



From Teasing to Torment: A Report on School Climate in Arizona



A Report from GLSEN's Research Department

From Teasing to Torment: A Report on School Climate in Arizona

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When referencing this document, we recommend the following citation:
GLSEN (2005). *From Teasing To Torment: A Report on School Climate in Arizona*.
New York: GLSEN.

The **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network** is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. Established nationally in 1995, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

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KEY FINDINGS

Biased language was frequently heard in Arizona schools:

- A majority of Arizona students reported hearing homophobic remarks, such as “that’s so gay” (80%) or derogatory terms such as “faggot” or “dyke” (72%), from students in their school.
- Sexist remarks and negative remarks about a person’s gender expression, such as a boy being told he acts “too feminine,” were frequently heard in Arizona schools. Three-quarters (74%) of students reported hearing sexist remarks and over half (57%) heard negative remarks about gender expression from other students.
- Intervention by school authorities when hearing biased language from students was not as common as should be expected. Only a third of Arizona students reported that teachers or other school staff frequently intervened when hearing sexist or racist remarks and less than a quarter (21%) frequently intervened when homophobic remarks were made.
- Students heard teachers and other school staff use biased language as well—about a third (32%) of students heard school staff make sexist remarks, nearly a quarter heard homophobic (22%), and a fifth racist (18%) remarks from school staff.

Bullying, name-calling, and harassment were serious problems in Arizona schools:

- Less than half (46%) of students reported feeling very safe at school, while 44% reported bullying, name-calling and harassment to be serious problems in their school.
- Forty-two percent of respondents reported feeling unsafe at school on the basis of at least one personal characteristic, such as their physical appearance or gender expression.
- A third (34%) of respondents reported sexual orientation and gender expression to be the characteristics most often targeted for bullying and harassment in their school.
- A majority of students reported that people at their school were harassed or bullied at least sometimes because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (67%), their looks or body size (67%) or because of how they expressed their gender (63%).
- Verbal and physical harassment, particularly based on physical appearance, were not uncommon experiences.

Incidents of harassment and assault were often not reported to teachers and other school staff. When reported, responses of faculty and other school staff were often inadequate:

- A majority (57%) of students who had been harassed or assaulted in school did not report it to a teacher, principal or other school staff person.
- Thirty-nine percent of students did not report incidents to school authorities because they believed it would worsen the situation or school authorities would not take action to resolve it.
- Among students who did report incidents of harassment or assault, only about half (53%) said that some sort of immediate action was taken by school authorities.

LGBT students lacked access to resources and supports:

- Only a fifth (21%) of Arizona students reported that their school had a GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) or another student club that addressed LGBT student issues.
- Only half (52%) of Arizona students reported that they were protected by a comprehensive anti-harassment policy that specifically mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
- Students from schools without a comprehensive anti-harassment policy were more likely than students from schools with such policies to report verbal harassment. For example, students from schools without comprehensive policies were two times as likely to report

being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation and gender expression, and were 49% more likely to report harassment because of their looks or body size.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Arizona teachers and other school staff need training to address the inconsistency in their responses when learning of incidents of harassment and assault or when hearing students make derogatory remarks in school. In addition, schools should establish and enforce “no tolerance” policies regarding the use of biased language by school staff.
- Given that only about half of Arizona students reported being protected by comprehensive anti-harassment policies in their schools, state-level safe school legislation that provides specific enumerated categories, such as sexual orientation and gender, must be adopted.
- School staff and administrators must ensure that students are made fully aware of any anti-harassment protections provided by their school.

INTRODUCTION

In 2003 GLSEN conducted its third national survey of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) youth—the 2003 National School Climate Survey (NSCS), the only national survey to document the experiences of LGBT youth in school. Results from this survey revealed that school can be an unsafe and hostile environment for many students, particularly those who are LGBT. Name calling, harassment and bullying, as well as the use of derogatory language by students were common occurrences in our nation’s schools and were often not properly addressed by teachers and other school staff.¹ Given the limited attention paid by federal, state and local policy makers to LGBT youth, and because GLSEN’s work to make all schools safe for LGBT students is on-going, it is important to keep informed about the experiences of LGBT students in their schools. Understanding the experiences of the general school population, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, is key to meeting this challenge. GLSEN hoped to broaden the scope of its research by documenting the attitudes and experiences of all students in secondary school, particularly their attitudes toward and experiences with anti-LGBT behavior at school. For this reason, GLSEN commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a national survey of secondary school students and teachers. Topics covered in the survey included exposure to biased language, the frequency of bullying, name calling and harassment, and students’ personal experiences with harassment and assault at school. The full report from this study, *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America*, also includes results from a national survey of secondary school teachers, and can be found on GLSEN’s website (www.glsen.org). The following is a report of findings based on the responses of youth who were attending schools in Arizona at the time of the survey. Data collection and analysis of the national survey of students and teachers was conducted by Harris Interactive. Analysis of state oversampled data in this report was conducted by GLSEN’s Research Department.

RESULTS

A total of 154 respondents attended schools in Arizona at the time of the survey. As shown in Table 1, more than half of the students were white and over a quarter were Latino/a – the percentage of Latino/a students was much higher than in the national sample (6%). A majority were male high school students and attended public schools in urban or suburban areas (see Table 2). Close to a tenth of students in Arizona identified as LGBT,² which was also higher than the 6% of students in the national sample.

Biased Language in School

Biased Language From Students

Hearing derogatory remarks about oneself or others contributes to a hostile school environment for students. Thus, it is important to examine the frequency and pervasiveness of biased language in school. Students were asked how frequently they heard homophobic, racist, sexist and religiously-biased remarks from other students.

Homophobic Remarks

Homophobic remarks, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” were one of the most frequent types of biased language that respondents reported hearing from other students in Arizona schools. As Figure 1 illustrates, almost three-fourths of respondents (72%) said that they heard such remarks from students at least sometimes and nearly half (47%) reported hearing homophobic remarks often

¹ Kosciw, J. G. (2004). *The 2003 National School Climate Survey: The school-related experiences of our nation’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth*. New York: GLSEN.

² The category “LGBT” includes respondents who were transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning or “other.”

Table 1. Demographics of Arizona Participants

Race/Ethnicity

White	56%
Black or African American	5%
Latino/a or Hispanic	27%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%
Native American/Alaskan Native	2%
Mixed racial background	8%
Other race/ethnicity	<1%

Gender

Male	62%
Female	38%

LGBT Status

LGBT	9%
Non-LGBT	91%

Grade

5th	2%
7th	10%
8th	20%
9th	18%
10th	15%
11th	17%
12th	18%

Average Age = 15.1 years

Table 2. School Characteristics

Grade Levels

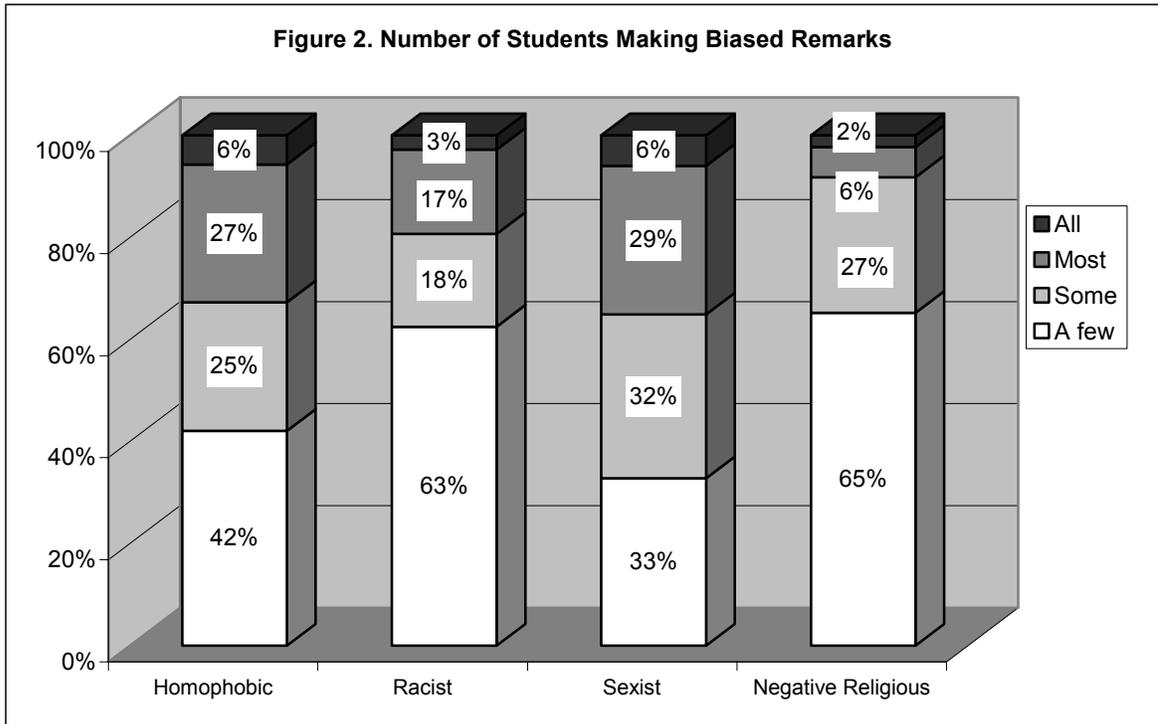
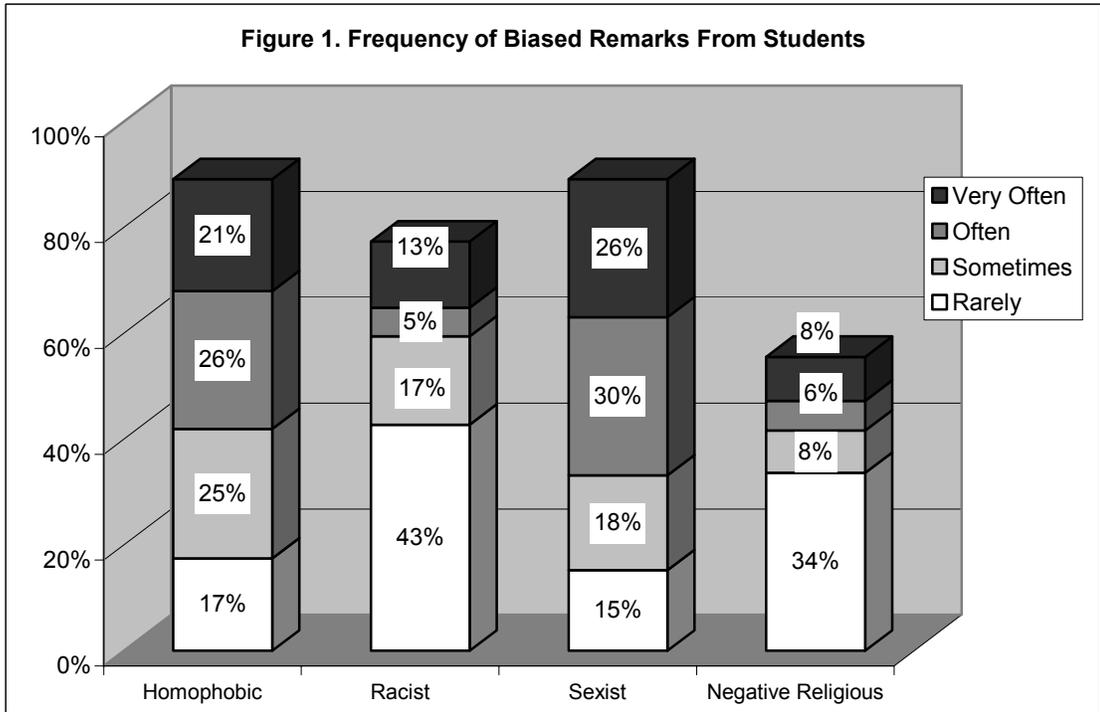
K through 12 school	4%
Elementary school	2%
Lower school (elementary and middle school grades)	<1%
Middle school	28%
Upper school (middle and high school grades)	1%
High School	65%

Location

Urban area	50%
Suburban area	36%
Small town or rural area	14%

School Type

Public school	93%
Private or parochial school	7%
<i>Religious-affiliated</i>	<i>7%</i>



or very often. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 2, use of such language was not limited to a few students—a third (33%) of respondents who reported hearing homophobic remarks said that they heard them from most or all of the students at their school.

An even larger number of Arizona students reported hearing homophobic expressions such as “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” – expressions commonly used to indicate that something or someone is valueless or stupid. Eighty percent of respondents reported hearing “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” at least some of the time and 60% heard these expressions even more frequently (see Figure 3).

Negative Remarks about Gender Expression

Youth who do not express themselves in ways considered to be gender-appropriate must often contend with negative reactions, such as being called names and being harassed, particularly at school.³ Respondents were asked how often they had heard remarks about individuals’ nontraditional gender expression, such as a male student acting too “feminine,” or a female student acting “too much like a boy.” Although less common than homophobic remarks, over half of the respondents (57%) reported hearing negative comments about someone’s gender expression at least sometimes, and almost a quarter (22%) reported hearing such remarks often or very often from their peers (see Figure 4).

Sexist Remarks

Sexist remarks, such as calling a girl a “bitch,” or saying girls are not as capable as boys, were commonly heard in Arizona schools. As shown in Figure 1, 74% of respondents reported hearing sexist remarks from students at least some of the time, and more than half (56%) said that they heard such remarks often or very often. Additionally, over a third (35%) of the respondents who reported hearing sexist comments said that they heard them from all or most of the students at their school (see Figure 2).

Racist Remarks

Although racist remarks were heard less frequently than homophobic or sexist remarks, they were not uncommon in Arizona schools. Over a third (35%) of respondents reported hearing racist remarks from students at least sometimes, and 18% said they heard these remarks often

Figure 3. Frequency of Hearing "That's So Gay" or "You're So Gay" in School

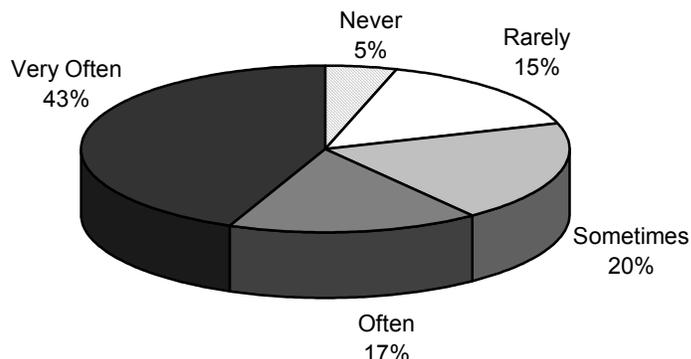
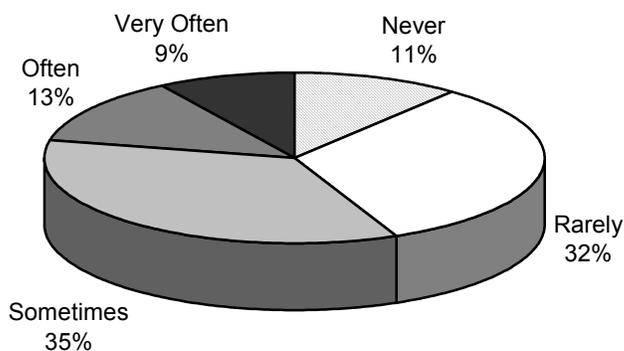


Figure 4. Frequency of Remarks About Gender Expression From Students



³ Kosciw, J.G. (2004). *The 2003 National School Climate Survey: The school-related experiences of our nation's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth*. New York: GLSEN.

or very often (see Figure 1). Furthermore, one-fifth (20%) of the respondents who reported hearing racist remarks said that they heard them from most or all of the students at their school (see Figure 2).

Negative Religious Remarks

Negative remarks about a person’s actual or presumed religion were least commonly heard by respondents. As shown in Figure 1, 22% of respondents reported hearing negative religious remarks at least sometimes, and 14% heard such remarks often or very often. Less than 10% of the respondents who reported hearing negative religious remarks said that they heard them from all or most of their peers (see Figure 2).

Biased Language from Faculty and Other School Staff

Hearing biased language from authority figures, such as a teacher or school principal, may send a message to students that use of such language in school is permissible. Accordingly, respondents were asked how often they heard homophobic, sexist, racist or negative religious remarks from faculty or other school staff. Although biased remarks from school authorities were not overly commonplace, given the possible impact on students, any biased language coming from educators is troubling. As shown in Figure 5, sexist remarks were the most frequently heard type of biased language—almost a third (32%) of respondents reported hearing school personnel make sexist comments. A sizable percentage of students also reported hearing homophobic (22%), negative religious (21%) and racist (18%) remarks from school personnel.

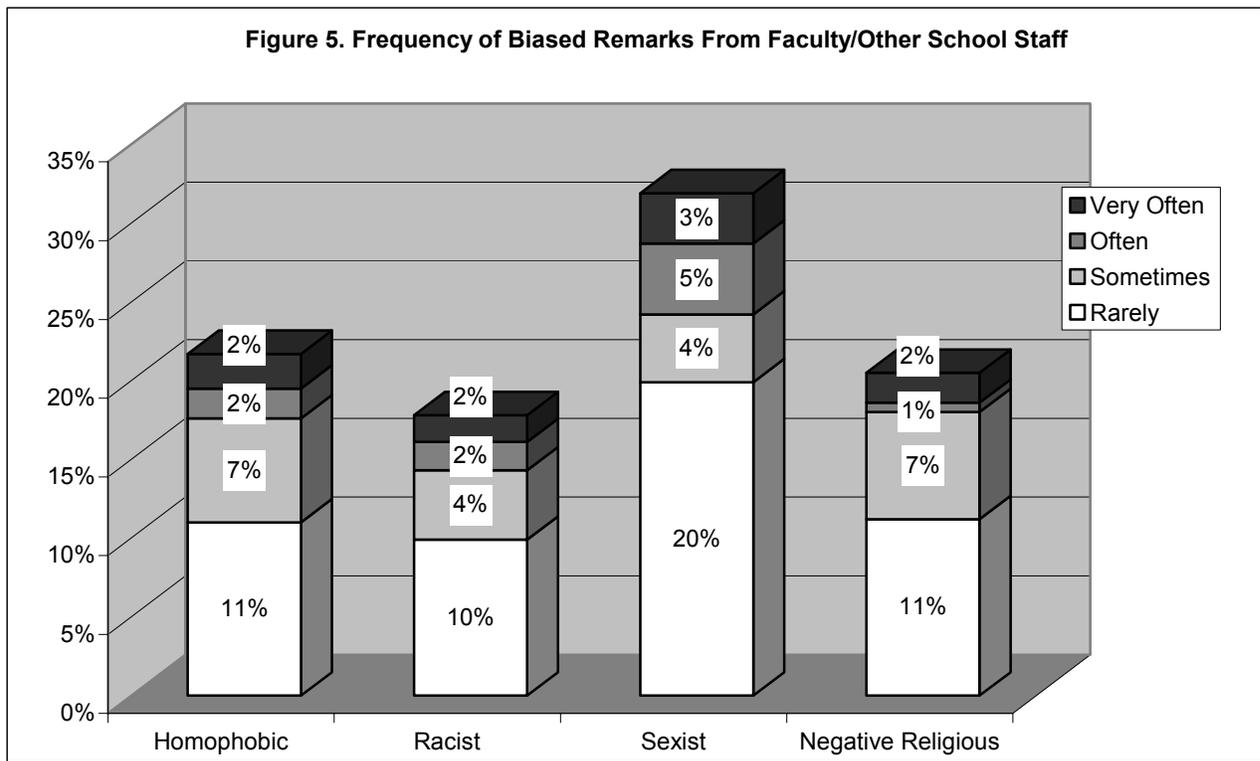


Figure 6. Presence of Faculty/Other School Staff When Biased Remarks Made by Students

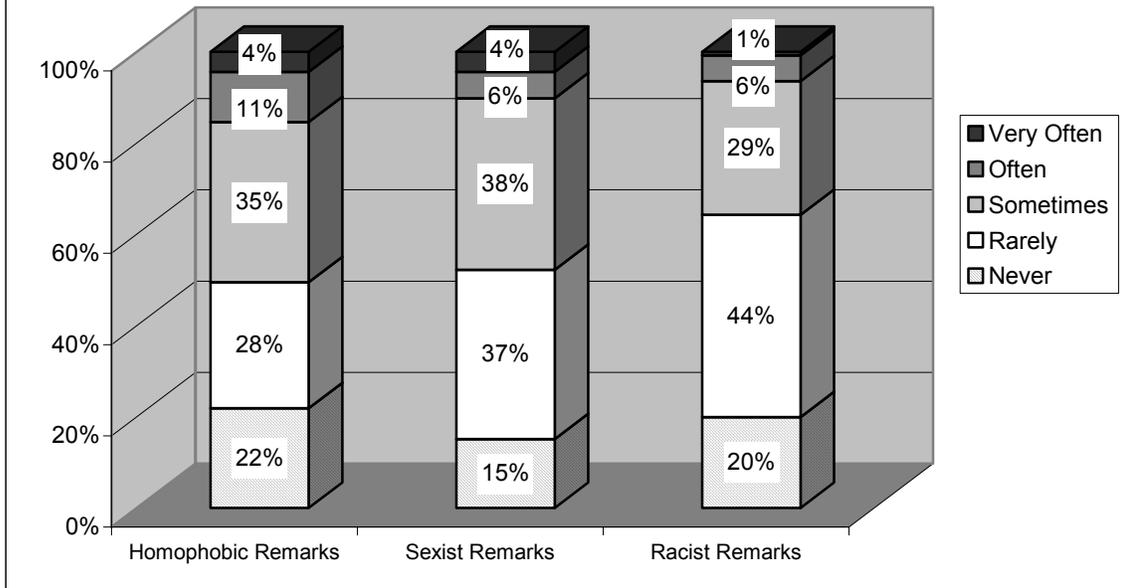
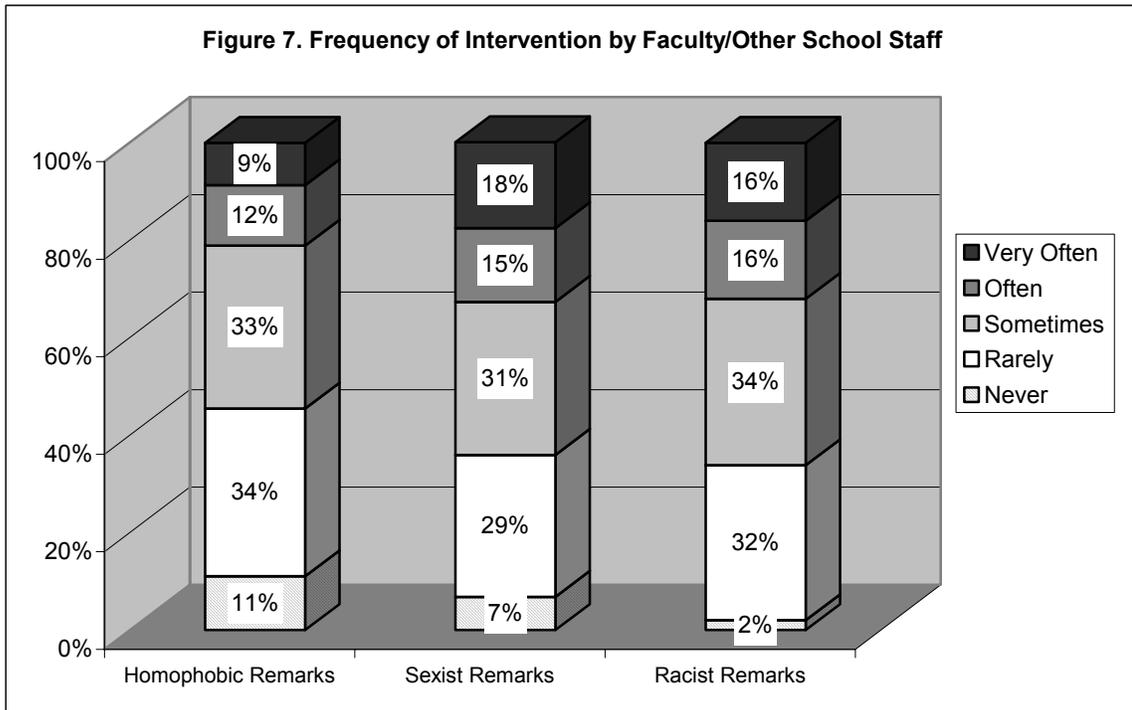


Figure 7. Frequency of Intervention by Faculty/Other School Staff



Intervention Regarding Biased Remarks

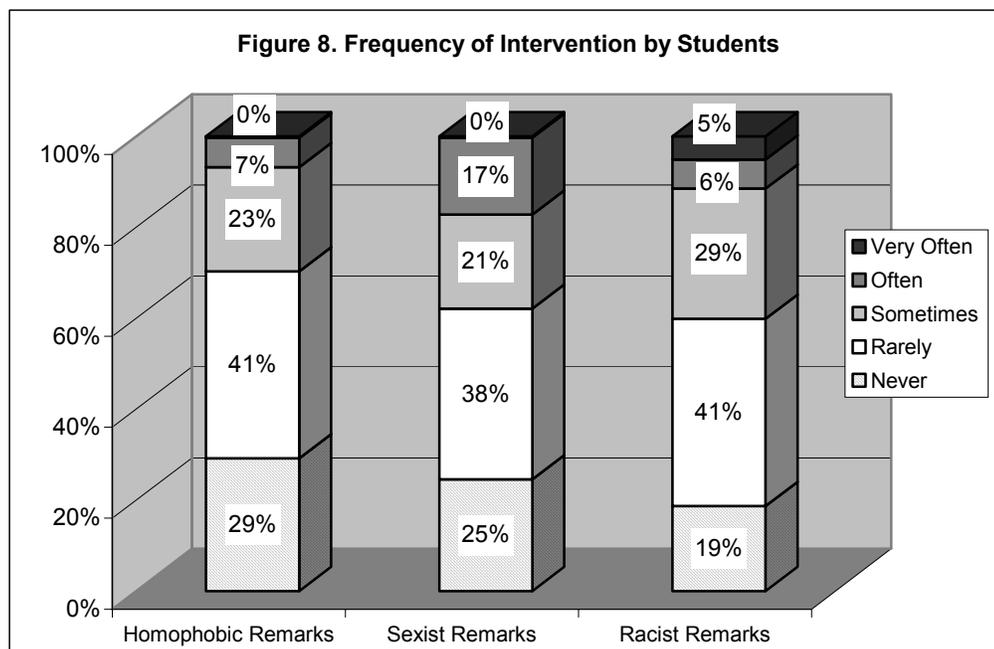
Intervention by Faculty and Other School Staff

In addition to the frequency of hearing biased language at school, respondents were asked how often teachers or other school staff were present when students made biased remarks in school, and how often they corrected or criticized these biased remarks. According to respondents' reports, students were less likely to make racist remarks when school staff were around than they were to make sexist or homophobic remarks. Two-thirds of respondents said that staff were never or rarely present when racist language was used, whereas about half said that staff were never or rarely present when sexist and homophobic remarks made (see Figure 6).

Many students reported that school personnel did not intervene when hearing other students make homophobic, racist or sexist remarks in school. As shown in Figure 7, nearly half (45%) of Arizona respondents reported that teachers and other school staff rarely or never corrected or criticized homophobic remarks made in their presence. A substantial percentage of students also reported that school personnel rarely or never corrected sexist (36%) or racist (34%) remarks. Although school staff were less likely to be present when students made racist remarks, they were more likely to intervene than when hearing homophobic language. A lack of consistent intervention by school authorities when overhearing students use biased language may send the message that such language is tolerated in Arizona schools.

Intervention by Students

The degree to which students intervene when hearing derogatory language from their peers is another indicator of school climate. Students' own failure to intervene may be indicative of a school atmosphere in which use of such language is considered acceptable. Thus, respondents were asked how often other students corrected or criticized biased remarks when they heard them at school. As illustrated in Figure 8, students usually did not intervene when other students used biased language. A substantial majority of respondents reported that other students rarely or never intervened in response to homophobic (70%), sexist (63%), and racist (60%) remarks.



Severity of Bullying, Name-Calling and Harassment in School

Survey respondents were asked about their perceptions of the severity of bullying, name calling and harassment in their schools. As shown in Figure 9, nearly half (44%) of respondents reported that these behaviors were at least somewhat serious issues troubling Arizona schools.

Respondents were also asked about the frequency of witnessing other students being bullied, called names or harassed in school. Figure 10 shows that students in Arizona schools were most commonly bullied, called names and harassed because of their actual or perceived sexual

orientation, physical appearance and gender expression. A majority of respondents reported that people at their school were harassed or bullied at least sometimes because they were (or people thought they were) lesbian, gay or bisexual (67%), because of their looks or body size (67%) or because of how they expressed their gender (63%). Furthermore, many respondents said that these types of harassment occurred often or very often (35% for sexual orientation, 37% for physical appearance and 33% for gender expression).

Although not as frequent, harassment based on a person's academic ability, race or ethnicity and family income were still common—43% of respondents said that students were harassed at least sometimes on the basis of their academic ability, 40% said students experienced harassment because of their race or ethnicity, and 37% said students were harassed because of their family income. Although harassment based on religion was reported to occur least frequently, over a quarter (28%) of respondents said that students experienced this type of harassment at least sometimes in Arizona Schools (see Figure 10).

As shown in Figure 11, when asked which characteristics were most often targeted for bullying, name-calling and harassment, the largest number of students reported that physical appearance was the most common characteristic (40%), followed by actual or perceived sexual orientation (26%). In addition, 12% reported race or ethnicity to be the most common reason people were bullied at their school. Fewer than 10% of students reported that students were harassed most often because of their gender expression, religion, academic ability or family income.

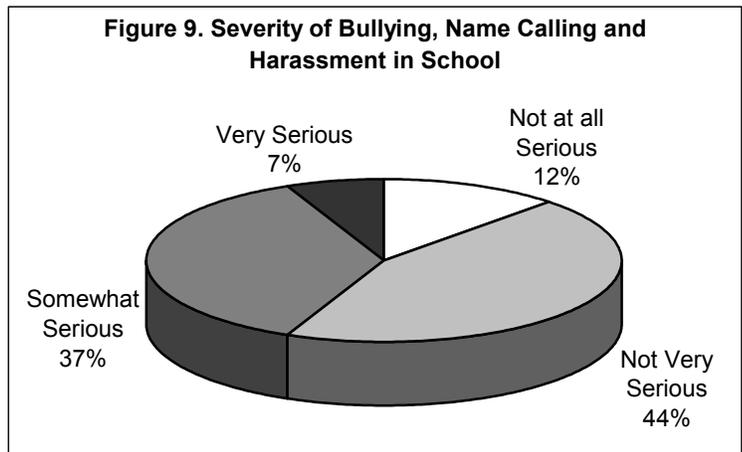


Figure 10. Frequency of Bullying, Name Calling and Harassment

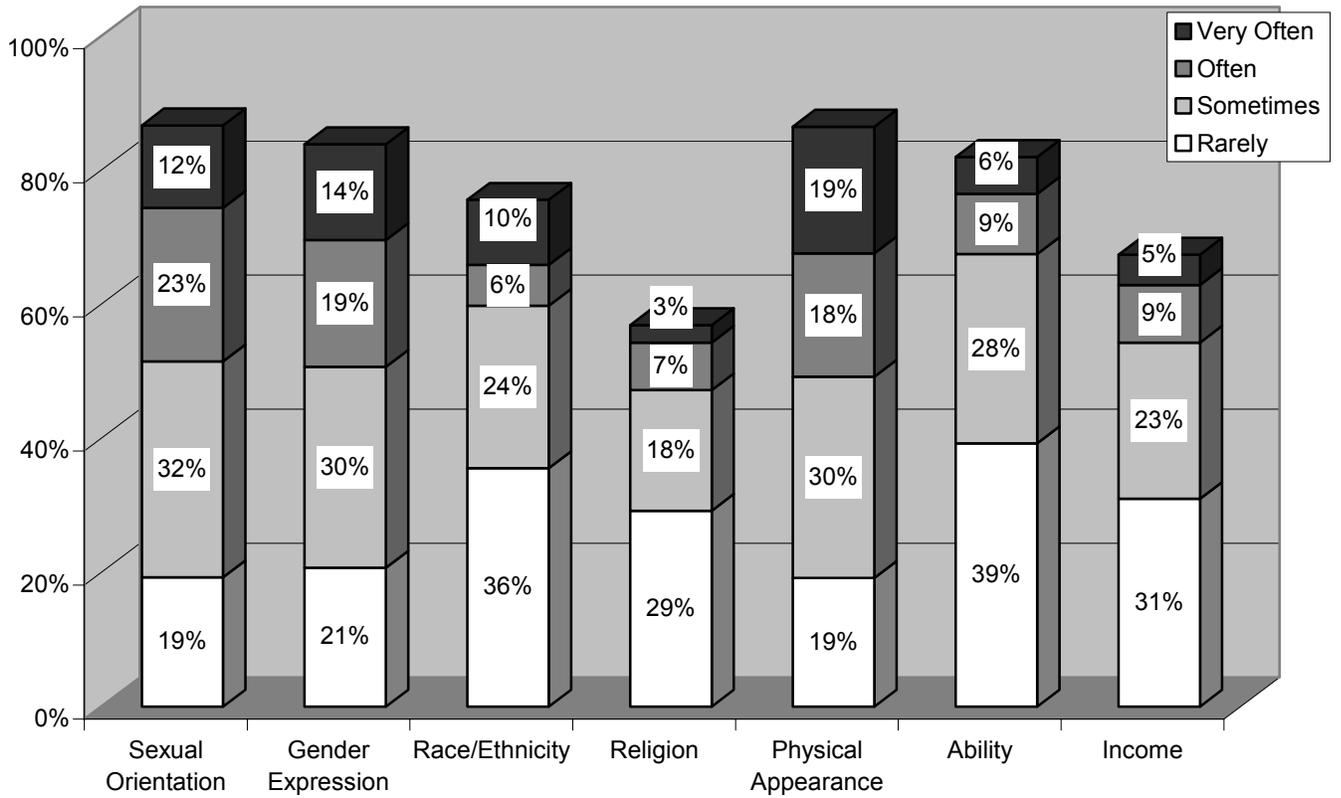
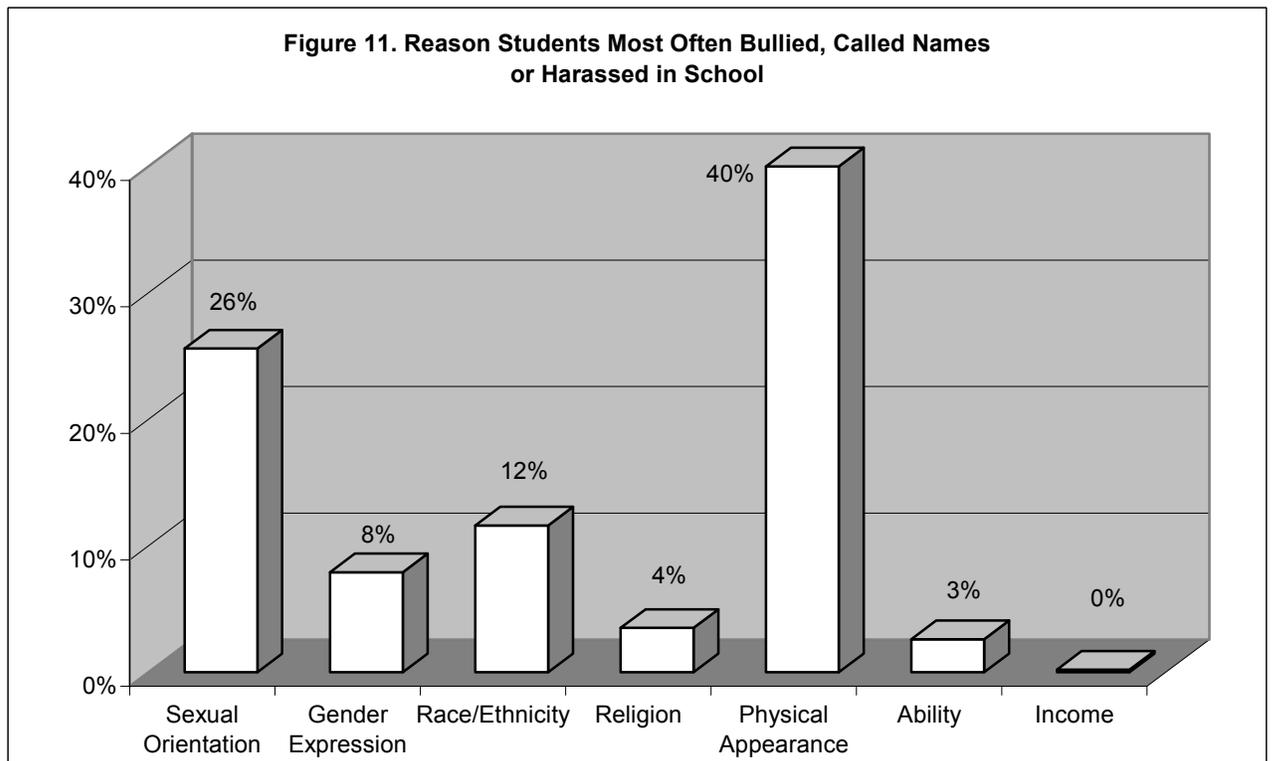


Figure 11. Reason Students Most Often Bullied, Called Names or Harassed in School

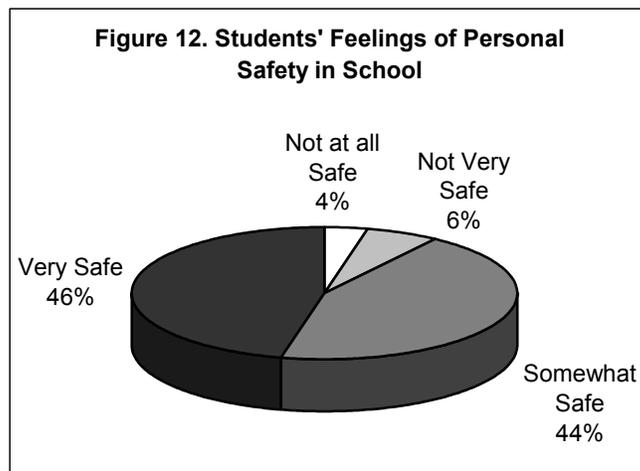


Safety in School

In addition to reporting the frequency of witnessing bullying, name-calling and harassment experienced by other students, respondents were asked a range of questions regarding their personal safety in school and their own experiences of being verbally or physically harassed or assaulted in school. As shown in Figure 12, less than half of the Arizona students (46%) reported feeling very safe in school.

To understand the reasons why many students did not feel completely safe at school, respondents were asked whether they felt unsafe because of one or more personal characteristics such as their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race or ethnicity, disability, religion or physical appearance (looks/body size).

Nearly half (42%) of Arizona students reported that they felt unsafe at school because of one or more of the personal characteristics listed. As Figure 13 illustrates, respondents most commonly reported feeling unsafe because of their physical appearance (20%). Gender expression and race/ethnicity were the next most common reasons given by respondents for feeling unsafe (9% reported each). Seven percent of respondents reported that they felt unsafe due to their sexual orientation.



Personal Experiences with Bullying, Name-Calling and Harassment

Verbal Harassment

Survey respondents were asked how often they had personally been verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past school year. As shown in Figure 14, physical appearance and race/ethnicity were the most common reasons for verbal harassment. Thirty-eight percent of

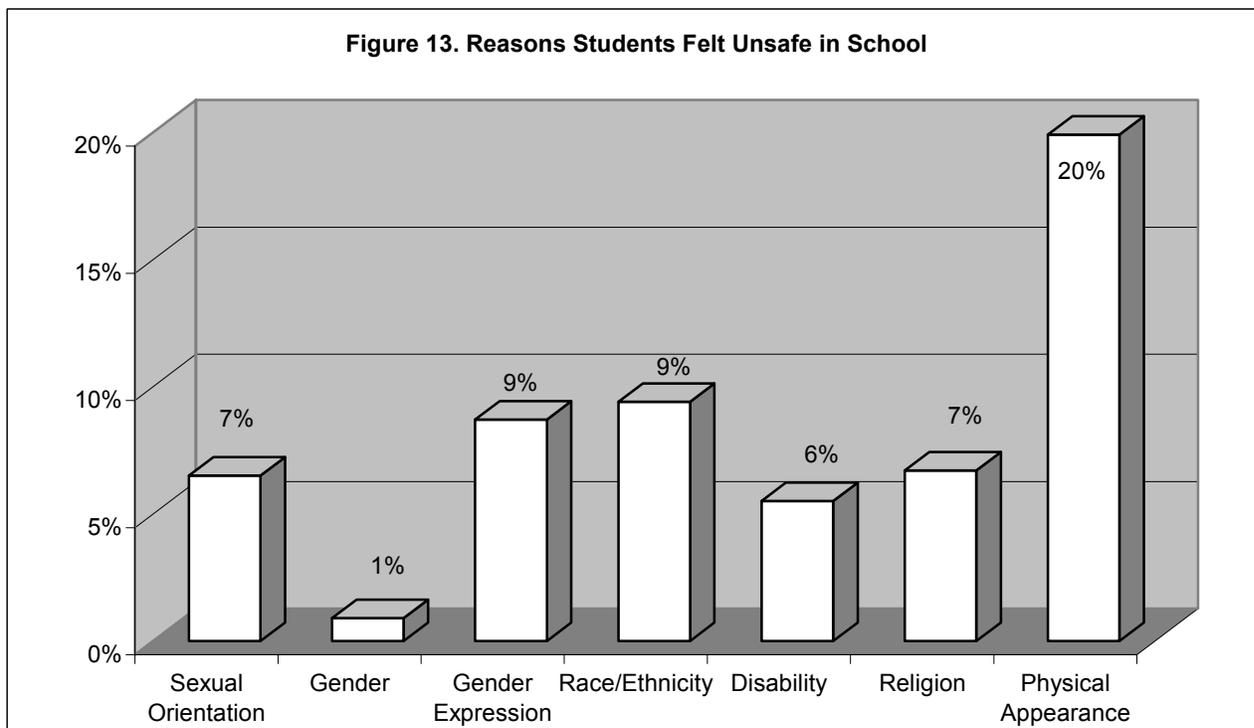


Figure 14. Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past Year

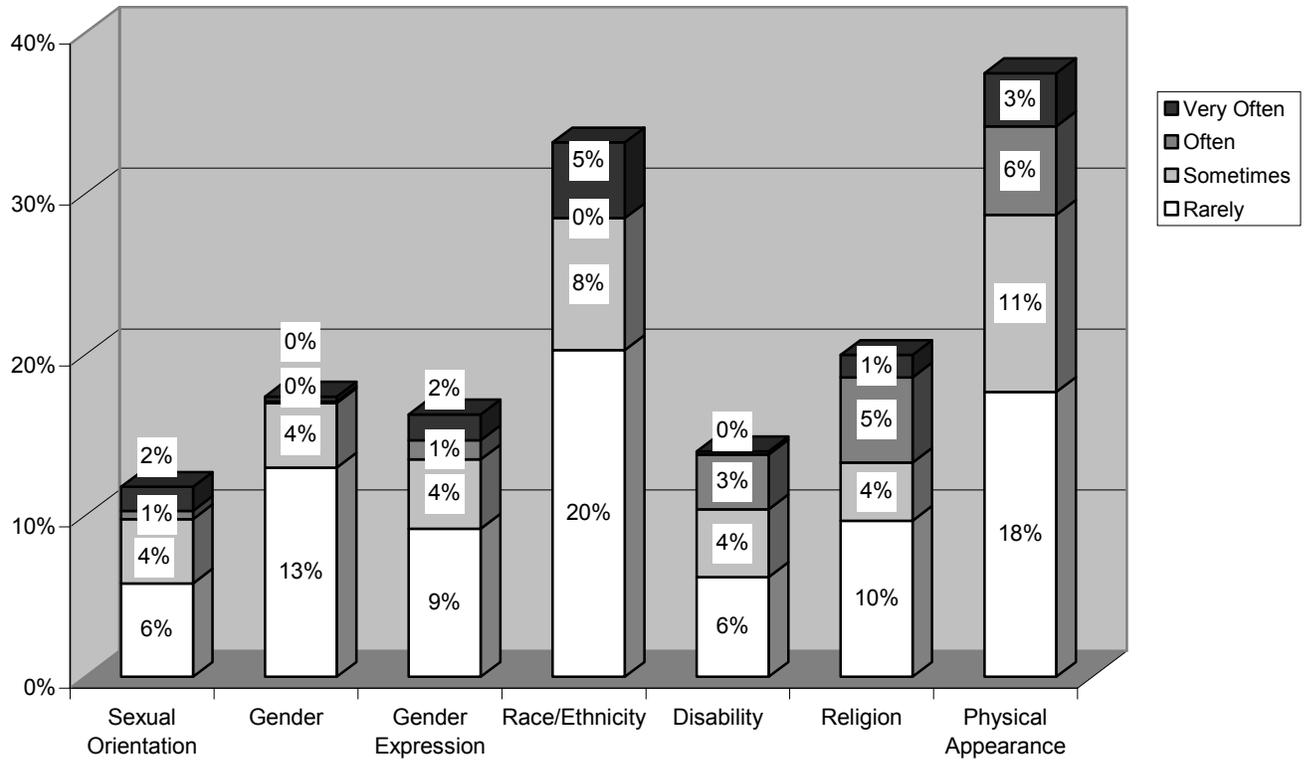
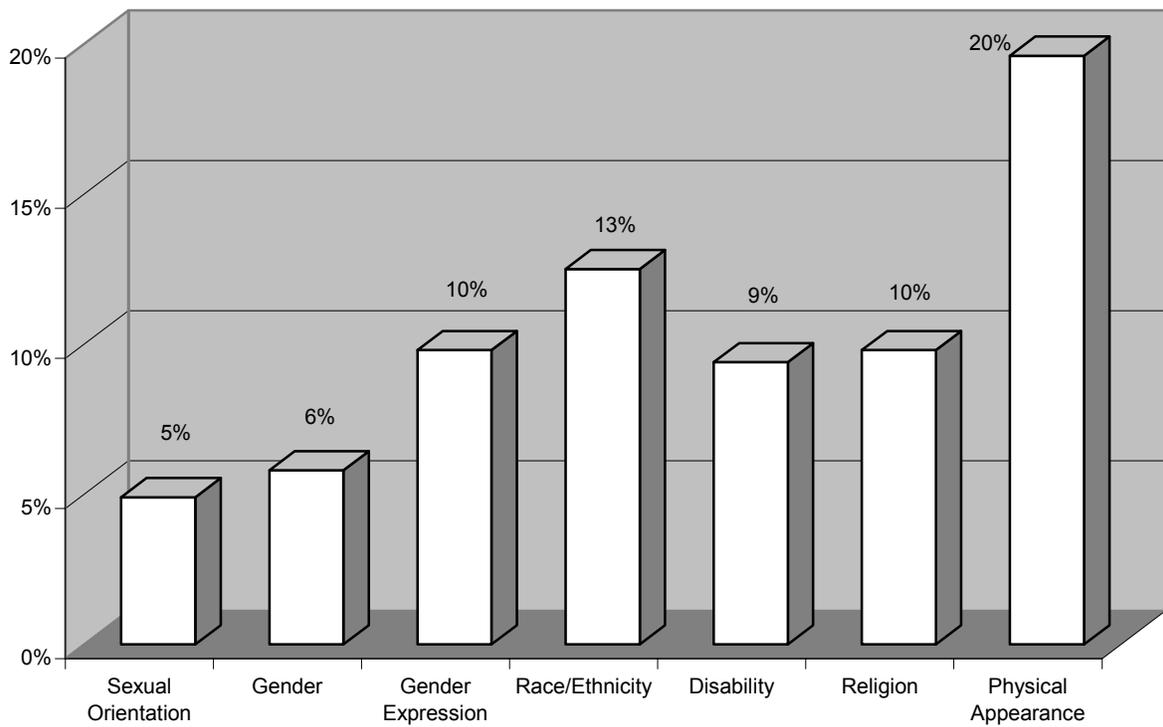
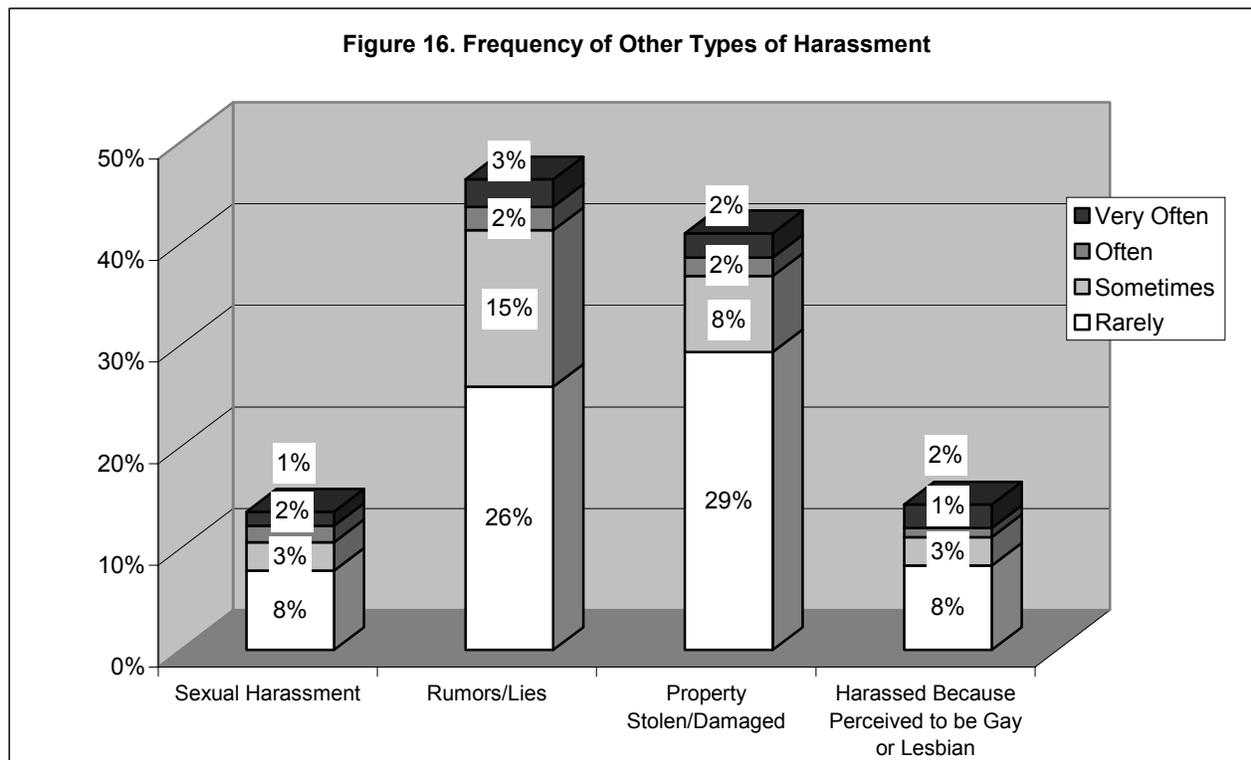


Figure 15. Percentage of Students Who Were Physically Harassed or Assaulted in the Past Year





respondents reported being verbally harassed at some point in school because of their looks or body size. A third (33%) had experienced harassment based on their race or ethnicity, which was significantly higher than the percentage of students in the national sample (21%). A sizable percentage of students also reported being verbally harassed because of other characteristics, including their religion (20%), gender (17%), gender expression (16%), sexual orientation (13%) and a disability (13%). Although respondents were more likely to report harassment based on their physical appearance or race/ethnicity than any other single characteristic, the results indicate that verbal harassment of all types was an unacceptable problem in Arizona schools.

Physical Harassment and Assault

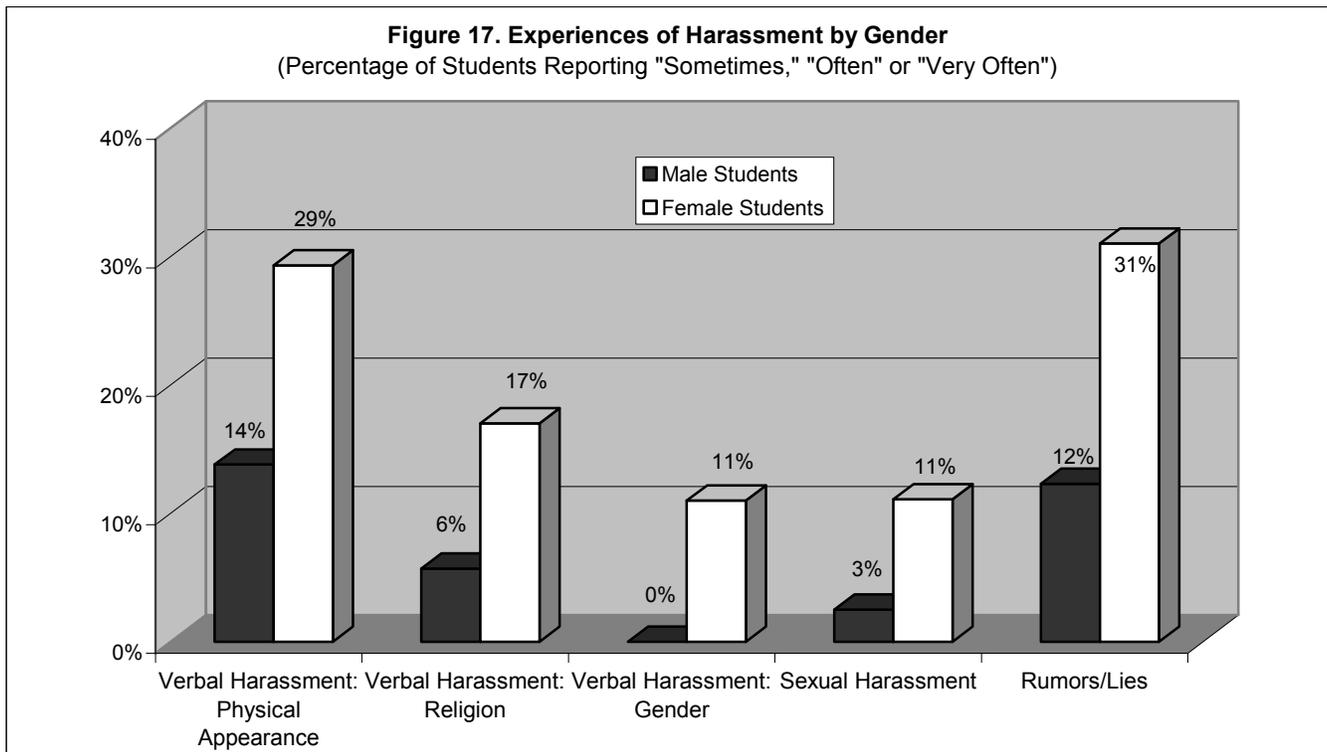
Survey respondents were also asked if they had been physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) or assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) at school in the past year. Given the extreme nature of these forms of harassment, it is not surprising that both physical harassment and physical assault were reported to occur less frequently than verbal harassment. However, such behaviors were not uncommon in Arizona schools. As shown in Figure 15,⁴ physical appearance was, again, the most frequently reported reason for such behavior—20% of respondents reported being physically harassed or assaulted in the past school year based on because of their looks or body size. Nearly a fifth (13%) of respondents had been physically harassed or assaulted on the basis of their race or ethnicity. Given the severity of these types of victimization, any occurrence of physical harassment or assault in school is unacceptable in our schools.

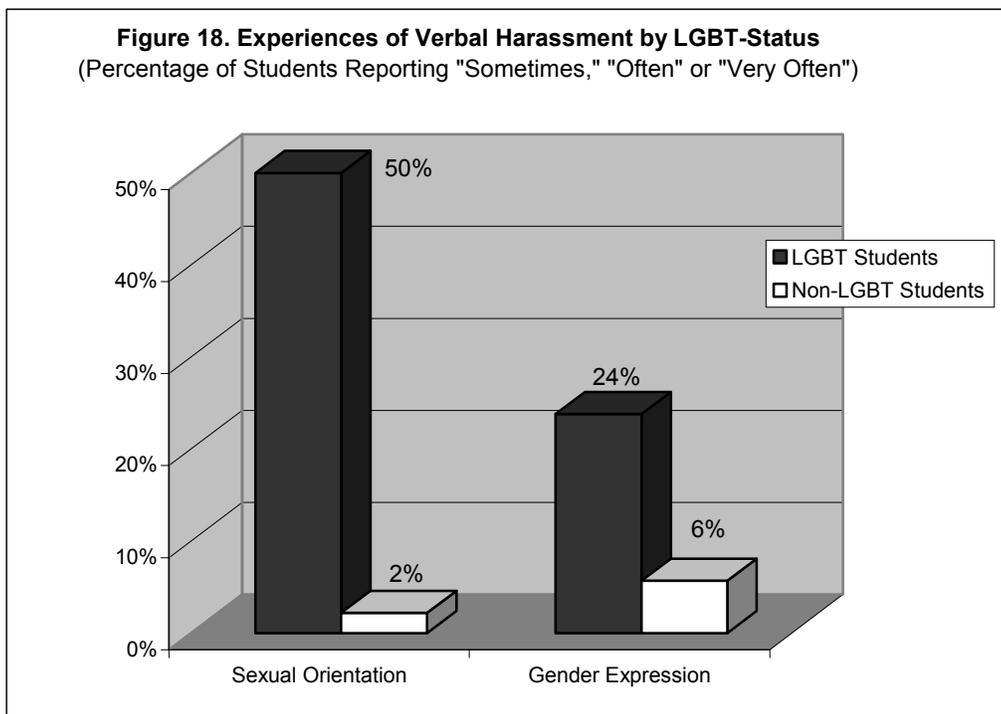
⁴ Given the low incidence of physical harassment and assault, Figure 15 represents only whether students ever experienced the particular event, i.e., those who reported that they “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often” or “very often” experienced physical harassment or assault.

Other Forms of Harassment in School

Figure 16 illustrates the frequency of other forms of bullying and harassment in school. Unlike verbal harassment and physical harassment or assault, students were not asked whether these other types of harassment were specifically related to a personal characteristic. For example, students may be the target of mean rumors or lies because of their sexual orientation or religion or for no apparent reason. Of these types of harassment, respondents most frequently reported being the target of mean rumors or lies with almost half (46%) reporting that it had occurred in the past year. Forty-one percent reported that their personal property had been stolen or deliberately damaged at school. More than a tenth of students reported that they experienced sexual harassment or were harassed because people thought they were gay or lesbian (14% each).

There were some differences in regard to experiences with harassment in Arizona schools. As shown in Figure 17, female respondents were more likely than their male peers to have experienced verbal harassment on the basis of their physical appearance (29% vs. 14%), religion (17% vs. 6%) and their gender (11% vs. 0%). Female respondents were also more likely to have experienced sexual harassment (11% vs. 3%) and to have had rumors or lies told about them at school (31% vs. 12%) than male respondents. LGBT students were more likely than students who were not LGBT to report frequent verbal harassment based on their sexual orientation (50% versus 2%) and gender expression (24% versus 6%) (see Figure 18).

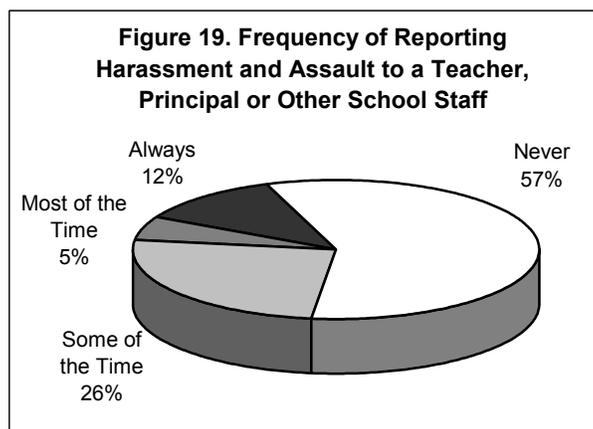




Reporting Incidents of Harassment

Incidents of harassment and assault often went unreported to school personnel. Among Arizona students who experienced any form of verbal or physical harassment or assault, the majority (57%) said that they never reported the incident(s) to a teacher, principal or other school staff person (see Figure 19).

Respondents who did not report the incident were asked why they had not done so. About a quarter (24%) of these respondents said that they did not report the incident to school authorities because they felt that nothing would be done to address the situation. For example, one 12th grade student said:



I don't want to make a big deal because our school treats different clicks with different punishment. And the last time [I] was sexually assaulted at my school. They didn't do anything but make the kid apologize to me with no other punishment and he was sexually assaulting other girls. So there for why should [I] try to stand up for my self and my friends when our school won't do anything about it.

A number of other respondents expressed similar concerns:

They either don't believe it or will not do anything.

The person in charge would do nothing about it.

Because I didn't think they would do anything about it.

They wouldn't do anything about it.

Our staff really doesn't help.

Furthermore, 15% of respondents felt that reporting the incident would worsen the situation in some way (e.g.; they would get a "bad reputation"). One 10th grade student provided the following explanation:

I knew very well that if I were to say anything or report any form of violence towards me, it would only make things far worse. Instead of being tripped, spit on, or pushed down the stairs here and there, it would be a constant threat of gangs of people cornering me and beating the hell out of me. That, along with my threats deciding to drag some of my friends down along with me.

In addition, several more students expressed concern that reporting the incident would further provoke the perpetrators:

I didn't want to worsen the problem and give them more of a reason to harass me.

I was afraid of what they would do to me.

I felt that would make me susceptible to more harassment, because I'll be known around the school. I deal with my problem with that person(s) and we usually come to an understanding and everything's cool.

Another student, a 12th grader, pointed out how the lack of intervention by school personnel could worsen the situation:

Because they never did anything when I did report it at first, and all that ever happens is they tell the other kid to stop it. When that happens, they just do it more, or worse, they get more dangerous about how they do it. If you keep your mouth shut, sometimes they leave you alone after that, but at least it doesn't get much worse.

About a quarter (26%) of respondents said that they did not report incidents to school authorities because they felt that it was not "a big deal" or serious enough to report (e.g., it was a joke or reporting was too much trouble), and another 13% said that they handled the situation on their own. For example, one 10th grader said: "it wasn't serious, I was able to deal with it. Had it escalated I would have reported it, but I was able to speak to the person in a mature manner and we figured things out." However, other incidents that students describe as not "a big deal" are more disconcerting. For example, a 16 year-old 10th grade student gave the following explanation: "[B]ecause it wasn't a big deal...it happens all the time and the boys are just kidding." This comment is troubling because it may be an indication that at least certain types of harassment are commonplace or to be expected. Some students may also feel that their school's climate will never improve no matter what actions school authorities may take.

For many respondents, reporting incidents of harassment or assault to a teacher or other school staff person did not elicit a helpful response. Only slightly more than half (53%) of the respondents who reported victimization events to school authorities said that some sort of immediate action was taken (e.g., the teacher reported the incident to the principal or talked to the perpetrator). Instead, many students were told to ignore the incident or were merely assured that the staff person would handle the situation:

[The faculty/staff person] said they would 'handle the problem' but little or no action was taken.

[The faculty/staff] blamed me, and suspended me, until other people went to them and said that the other person was doing it.

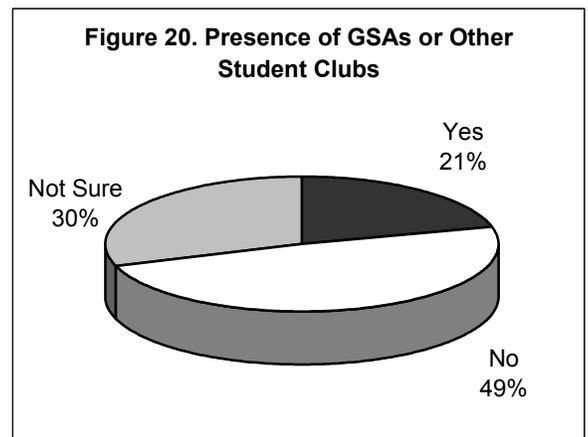
...my car has been broken into twice, my cd player and all of my cds were stolen on both occasions, reported it to the vice principal, my friends went with me to report they were sure of who committed these crimes on both occasions NOTHING WAS DONE. I have also had a tire slashed and NOTHING WAS DONE.

These comments from students paint a bleak picture of the climate of Arizona schools. Most respondents who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incidents to school personnel, often because they believed school staff would not adequately address the problem or that it would make the problem worse. Furthermore, of students who reported incidents, only about half said that it resulted in immediate action being taken. Because students do not often report harassment to school staff, school staff may not be fully informed as to the dangers their students face in school. Yet students may not increase their level of reporting until they see that teachers and other staff are consistently addressing these problems when they arise. In order to break this cycle, schools must take the first step by implementing effective school policies around safety issues and trainings for school personnel on how to address these issues in school.

School Climate and Educational Indicators

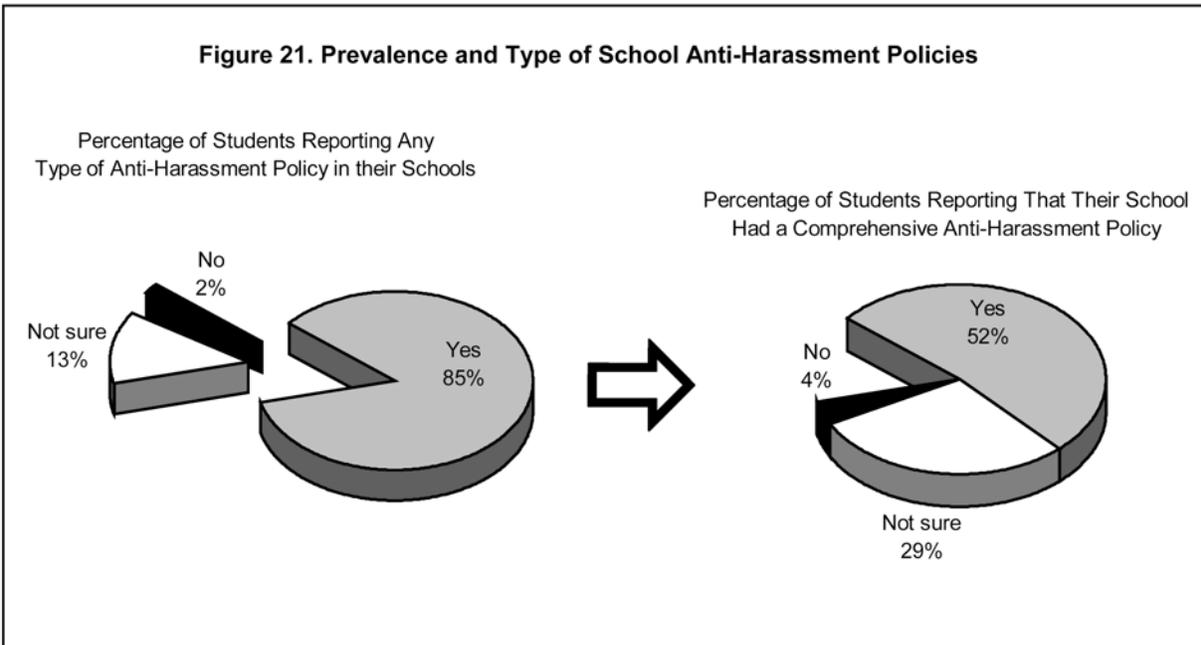
Students' school attendance, level of school engagement and educational aspirations may be affected by the negative experiences like harassment or feeling unsafe at school. When asked about their school attendance, 4% of respondents reported that they had skipped a class at least one time in the past month because they felt unsafe, and 3% had missed at least one entire school day for the same reason. Twelve percent of respondents said that a friend had skipped class at least one time in the past month of school due to safety concerns, and 10% reported a friend missing at least one entire day of school in the past month for this reason. Female students were more likely than male students to report missing at least a day of school because they felt unsafe (8% vs. 1%).

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents reported that they liked school. Respondents who thought that their school had a serious problem with bullying and harassment were less likely to report that they liked school (54% versus 74%), and students who felt unsafe were also less likely to report liking school (39% versus 68%). Feelings of safety were related to respondents' educational aspirations as well. A majority of respondents (80%) reported that they planned to attend college, however, students who reported feeling unsafe at school were nearly half as likely to have future college plans than those who did feel safe in school (46% vs. 84%).



LGBT Resources and Supports in School

Bullying, name-calling and harassment because of sexual orientation as well as hearing homophobic remarks were reported to occur quite frequently in Arizona schools. A high frequency of homophobic remarks, bullying, and harassment may create a hostile learning environment, particularly for LGBT students. The existence of supportive resources may help lessen the negative effects of such a climate. Supportive school clubs that address LGBT student issues such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are one potentially important source of support for LGBT students. Unfortunately, only one-fifth (21%) of Arizona respondents reported that their school had this type of supportive organization in place for LGBT students (see Figure 20).



Another potentially important source of support is the existence of anti-harassment policies that provide explicit protection for LGBT students by including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. As illustrated in Figure 21, a majority (85%) of respondents believed that their school had a general policy for reporting incidents of harassment and assault, and 61% of those respondents also believed that their school had a comprehensive anti-harassment policy that explicitly included sexual orientation or gender identity/expression as protected categories. Thus, only about half (52%) of all Arizona students reported that they were protected by comprehensive anti-harassment policies. It is important to note that almost a fifth of students were unsure whether or not their school had any protective policy. While it is possible that these students were not aware of a policy because one did not exist, it is also possible that the students were not informed about existing policies and that Arizona schools need to do a more comprehensive job of informing their students about their rights and protections.

Important differences were found between students from schools with comprehensive anti-harassment policies and students from schools without comprehensive anti-harassment policies in their reports of personal experiences of verbal harassment as well as reports of the frequency of certain types of bullying and harassment of other students. As Figure 22 illustrates, respondents from schools without a comprehensive anti-harassment policy were more likely than respondents from schools with such policies to report verbal harassment. For example, respondents from schools without comprehensive policies were two times as likely to report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation and gender expression. There was also a difference in experiences of the most common type of harassment reported by respondents—harassment based on physical appearance. Respondents from schools without comprehensive policies were 49% more likely to report having been harassed because of their looks or body size.

In addition, students at schools that had a comprehensive anti-harassment policy were less likely to report that bullying, name calling and harassment based on gender expression and physical appearance occurred frequently at their school (see Figure 23). About half (53%) of respondents from schools with comprehensive anti-harassment policies reported that students were frequently bullied and harassed at their school because of their gender expression, compared to three-fourths (77%) of respondents at schools without such policies. Similarly, 59% of students from schools with comprehensive anti-harassment policies said that students were frequently bullied and harassed because of their physical appearance compared to 80% of students from schools without such policies.

Figure 22. Anti-Harassment Policies and Verbal Harassment in Arizona Schools

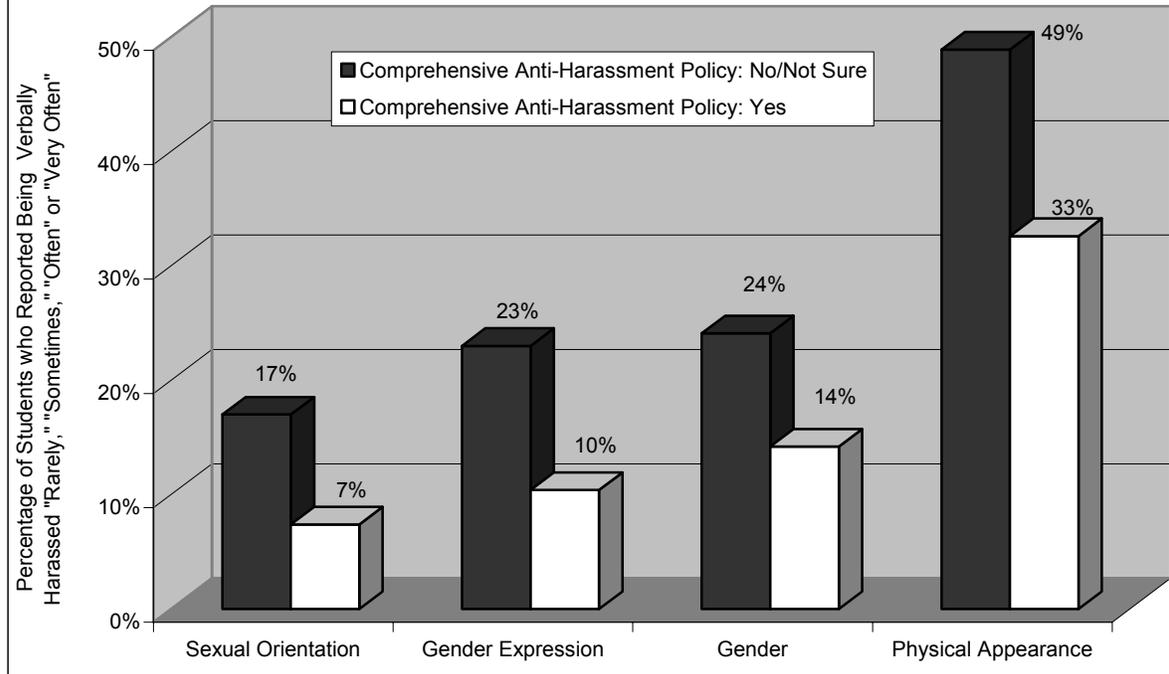
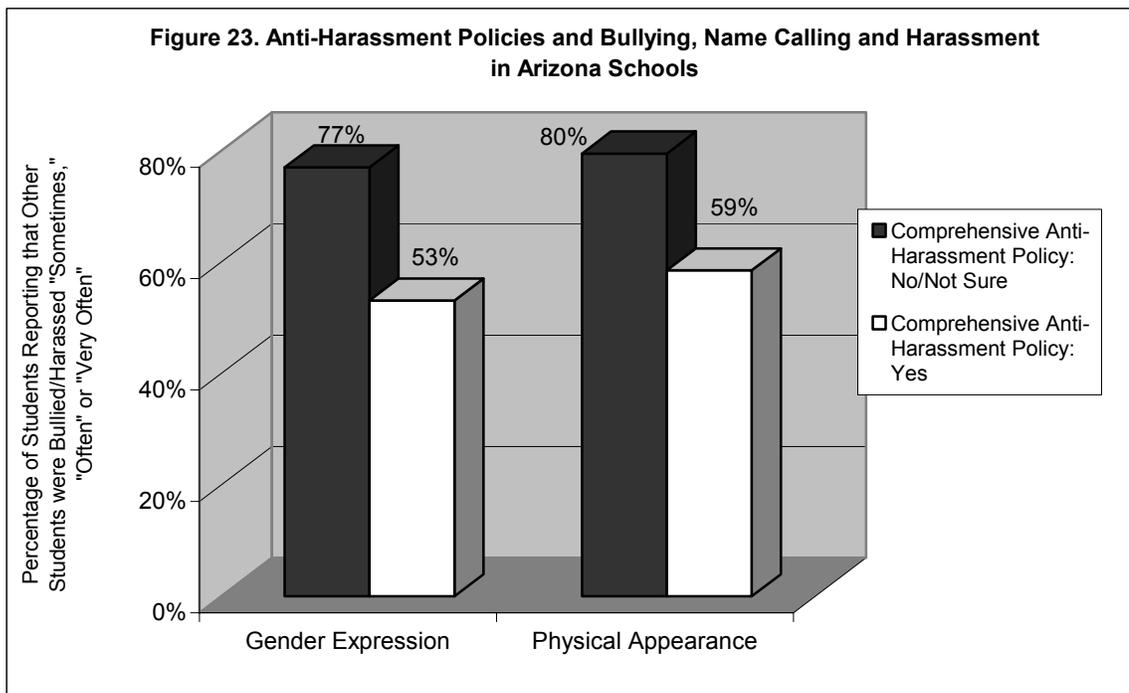


Figure 23. Anti-Harassment Policies and Bullying, Name Calling and Harassment in Arizona Schools



SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues of safety, bullying, name-calling and harassment were serious for many students in Arizona schools. Biased language, especially homophobic and sexist remarks, were commonly heard among students and often overlooked by teachers and other school staff. Biased language was even heard from some teachers and school staff. Respondents reported that students were frequently bullied and harassed because of their personal characteristics, especially their physical appearance, actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender expression.

Reports of verbal and physical harassment and assault, particularly on the basis of physical appearance and race/ethnicity, were not uncommon among Arizona students. A majority of students did not report incidents of harassment or assault to a teacher, principal or staff person, often because they thought it would only make the situation worse or that teachers and staff would not care. Many students said that school authorities did not take appropriate action when they reported incidents of harassment or assault. The high frequency of derogatory language, experiences with bullying and harassment, and lack of intervention by peers and school staff may be key to understanding why many students did not feel completely safe at school.

The results of this study indicate that much work needs to be done in Arizona to ensure that all students have access to a safe and supportive learning environment. Findings from this report suggest that comprehensive anti-harassment policies may lower the frequency of bullying, name-calling and harassment in Arizona schools. Given that only half of Arizona students reported being protected by comprehensive anti-harassment policies in their schools, it is imperative that lawmakers and school officials create state-level safe school legislation that offers explicit protection to students who are targets of bullying, harassment and assault based on personal characteristics such as sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Arizona teachers and other school staff need training to address the inconsistency in their responses when hearing students make derogatory remarks and when learning of incidents of harassment and assault in school. In addition, Arizona schools should establish and enforce "no tolerance" policies regarding the use of biased language by school staff. Teachers and staff who understand their role in enforcing protective policies are more likely to do so effectively, ultimately improving the safety and quality of the school environment for all students.

ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY

Student interviews were conducted online by a nationally representative sample of 3,450 public and private/parochial students ages 13 to 18. Within this sample, an oversample of students was drawn from Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia. Interviews averaged 15 minutes and were conducted between January 13 and January 31, 2005. Sample was drawn from the Harris Poll Online (HPOL) multimillion member online panel of cooperative respondents from over one hundred countries. Invitations for this study were emailed to a selected sample of the database identified as residing in the United States and being a student between the ages of 13 and 18. Data for the national survey were weighted to reflect the national population of children ages 13 to 18 for key demographic variables (gender, age, race and ethnicity, size of place, region, and parent's education). Demographic weights were based on U.S. Census data obtained via the March 2004 Current Population Survey (CPS). For the national survey, a post weight was applied to the student data to adjust for the twelve state oversampling so that the regional distribution reflects the nation as a whole. State-specific data, including that which is presented in this report, does not reflect this postweight.