
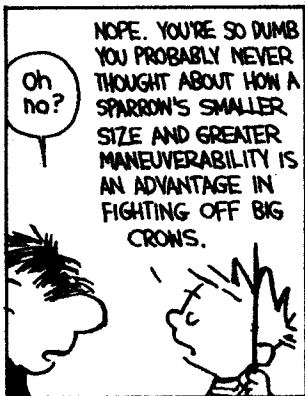
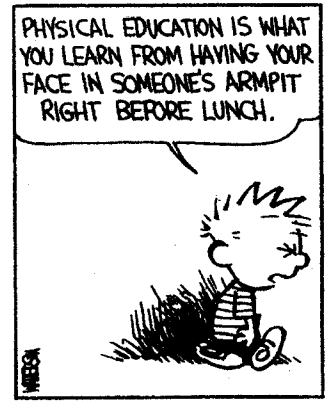
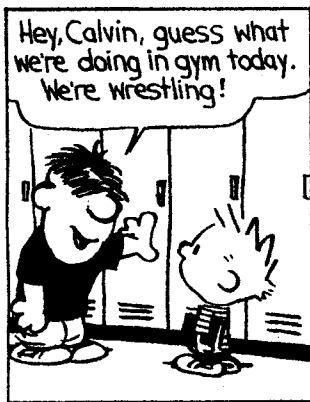


Calvin and Hobbes

by WATSON

SCHOOL'S OUT!
FREE AT LAST!

A survey of middle school students' experiences with bullying shows that kids want the adults in school to pay attention and keep them safe.

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How We Treat

When rising middle school students are asked to name their biggest worry about going to a new school, they most often answer, "That I will not have any friends" or "That people will make fun of me" (San Antonio, 2004). The prospect of being friendless or getting teased looms large for many students at this age and can profoundly affect their sense of affiliation with school. Students tell us with heartbreaking regularity of the pain and anger they feel when their peers do not see them, include them, or care about them. At the extreme, some students not only are treated with indifference but also become targets of bullying.

Devastating Effects

Olweus (1993) defines bullying as verbal, physical, or psychological abuse or teasing accompanied by real or perceived imbalance of power. Bullying

most often focuses on qualities that students (and the broader society) perceive to be different from the established norm, such as expected gender-specific behavior for boys and girls, dress and physical appearance, and manner of speaking. Bullying is connected to diversity, and reducing bullying means taking steps to make the community and the school safe for diversity of all kinds.

Research indicates that bullying—with its accompanying fear, loss of self-efficacy, anger, and hurt—negatively affects the school environment and can greatly diminish students' ability to engage actively in learning (Hoover & Oliver, 1996). Being bullied has been linked with high rates of school absence (Fried & Fried, 1996); dropping out of school (Weinhold & Weinhold, 1998); and low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Banks, 1997). A U.S. Department of Education study (1998) found that students who had experi-

enced sustained threats and verbal and physical peer aggression carried out two-thirds of school shootings.

Some researchers and practitioners believe that the impact of bullying is as devastating and life changing as that of other forms of trauma, such as physical abuse. The effects of bullying may linger long into the victims' adulthood (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelae, Rantanen, & Rimpelae, 2000). Recent research has documented increased levels of depression and anxiety in adults who had been bullied in their youth (Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006).

Because of the documented harmful effects of bullying—as well as other forms of social isolation—on school climate and student achievement, educators are taking this problem seriously. Many schools have explored the benefits of implementing schoolwide programs to promote social and emotional learning, prevent bullying, and nurture positive peer relationships.



Another in School

A survey of middle school students that we recently conducted in three schools provides information on bullying behavior that can inform such programs.

A Middle School Survey on Bullying

To measure students' experience with physical, verbal, and relational¹ bullying, we administered surveys in spring 2006 to 211 7th and 8th grade students in three K–8 schools in New England. The three schools differ significantly by race, socioeconomic status, and urbanicity. Rural School,² located in a small town, serves a student population that is socioeconomically diverse but is 94 percent white; 25 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Big City School is located in a low-income urban neighborhood and serves primarily Latino (65 percent) and black (33 percent) students; 93 percent are eligible for free

or reduced-price lunch. Small City School has a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse student body composed of 40 percent white, 36 percent black, 11 percent Latino, and 10 percent Asian students; 30 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

We surveyed nearly all the students in each grade, with the exception of 8th graders at Rural School, where we were able to survey only half of the class. The surveys included multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Respondents

were evenly split between boys and girls. Most of our findings were consistent with what other research has found and what middle grades teachers know about bullying in the adolescent years. Some of our most significant findings follow.

Extent of Bullying

Most students (76.5 percent) felt safe most of the time. However, students at Big City School reported feeling safe much less often than did their peers at the other two schools (65 percent, compared with 83 percent at Small City School and 81 percent at Rural School). They also feared bullying more, even though students at Rural School reported seeing it occur more often. We believe this reflects the greater incidence of community violence to which Big City School students are exposed.

Rural School was the only school in which a majority of students (about 2 in 3) said that bullying was a serious

