

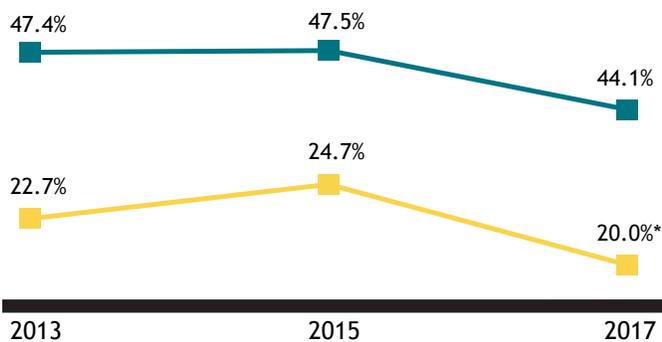
Bullying Prevention in Middle Schools

Background

Bullying can begin as early as kindergarten and continues through adolescence. Bullying on and off school property can have adverse effects on student health and academics.¹ In 2011, the Colorado General Assembly passed House Bill (HB) 1254, **Colorado's Anti-Bullying Law**, which increased district anti-bullying policy requirements, encouraged bullying prevention education, and tasked schools with creating school-level teams to help reduce bullying.² HB-1254 expanded the **definition of bullying** to include the following acts or gestures intended to coerce, intimidate, or cause physical, mental or emotional harm to a student:

The law protects students based on actual or perceived race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, religion, ancestry, or the need for special education services.

The **Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS)** is Colorado's only comprehensive survey on the health and well-being of young people, administered to secondary students during odd numbered years. The survey asks students about their experiences with bullying. Between 2013 and 2017, **middle school students** reported ever being bullied on school property and ever being electronically bullied at the following prevalences:



■ Ever been bullied on school property
■ Ever been electronically bullied
 *Significant difference from previous year at 0.05 level†

Bullying, as defined on the HKCS, is when one or more students tease, threaten, spread rumors about, hit, shove, or hurt another student over and over again. It is **not bullying** when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight or tease each other in a friendly way.

† Throughout this brief, a significance level of 0.05 is used - meaning there is a 5% risk of concluding that a difference exists when there is no actual difference.

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HEALTHY KIDS COLORADO SURVEY COLORADO HEALTHY SCHOOLS SMARTSOURCE



WRITTEN



PHYSICAL



VERBAL



ELECTRONIC

Demographic	Been bullied on school property in past 12 months	Ever been electronically bullied	Witnessed someone else being bullied on school property in the past 30 days	Skipped school because they did not feel safe in the past 30 days
% (95% Confidence Interval)				
Colorado	28.6 (17.8, 29.3)	20.6 (19.9, 21.2)	42.2 (41.3, 43.0)	15.2 (14.6, 15.8)
Sex				
Female	32.1* (31.1, 33.1)	27.0* (26.0, 28.0)	51.9 (48.6, 55.3)	53.4 (49.3, 57.5)
Male	25.3 (24.4, 26.3)	14.6 (13.9, 15.3)	48.1 (44.7, 51.4)	46.6 (42.5, 50.7)
Grade				
6th	30.5 (29.4, 31.6)	19.2 (18.2, 20.2)	29.7 (25.1, 34.3)	30.2 (25.0, 35.4)
7th	28.8 (27.1, 30.6)	21.7* (20.3, 23.0)	35.2 (30.5, 39.9)	35.8 (31.8, 39.8)
8th	26.7* (25.4, 28.0)	20.5 (19.4, 21.6)	35.1 (31.0, 39.2)	34.0 (27.7, 40.3)

*Significant difference by sex and grade (ref: 6th) at 0.05 level

Bullying Among Colorado Middle School Students

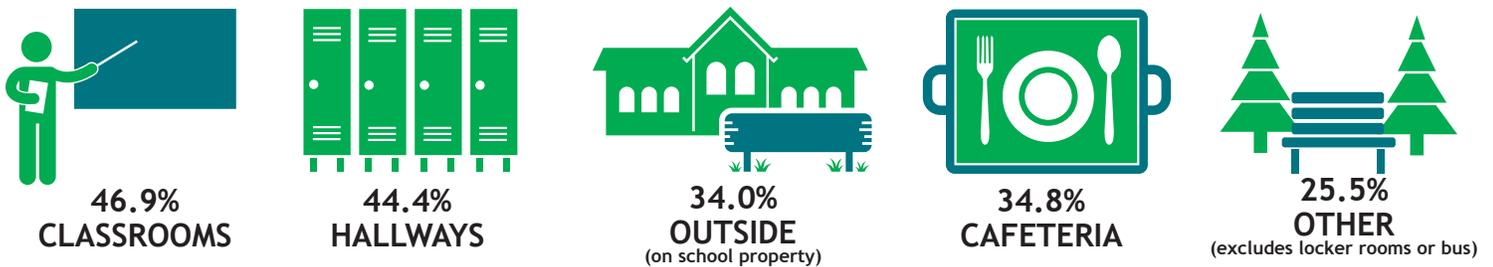
In 2019, the HKCS included new and modified questions about bullying to better understand bullying and victimization among middle school students. The updated questions allow students to report being bullied over the past 12 months versus if they had ever been bullied on school property.

WHERE ARE STUDENTS BULLIED ON SCHOOL PROPERTY?

Understanding where students are bullied on school property allows schools and districts to increase the ways in which they work to curb bullying. Strategies to prevent bullying include increasing the number of teachers in hallways during passing periods, providing bullying prevention training to bus drivers, or having more teachers outside after school.³

Females report bullying on school property and electronically at higher rates than males. 6th grade students experience bullying on school property at the highest rates, while 7th grade students experience more electronic bullying. Almost half of all students report witnessing bullying on school property.

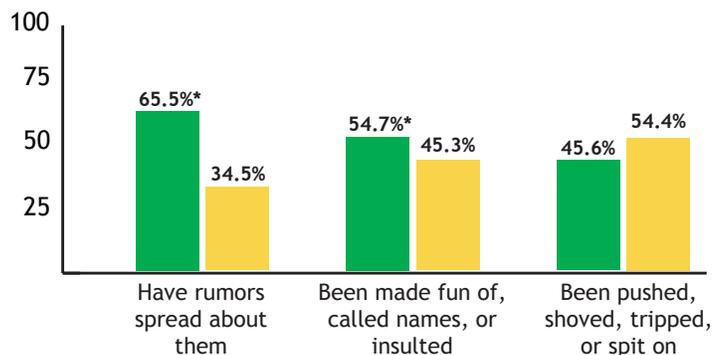
% OF STUDENTS WHO REPORTED BEING BULLIED ON SCHOOL PROPERTY BY LOCATION



HOW ARE STUDENTS BULLIED?

Knowing how students are bullied is critical for schools in developing bullying prevention and interventions. Female students report experiencing bullying by having rumors spread about them or being made fun of, while male students report experiencing bullying by being pushed, shoved, tripped or spit on.

% OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN BULLIED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS BY SEX

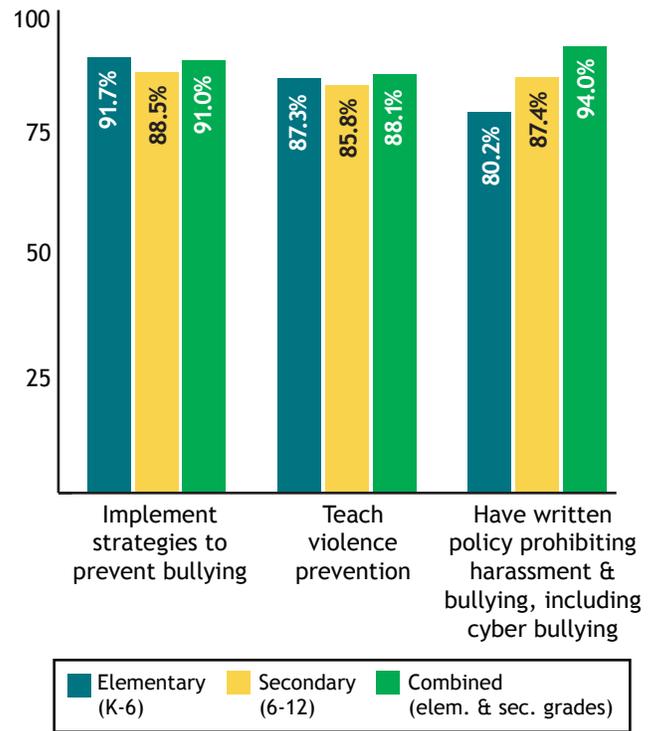


Bullying Prevention Practices in Colorado Schools

Bullying prevention is recommended for all school levels, including elementary. Early exposure to protective practices may help prevent bullying in middle school grades. Data on schools implementing strategies to address harassment and bullying in schools are collected through the **Colorado Healthy Schools Smart Source (Smart Source)**, the state's comprehensive inventory of school health best practices used to guide schools and districts in their health and wellness efforts. The Colorado Bullying Prevention and Education Best Practices and Model Policy is an additional resource for bullying prevention best practices. According to both resources, bullying prevention efforts should include, but are not limited to, engaging with **students, families, and community partners**.⁴

The majority of schools in Colorado align with best practices related to bullying prevention by implementing strategies to prevent bullying, teaching about violence prevention, and having an anti-bullying policy that includes cyber bullying.

% OF SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTING BULLYING PREVENTION PRACTICES



Impact of Bullying Prevention Policies and Practices on Student Health

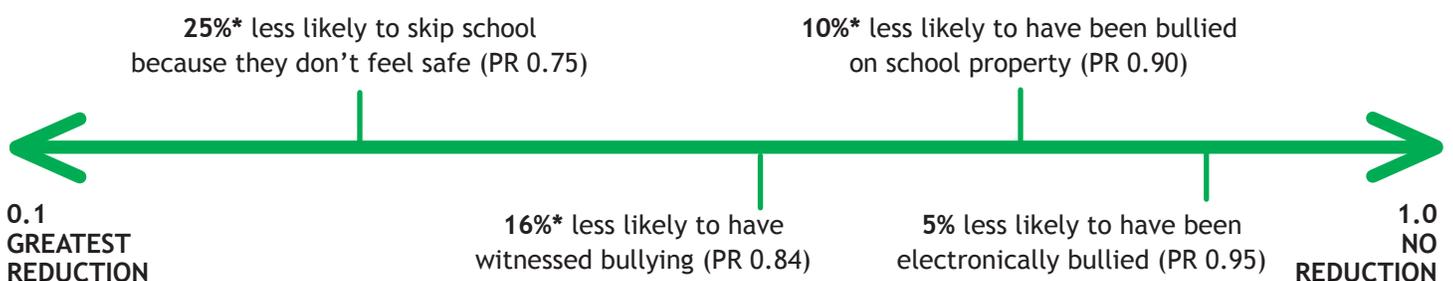
An analysis using results from the 2019 Smart Source & HKCS was conducted in order to explore the association between select bullying prevention strategies involving students, staff, or parents/guardians and bullying outcomes among middle school students. Middle schools were included if they participated in both surveys (n=155). When available, results are reported as prevalence ratios (PRs), used to measure the association between bullying prevention strategies in schools and student outcomes.

It is of note that regardless of whether schools implement select bullying prevention strategies (highlighted below), approximately 40% of students report witnessing bullying. Data on witnessing bullying can be leveraged to gain understanding on how students may reinforce, counter, or establish norms around bullying.⁵

PREVENTION INVOLVING STUDENTS

A best practice of bullying prevention education is to build student knowledge and engagement, such as sharing information about the consequences of harassment and bullying with students.⁴ 93.1% of schools report sharing this information with their students.

STUDENTS REPORT LESS BULLYING IN SCHOOLS THAT COMMUNICATE INFORMATION ABOUT CONSEQUENCES OF BULLYING AND HARASSMENT:



* Significant difference at 0.05 level

PREVENTION INVOLVING STAFF

Best practices for bullying prevention include **training school staff on the school's bullying prevention curriculum.**² It is important to include any **staff member that regularly interacts with students** in bullying prevention trainings, including teachers, administrators, coaches, support staff (e.g. counselors, nurses), and bus drivers.

In 2019, the majority of schools (72.9%) reported providing training to their staff on responding to bullying.



Staff training on bullying prevention can be improved by:

- ✓ Having a person clearly accountable for leading the training
- ✓ Requiring and providing the training before staff use the approach
- ✓ Using data on the training for continuous improvement⁶

These results are specific to trainings on how to respond to bullying and does not measure: (1) if these schools employ prevention curricula, or (2) what response to bullying is taught.

Students in schools that report conducting trainings for school staff experience **similar or marginally higher rates of bullying** compared to students in schools without such trainings.

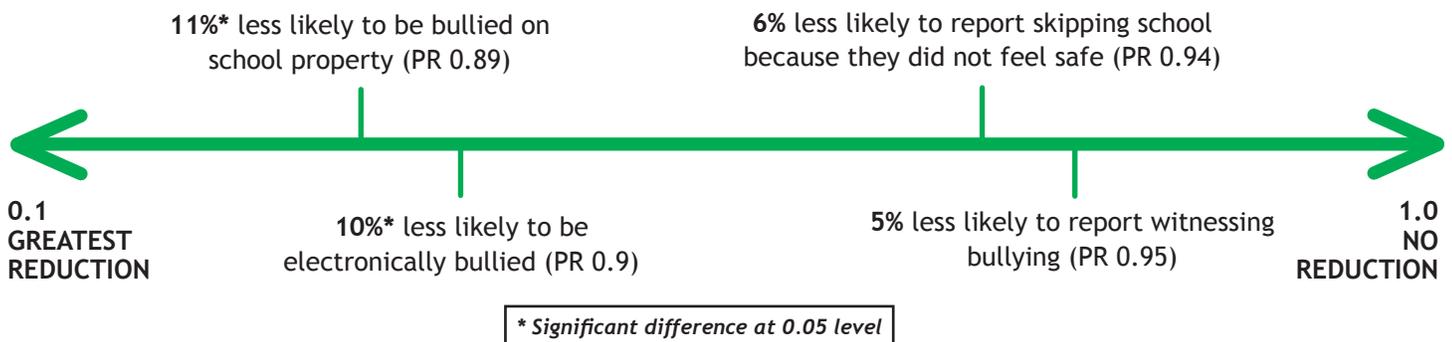
Due to the **cross-sectional** design of HKCS & Smart Source, causality should not be inferred. It is possible that schools with higher rates of bullying were more likely to implement trainings as a response.

When implementing bullying prevention trainings, schools should use **evidence-based programs** and consider improvement strategies where possible.⁶

PREVENTION INVOLVING FAMILIES (OR PARENTS/GUARDIANS)

Engaging parents and guardians in school-based bullying prevention efforts increases buy-in and support for these programs, as well as significantly decreases bullying incidence.⁷ In 2019, **84.5% of schools reported providing information to parents and guardians about harassment and bullying.**

STUDENTS REPORT LESS BULLYING IN SCHOOLS THAT PROVIDE INFORMATION TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS ABOUT HARASSMENT AND BULLYING



Key Takeaways

- Tracking **where** and **how** students are bullied on school property, and whether students **witness** bullying can inform bullying prevention efforts.
- Schools that engage students in bullying prevention efforts have students that are **less likely to skip school** because they feel unsafe.
- Schools providing trainings to school staff should focus on **evidence-based** bullying prevention practices.⁶
- Engaging parents in bullying prevention is positively associated with **decreased bullying** among students.
- A limitation of these findings is that the data are cross-sectional; therefore, causality may not be inferred. However, best practices in bullying prevention described in this brief are supported by studies demonstrating their **positive impact** on student safety and wellbeing.

Resources

1. Healthy Kids Colorado Survey & Smart Source: www.healthykidscolo.org
2. Colorado Department of Education: Colorado Bullying Prevention and Education Best Practices and Model policy: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/mtss/modelpolicypdf>
3. StopBullying.gov, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: stopbullying.gov

References

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