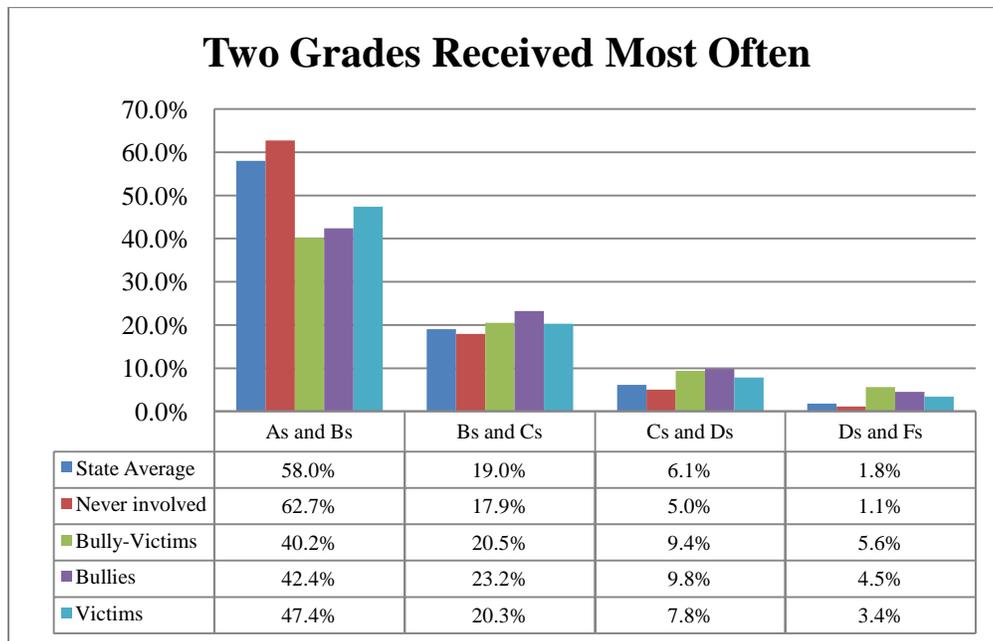
	State Average	Never Involved	Victims	Bullies	Bully/Victims
<b>Skipped school</b>	25.1%	21.3%	30.9%	41.1%	42.7%
<b>Did not go to school because it felt unsafe</b>	5.4%	1.3%	18.4%	13%	24%

**Academic Achievement**

Students were asked to indicate the two grades they get the most often. Bullying-involved students, especially bully/victims, are more likely to report receiving failing grades than those who are not involved in bullying incidents.

Bullies are more likely to get D’s and F’s, (4.5% vs. 1.1%) and are more likely to report getting F’s only (1.2% vs. 0.3%) than students who never experience bullying. Victims are more likely than never involved students to receive D’s and F’s, or F’s only (4.5% vs. 1.8%). Youth who are never involved in bullying, in contrast, were more likely to receive A’s and B’s than bullying-involved students.

Bully/victims are less likely to report that they are excelling in school—receiving A’s or A’s and B’s only (42.4% vs. 66.1% for “nevers”)—and they are more likely to say that they are failing—receiving D’s and F’s (8.9% vs. 1.7% of the “nevers”). Overall, the reported grades of students who are regularly involved in bullying are in inverse proportion to the students who never are involved in bullying (Chart: Grades Received).



**Perceptions of Care—Students**

Students were asked if “students in your school have made fun of or threatened students of other races,” if the “students in your school are friendly,” and if “friends care about you?” Bullying-involved students have a different perception of other people’s behaviors from students who are not regularly involved in bullying incidents. For instance, at twice or more the rates of the state average, students who bully are more likely to report that all or most students in the school threaten or make fun of students of other races in the school. Experiencing bullying either as a bully or a victim seems to increase awareness or perception of harm to others (Table 2).

**Table 2: Perceptions of care—students**

<i>Negative Items</i>	<b>State Average</b>	<b>Never Involved</b>	<b>Victims</b>	<b>Bullies</b>	<b>Bully/Victims</b>
<b>All or most students threaten or make fun of other races</b>	11.6%	6.1%	27.5%	29.2%	37.7%
<b>Few or no students are friendly</b>	8.4%	4.1%	25.9%	18.2%	29.6%
<b>Friends care not at all or a little</b>	8.0%	4.5%	24.4%	15.0%	27.2%

<i>Positive Items</i>	<b>State Average</b>	<b>Never Involved</b>	<b>Victims</b>	<b>Bullies</b>	<b>Bully/Victims</b>
<b>All or most students are friendly at school</b>	60.0%	71.2%	31.4%	43.4%	30.0%
<b>Friends care very much or quite a bit</b>	76.3%	83.8%	53.4%	65.9%	50.3%

Victims, bullies, and bully/victims are more likely to report that some or few or none of “students are friendly.” Both victims and bully/victims (as well as bullies) are less likely to report that their friends care about them than the students who report no bullying experiences. Bullies seem to have a more positive outlook on peers than victims and bully/victims, but less so than the state average.

Students who have not been regularly involved in bullying incidents report that their friends care about them at a higher rate than bullying-involved students. Those students’ perceptions that friends care drops significantly.

**Perceptions of Care and Respect—Teachers and Staff**

Similar to their perception that students and friends do not care about them, bullying-involved students report perceptions of care from teachers and staff at a lower rate than the general population and those never involved in bullying. For instance, one-and-a-half to two times as many students who bully compared to those who are never involved report that teachers do not respect them. They are less likely to believe that teachers are interested in them as people.

Bully/victims are more likely to state that some or few teachers are interested in them as people and are twice as likely to say that some, few or no teachers show respect. Victims and bullies are less likely to report that friends, teachers or other community adults care “about you some or very much”; these students are more likely to say that people “don’t care about you at all” (Table 3).

**Table 3: Perceptions of care and respect—teachers and staff**

	State Average	Never Involved	Victims	Bullies	Bully/Victims
Teachers respect students (all or most)	79.2%	84.6%	68%	60.1%	54.2%
Few or no teachers respect students	9.0%	5.7%	17.6%	22.2%	28.4%
Teachers interested in me as a person (all, most, some)	73.9%	79.3%	62.5%	59.1%	53.9%
Few or no teachers are interested in me as a person	26.2%	20.7%	37.5%	41%	46.1%
Teachers/Other Staff care quite a bit or very much	53.3%	59.8%	40.4%	36.0%	31.6%
Teachers or other staff care not at all	5.0%	3.0%	12.4%	13.8%	19.9%

***Perceptions of Safety***

Bullying-involved students are less likely than their peers to feel safe at school in general and specifically in bathrooms at school. They are also more likely to report that few students behave well in the hallways (Table 4).

**Table 4: Perception of Safety at School**

	State Average	Never Involved	Victims	Bullies	Bully/Victims
All or most students behave well in the hallways, lunchrooms	44.3%	54.2%	26.6%	28.9%	23.7%
Bathrooms are safe (agree or strongly agree)	83.2%	89.1%	67.7%	70.3%	60.4%
I feel safe at school (agree or strongly agree)	93.4%	97.3%	77.8%	83.1%	71.5%

***Guns, weapons in school***

The state average for students reporting carrying a weapon (other than a gun) on school property in the previous 30 days is 4.8 percent. Most students never bring a weapon to school. Girls and those who have no involvement in bullying are especially likely to report never carrying a weapon. Students regularly involved in bullying incidents are more likely than their peers to report carrying a weapon or a gun on school property in the last 30 days.

Of students who report being bully/victims, one-in-four had carried a weapon other than a gun to school in the 30 days prior to the survey. Approximately one-in-seven students regularly involved in bullying incidents reported carrying a gun on school property.

Boys who are victims or bullies carry weapons more often than girls who are victims or bullies. As in other categories, victims are more likely than the general population to carry a weapon, bullies are more likely than victims to do so and bully/victims reported the highest likelihood of carrying a weapon to school (Table 5).

**Table 5: Carried a weapon or gun**

	State Average		Never Involved		Victims		Bullies		Bully/Victims	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Carried a Weapon</b>	4.8% (n = 6293)		2% (n = 1135)		12.2% (n = 2012)		18.9% (n = 2245)		25.7% (n = 1025)	
	7.6%	2.0%	3.5%	0.7%	17.3%	6.4%	24.1%	10.0%	32.3%	14.5%
<b>Carried a Gun</b>	1.4% (n = 1872)		0.7% (n = 283)		4.8% (n = 793)		7.7% (n = 920)		13.1% (n = 521)	
	2.4%	0.5%	1.0%	0%	7.5%	1.7%	10.5%	2.9%	17.4%	5.8%

**Summary**

Students in Minnesota are likely to report similar experiences to those across the country where variables of school-related risks and bullying are concerned. Bullying-involved students are more likely to carry weapons, including guns, to school on a semi-regular basis and are less likely to perceive their schools as safe places to be. Victims, bullies, and bully/victims skip school more often than the average student, both due to fear for their safety and for other reasons. Attitudes toward school and perceptions of care from teachers are more negative for bullying-involved students than for their peers. Finally, bullying-involved students are less likely than other students to report getting As and Bs on their report cards.

Although bullying-involved students did not report supports in a frequency as high as those not involved in bullying, some positive results were found. Over half of victims, bullies, and bully/victims reported that their friends care about them “very much” or “quite a bit”. Similarly, over half reported that at least some teachers were interested in them as a person, and over one-third reported that teachers care about them “very much” or “quite a bit”.

Students involved in bullying in any way—as bullies, victims, or bully/victims—are at a greater risk for negative experiences in school. While some report positive support such as caring teachers and friends, these assets exist at a lower rate for bullying-involved students than for students who have no involvement in bullying.

**Recommendations**

***Prevention and intervention***

Bullying is best prevented by working to reduce its prevalence, increasing the capacity of adults and students to identify and respond, and utilizing formative (non-punitive) discipline. (Morrison, 2011). To prevent bullying, school staff need to be intentional and consistent in teaching the skills of respect, responsibility and reparation/restoration (Morrison, 2007).

***Tiered levels of support***

Implementing and maintaining a comprehensive, whole-school bullying prevention or positive school climate program using tiered levels of support is necessary to re-affirm, restore and re-build relationships damaged by bullying (Hopkins, 2004, Morrison, 2007).

***Increase bystander and adult skills to intervene***

Teach all students how to intervene assertively—walk away, support the child who is the target, report to a responsible adult, or assertively tell the child who is bullying to stop. Adults can treat all students with respect, help all students look valuable in the eyes of their classmates, and learn to intervene in a non-shaming manner to harmful, hurtful behaviors (Pepler, 2007).

### ***Promote students' assets and protective factors***

Adults should build students assets and strengths by providing both students who bully and students who have been bullied opportunities in school and out of school to build social skills, find safe places to contribute to the school or community, and connect with caring adults (Benson, 2008).

### ***Differentiate discipline and expand interventions***

If a student is identified as bullying other students, in addition to any disciplinary intervention sanctioned by the school, the student should be referred to student assistance staff to explore other experiences of victimization in their life, whether in the family, community or in dating relationships. School policy should allow administrators to differentiate discipline that is formative rather than punitive. (See PrevNet, <http://prevnet.ca/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx> > Downloads > formative consequences.)

### ***Attend to the needs of the victim***

Districts should establish a policy of attending to the needs of victims of bullying, which may include discussions with student support staff, family members and family health care providers. Interventions such as restorative measures, when applied by a trained, experienced restorative facilitator, can help address the needs of victims, bullies, and other affected parties (Anderson, 1977).

### ***Educate school staff***

Teach principals, deans, assistant principals, behavior specialists and staff about the associated behaviors and experiences of victims, offenders and bully-victims. Because the students regularly involved in bullying experiences may have other forms of victimization or trauma, all staff should be trained in the universal precautions for trauma informed care (Hodas, 2006).

### ***Coordinate policy, curriculum and practice***

Interconnect bullying data, research, prevention and intervention best practices and that of other victimizations, risk behaviors or perpetration in curriculum, policy and practice. See the Common Principles of Effective Practice regarding “coherent alignment of policies and practices” (implementation teams, continuous feedback loop, shared vision, collaboration, data support, professional development) at: <http://education.state.mn.us> > Implementation of Effective Practice.

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<sup>i</sup> Both questions had the response options of “never”, “once or twice”, “about once a week”, “several times a week” or “every day”. A calculated response option for both questions was created that included student responses of “about once a week”, “several times a week”, and “every day”. This category was renamed “weekly or more”. Definitions of bullying vary, but there are common elements, including an imbalance of power, intent to cause harm and repetition. According to the U.S. Government website on bullying prevention, StopBullying.gov, “incidents of bullying happen to the same the person over and over by the same person or group of people.” For more information, go to <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/>.

***Bullying in Minnesota Schools: An analysis of the Minnesota Student Survey, 2010***, was written by Annie Hansen, Ph.D., University of Minnesota; Allison Anfinson, Results Measurements Director, Minnesota Department of Education; Jennifer O'Brien, MPH, Adolescent Health Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Health; and Nancy Riestenberg, School Climate Specialist, Minnesota Department of Education. Carol Thomas is the Director of the Safety, Health and Nutrition Division, Minnesota Department of Education.

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