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STUDENT SURVEY
A NATIONAL NONPROFIT

Learning from Student Voice:
How do students experience bullying?

While bullying is a perennial problem in schools, it is one that students are often reticent to talk about openly. Students who are bullied often fail to report it out of fear of becoming a greater target, or because they may be uncomfortable coming forward. As a result, even the most involved school leaders may not know *how much* or *what kind* of bullying is occurring in their schools, as well as *why* students feel they are bullied . YouthTruth asks students directly about their experiences with school climate and culture — including bullying — through an anonymous online survey.

We analyzed data collected from nearly 80,000 public school students across the country in grades five through twelve, and uncovered three key insights:

1 Rates of bullying **vary widely across schools**.

2 Most bullying happens **in person, not online**. But when students are victims of cyberbullying, they are usually being bullied in person as well.

3 The **top three reasons** students believe they are bullied include their appearance, their race or skin color, and because other students thought they were gay.
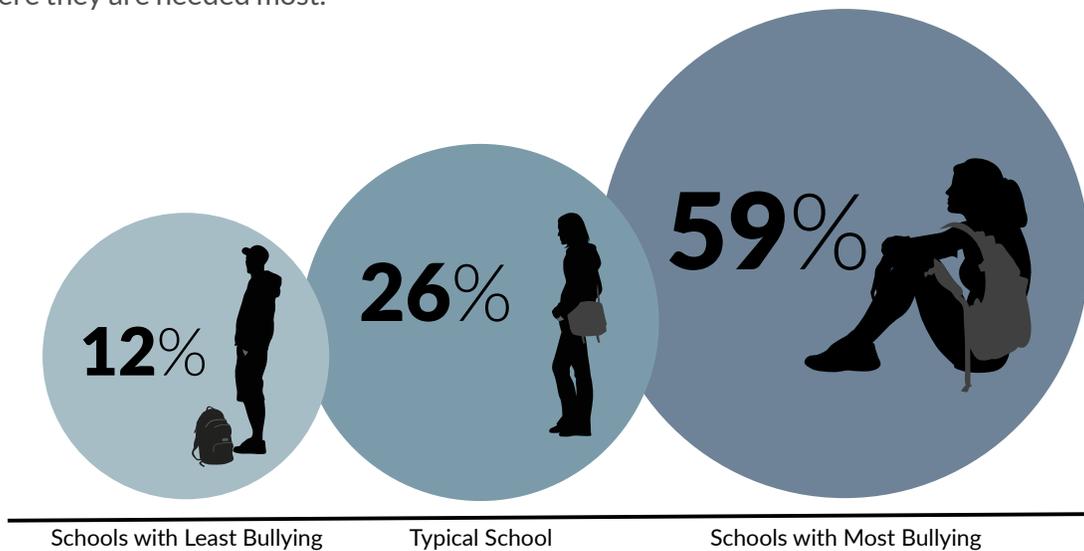
It is generally reported, and our data confirms, that nearly **one in four students** in America's public schools are bullied. While this broad statistic is a troubling but informative benchmark, our data reveals greater nuance in the range of bullying across schools. At one extreme, a full **59 percent** of students at a school whose students we surveyed reported being bullied. On the other end, the school surveyed with the lowest rates of bullying found that just **12 percent of students reported being bullied**.

1 in 4
students surveyed
reported being bullied.

This variation has critical implications for those leading school systems. It is unlikely that students are having uniform experiences with bullying across all schools in a district. Understanding the range of student experiences across different campuses can help prioritize resources and interventions where they are needed most.

12% **26%** **59%**

Schools with Least Bullying   Typical School   Schools with Most Bullying

Rates of Bullying

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2 **Most bullying happens in person, not online.**

Cyberbullying has been a hot topic over the past several years. However, the vast majority of bullied students still experience in-person harassment, not cyberbullying. Of those who were bullied, the most commonly reported type of bullying is **verbal harassment (79 percent)**, followed by **social harassment (50 percent)**, and **physical bullying (29 percent)**. **Cyberbullying** accounts for only **25 percent** of bullying.

But let's unpack what happens when students are cyberbullied. Our data suggests that cyberbullying does not stay online: of those students who experienced cyberbullying, **74 percent** were also verbally harassed, **68 percent** also reported being socially harassed, and **38 percent** also reported physical harassment. In short, cyberbullying does not exist in a vacuum, and often occurs in tandem with real-world harassment.

Types of Bullying

79% VERBAL HARASSMENT

50% SOCIAL HARASSMENT

29% PHYSICAL BULLYING

25% CYBER-BULLYING

Cyber-bullying doesn't stay online.

74% report also being **verbally** harassed

68% report also being **socially** harassed

38% report also being **physically** harassed

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3

The **top three reasons** students believe they are bullied are their appearance, their race or skin color, and because they were perceived as being gay.

What do students think is driving these acts of bullying? When asked why they thought they were being bullied, almost half of bullied students — **44 percent** — think it's because of **how they look**. Another **16 percent** believe they were bullied because of their **race or skin color**, and **14 percent** believe they were bullied because other students **thought they were gay** (regardless of how they actually identify).

When addressing issues around bullying, it helps to understand the reasons why students feel they are bullied. When equipped with this aggregate information, school leaders are better positioned to identify specific topics to be surfaced and concentrate on the highest-priority areas for changes in policy or culture.

Reasons for Bullying

44% of students say it's because of how they look

14% of students say it's because other students thought they were gay

9% of students say it's because of where their family is from

12% of students say it's because of how much money their parents have

8% of students say it's because of their sex or gender

16% of students say it's because of their race or skin color

9% of students say it's because of their religion

7% of students say it's because of a disability they have

When students have a venue to anonymously report their experiences of bullying, they may feel more comfortable sharing them. This allows school communities to gather more candid and accurate feedback. Student perception data can help teachers, principals, and administrators hone in on important insights — such as how many students feel they are bullied, in what ways, and why. Equipped with this information, educators can target their responses and allocate resources more effectively.

Students are the experts on their own experience. We believe this data provides an important comparative context for understanding student perspectives when it comes to bullying. We hope that these findings spark conversations within schools and communities about methods to identify and prevent bullying — and to incorporate student voice into those strategies.

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