

# TRENDS & TUDES

Keeping you connected to today's youth audience

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## EDITORIAL

### Our Take On It



#### Dana Markow, Ph.D.

Vice President and Senior Consultant,  
Youth Center of Excellence

By focusing on school principals, GLSEN's recently released report, *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment*, brings an important voice to the conversation concerning this issue. Including the perspectives of multiple audiences is an important consideration in most research, and is particularly critical when it comes to research about children and schools. Schools have multiple stakeholders – students, teachers, principals, administrators, parents and the local community. All are invested in, and contribute to the success of America's public schools.

Previous research by GLSEN, MetLife®, AAUW and others have allowed students' and teachers' voices to be heard about the extent that bullying and harassment occurs in schools. Students tell us that bullying and harassment have an impact on their ability to learn by impeding their concentration during class, as well as making them reluctant to attend class in the first place. Name calling,

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## EDITOR

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## Bullying and Harassment in Schools – The Principal's Perspective

By Dana Markow, Ph.D., Vice President and Senior Consultant, Youth Center of Excellence

Reports of school shootings are shocking, disturbing, and sad. Schools are meant to be places where students feel safe and protected and can focus on learning. Fortunately, while school shootings grab headlines, they are relatively rare<sup>1</sup>. However, the matter of school safety is larger than the occurrence of a fatal attack. Although homicides on school grounds are not common, verbal and physical harassment of fellow classmates is prevalent and interferes with many students' education.

Research that Harris Interactive conducted for the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) in 2005 documented that two-thirds of secondary school students have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the past year because of their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ ethnicity, disability or religion<sup>2</sup>. In 2001, Harris conducted a survey on behalf of the American Association of University Women which found that eight in 10 secondary school students had experienced sexual harassment at some time during their school lives, and that the



impact of this harassment included decreased participation or attention in class, or not wanting to go to school at all<sup>3</sup>. Further, the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Violence in America's Public Schools – Five Years Later (1999)* demonstrated that one-third of 3rd through 12th graders were worried about being physically attacked in or around school and eight percent of students (representing nearly 2.8 million students) did not feel safe at school.

These studies have used the voices of students (and in several instances, the voices of teachers) to document the extent of the problem of bullying and harassment in schools. Missing from this conversation has been the views of school principals. Recently, Harris Interactive's Youth Center of Excellence conducted

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bullying and harassment all contribute to a school's climate, and feelings of safety. Research that Harris Interactive conducts as part of our School Poll program also sheds light on this issue. With the School Poll, Harris Interactive works with school districts across the U.S. to help give educators a clear understanding of "educational quality" as defined by each of their school district's key stakeholder groups, empowering the district with the knowledge necessary to accomplish its educational goals. An important aspect of the School Poll is that it incorporates the views of three key school stakeholder groups – students, teachers, staff and parents.

School safety is one of the factors measured to understand overall school satisfaction. An analysis of our current data base of the more than 116,000 students, who have participated in the School Poll in the past two years, reveals that 11% of secondary school students and 5% of elementary school students tell us that they do not feel safe at school. While the numbers may seem relatively small, safety has consistently proven to be a factor that has a high degree of impact on a student's overall satisfaction. Parents' assessment of the school safety situation is in line with their children's reports. Of the more than 35,000 parents recently participating in the School Poll, 7% feel that the school does not provide a safe environment for their child.

Programs and curricula that schools implement to address issues of name calling, bullying and harassment have the potential to improve individual children's ability to learn reading, math, science and other subject areas. They also provide instruction to students on how to interact with people from different backgrounds. A recent Harris Poll<sup>5</sup> found that a majority of U.S. adults (53%) believe that public schools provide a better education on getting along with

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## Bullying and Harassment in Schools – The Principal's Perspective

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research on behalf of GLSEN to close this gap. The recently released report, *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment*, is based on a survey of 1,580 K-12 public school principals. As school leaders, principals have a responsibility for the climate of teaching and learning in their schools and an important role in creating and maintaining a safe and welcoming environment in their school. The study highlights principals' assessment of the extent of the problem, as well as the policies, programs and training in place to address this issue. The survey examines these issues for students overall and for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students and families in particular.

Principals recognize the importance of awareness of bullying and harassment. Half of public school principals (49%) report that bullying, name-calling or harassment of students is a serious problem at their school. In fact, bullying and harassment is a serious problem in more

schools than is peer pressure to use alcohol or drugs, racial or ethnic differences or school violence. While bullying or harassment occurs at all grade levels, it is a particularly prominent problem at the junior high or middle school level. Three-quarters of junior high or middle school principals (74%) say that bullying or harassment is a serious problem at their school, compared to 43% of elementary school principals and 45% of senior high school principals.



### Serious Problems at School

*How serious of a problem are the following at your school?*

*Base: All qualified respondents*

% Very/Somewhat Serious	Total	School Level	
		Elementary	Secondary
Base	1,580	479	883
	%	%	%
Bullying, name-calling or harassment of students	49	43	57
Peer pressure to use alcohol or drugs	27	4	70
Other disciplinary issues	19	16	25
Racial or ethnic differences among students	16	13	23
Other school violence (fighting, weapons, gang involvement)	12	7	22
Religious differences among students	2	2	3

*Source: Source: GLSEN and Harris Interactive (2008). The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment (2008). New York: GLSEN.*

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people from different backgrounds, compared to private schools or home schooling. Public schools are also perceived as doing better than other forms of schooling when it comes to social skills with peers and physical education. Unfortunately, only 15% of U.S. adults say that public elementary



schools provide an excellent or very good education, and only 13% say the same about public secondary schools. Given that the local community is an important school stakeholder through its support of public schools with tax dollars, their dissatisfaction with the quality of American public education is cause for concern.

More information on this Harris Poll is available at [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/index.asp?PID=913](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=913)

<sup>5</sup>The Harris Poll® #59, June 2, 2008

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Students are harassed for a variety of reasons; the most common being the students’ appearance or their body size. Nearly all elementary and secondary school principals (97%) report that harassment for this reason occurs at their school, and two in ten principals (20%) report that students are frequently harassed for this reason. At the secondary school level, name-calling, bullying or harassment because of a student’s (or their family’s) sexual orientation or gender identity or expression becomes more common. Nine in ten secondary school principals report that their students have been harassed because of how masculine or feminine they are (95%) or because they are or are perceived to be gay, lesbian or bisexual

(92%). These levels are similar to harassment because of race/ethnicity (93%).

While most secondary school principals believe that their students have at some point been bullied, called names or harassed for a variety of personal characteristics, their assessment of the frequency of the problem differs markedly from that reported by secondary school students themselves or their teachers. Secondary school teachers and students are twice as likely as principals to report that students at their school are frequently bullied, called names or harassed because of the way they look or their body size (40% of teachers, 41% of students vs. 21% of principals). When it comes to harassment related to gender expression or sexual orientation, this gap in perspectives widens even further.

**Reasons Why Students are Bullied at Their Schools<sup>4</sup>**

*At school, how often are students bullied, called names or harassed for the following reasons?*

*Base: All qualified respondents*

% Very Often/Often	Secondary Public School Principals	Secondary Public School Teachers	Secondary Public School Students
	Total	Total	Total
Base	883	886	3102
	%	%	%
The way they look or their body size	21	40	41
How masculine or feminine they are	12	31	29
They are or people think they are gay, lesbian or bisexual	9	28	34
Their race/ethnicity	7	16	15
Their academic performance (2007)/ Their ability at school (2005)	6	24	17
They have an LGBT parent/ family member	3	N/A	N/A
Their religion	*	3	8

Source: GLSEN and Harris Interactive (2008). *The Principal’s Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment (2008)*. New York: GLSEN.

\*Less than 0.05%

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## What's New With Youth?

Order Your Copy of *YouthPulse<sup>SM</sup> 2007*

You need to know almost as much about the youth market as you would if they were all your own children. How they spend their time, how they spend their money, their hopes, fears and aspirations, and which parts of the kid experience are totally different today than they were a decade – or even a year – ago.

To learn more about YouthPulse or to purchase the 2007 study, contact us at **877.919.4765** or by email at [info@harrisinteractive.com](mailto:info@harrisinteractive.com).

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### Contact Us

To make suggestions regarding this newsletter or to discuss a business issue involving youth or the people and issues that influence today's youth, please contact us at **877.919.4765** or [info@harrisinteractive.com](mailto:info@harrisinteractive.com).

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This difference in perception is likely due to the differing nature of principals' and teachers' roles in the school, as well as their contact with students. Given that teachers and students spend more time with each other, teachers are more likely than principals to directly observe instances of name-calling, bullying or harassment. Principals recognize that their knowledge of the extent of these incidents may be lacking. Overall, two-thirds of principals (66%) believe that only half or fewer of bullying or harassment incidents that occur at their school come to their attention (79% of secondary school principals vs. 58% of elementary school principals).

What are schools and districts doing to address the issue of school safety? Nearly all principals (96%) report that their school or school district has a "safer school" or anti-bullying and harassment policy. However, fewer than half of principals report that their school's anti-bullying/harassment policy specifically mentions sexual orientation (46%) or gender identity or expression (39%). In addition, only two in ten principals (21%) report that their school has engaged in efforts specifically designed to create a safe environment for LGBT students (41% of secondary school

principals and 11% of elementary school principals). Yet the need for protection of these students may be greater than others. Only one-third (33%) of secondary school principals say that a gay, lesbian or bisexual student would feel very safe in their school and only one-quarter (24%) say

that a transgender student would feel very safe in their school. This contrasts with the three-quarters (76%) of principals who say a student from a minority religious group would feel very safe in their school and the two-thirds (64%) who say that a student from a minority racial/ethnic group would feel very safe in their school.

Looking to the future, principals emphasize the importance of professional development in efforts to reduce bullying or harassment. Six in ten principals (58%) report that their professional development efforts during the past school year addressed bullying or harassment and more than half (62%) indicate that the non-academic area where their staff needs the most support or training is bullying and/or harassment intervention and prevention.

### Reference List

- <sup>1</sup>Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).
- <sup>2</sup>GLSEN and Harris Interactive (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America: A Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: GLSEN.
- <sup>3</sup>American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (2001). *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School*.
- <sup>4</sup>GLSEN and Harris Interactive (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America: A Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: GLSEN.

## Team Spotlight

### Andrea Pieters

Research Assistant  
Youth Center of Excellence



Andrea poses with her niece, Clara.

Andrea Pieters started at Harris Interactive in January 2008 after graduating from Penn State University. There, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in both Advertising and Psychology. She interned with the Youth Center of Excellence team for the past two summers which helped to reinforce her interest in issues surrounding youth and research in general. She is very excited to be able to return and continue working with all of the great members of the YCE team. When she isn't working on youth research, Andrea enjoys practicing yoga, going to the movies, catching up on sleep, and spending time with her friends and family.

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## Recent Research for Public Release

### Accidental injury death rate of children 14 and under down by 45 percent since 1987, says Safe Kids USA 20th anniversary report

*But accidental injury remains #1 killer of kids*

The accidental injury death rate of children 14 and under has declined by 45 percent in the United States since 1987, yet accidental injury remains the nation's leading killer of kids, according to a new report released by Safe Kids USA.

#### National report findings

This comprehensive national report was undertaken by Safe Kids USA in celebration of the 20th anniversary of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network of organizations whose mission is to prevent accidental childhood injury. Entitled *Report to the Nation: Trends in Unintentional Childhood Injury Mortality and Parental Views on Child Safety*, the report examines accidental injury in the United States and its impact on children by age, gender and race, and reviews the changes in accidental childhood injury death rates in areas such as motor vehicle occupant injuries, drownings, suffocation (which includes strangulation and choking) and more. The report also compares current data to data from 1987 and 1997.

The report unveils many findings including:

- Only 58 percent of parents with children 14 and under report their child being involved in a serious accident or getting seriously injured as a major concern – a seven percentage-point drop since 1987.

- There is little change from 1987 to 2007 in the amount done by parents to ensure their child's safety – due to reasons varying from parents actually feeling the chance of their child being seriously injured is slim (especially fathers); to reporting that taking all the necessary steps are a hassle; to 20 percent of low income families (household income levels under \$25,000) saying many safety devices such as fire extinguishers and bike helmets cost too much.
- Yet when parents do take action, they are not always taking the right steps every time their child is at risk of injury. For example, 31 percent of households with children 14 and under do not consistently ensure their children ride in the back seat of a car all the time; 24 percent do not consistently supervise their children around the water all the time and 18 percent do not always ensure their children (under 10 years of age) are with an adult when crossing the street.

The full report is available on Safe Kids USA's website:  
[http://www.usa.safekids.org/tier3\\_cd.cfm?content\\_item\\_id=25671&folder\\_id=300](http://www.usa.safekids.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=25671&folder_id=300)

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#### Media inquiries, contact:

Tracey McNerney 585.214.7756  
[tmcnerney@harrisinteractive.com](mailto:tmcnerney@harrisinteractive.com)

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