



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



A Report from GLSEN's Research Department

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

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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 Georgia schools:

- A majority of Georgia students reported hearing homophobic remarks, such as “that’s so gay” (82%) or derogatory terms such as “faggot” or “dyke” (75%), from students in their school. A majority (80%) also reported hearing sexist remarks in their schools.
- Negative remarks about a person’s gender expression, such as a girl acting “too much like a boy,” were also commonly heard in Georgia schools — two-thirds (66%) of respondents heard negative comments about gender expression from their peers.
- School authorities did not consistently intervene when hearing biased language in school. Less than a third of Georgia students reported that teachers or other school staff frequently intervened when hearing homophobic (23%), racist (26%) or sexist (30%) remarks in school.
- Students heard biased language from school staff as well — almost a quarter (22%) reported hearing faculty or other school staff make sexist remarks, and nearly a fifth heard homophobic (18%) or racist (18%) remarks from school staff.

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

- Nearly half (49%) of Georgia students reported bullying, name calling and harassment to be serious problems in their school, which was higher than for students nationally (36%). Only a third (34%) reported feeling very safe at school.
- Almost half (46%) of the students reported feeling at-risk at school because of at least one personal characteristic, such as their physical appearance or sexual orientation.
- Students reported that physical appearance and sexual orientation were the most common reasons students were harassed at school. About half reported that students were frequently victimized based on their physical appearance (52%), and 48% said students were frequently bullied or harassed based on sexual orientation.
- Georgia students were more likely to report that their peers were bullied, called names or harassed based on sexual orientation, physical appearance, academic ability and family income than students nationally.
- Reports of verbal harassment, particularly because of one’s physical appearance, were not uncommon among Georgia students. Five out of ten (50%) youth had been verbally harassed in the past year because of their physical appearance, and a quarter (24%) had been physically harassed or assaulted based on this characteristic.

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

- More than a half (54%) of students who had been harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to a teacher, principal or other school staff person, often because they believed that reporting incidents would make the situation worse or that school personnel would not take action to resolve it.
- Among students who did report incidents of harassment or assault, only a third (33%) said that school authorities took immediate action to address the situation.

LGBT students lacked access to resources and supports:

- Only 9% of students reported that their school had a GSA or other type of student club addressing LGBT student issues, which was much lower than the national percentage (22%).
- Students at schools with a supportive student club were much less likely to say that bullying and harassment were serious problems in their school (17% v. 52%) and were less likely to report that they felt unsafe in their schools (3% vs. 7%).

- Only half (51%) of Georgia students reported that they were protected by a comprehensive school anti-harassment or safe schools policy that explicitly mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. More than a quarter (29%) were unsure whether or not their school had a protective policy of any kind.
- Students at schools without comprehensive safe schools policies were more likely to have been harassed than those at schools with these types of policies. For example, youth at schools without a comprehensive policy were six times as likely to have been verbally harassed based on their sexual orientation (55% vs. 9%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 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, schools should establish and enforce “no tolerance” policies regarding the use of biased language by school staff.
- Students who attended Georgia schools that had a student club addressing LGBT student issues, such as a Gay-Straight Alliance, reported a safer learning environment. Given this finding, every effort should be made to support students who seek to improve school climate by starting and sustaining these clubs in their schools.
- Given only a half of Georgia 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 race, must be adopted.
- Given that more than a quarter of Georgia students did not know if their school had an anti-harassment policy of any kind, 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 Georgia 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 160 respondents attended schools in Georgia at the time of the survey. As shown in Table 1, a majority of the students were white and male. About seven out of ten (69%) were in the 9th through 12th grades (see Table 2). Six percent of Georgia students were identified as LGBT.² (see also Table 1). Almost all respondents (98%) attended public schools, most of which were located in suburban areas (see Table 2). Of the few respondents who attended private or parochial schools, 57% of those schools were religious-affiliated (see Table 2).

Biased Language in School

Biased Language from Students

Hearing derogatory remarks about oneself or others contributes to a hostile school environment for students. In fact, the vast majority of Georgia students thought that the atmosphere at their school would be better if homophobic (84%), racist (85%), sexist (94%) and negative religious (87%) remarks were used less. 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 negative religious remarks from other students.

Homophobic Remarks

Homophobic remarks, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” were one of the most frequently heard types of biased language in Georgia schools. As Figure 1 illustrates, three-fourths (75%) of Georgia respondents said that they heard homophobic remarks at least sometimes and 51% heard them even often or very often in school. Additionally, as shown in Figure 2, use of such language was

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*. Georgia: GLSEN.

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

Table 1. Demographics of Georgia Participants	
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	
White	58%
Black or African American	28%
Latino/a	9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%
Mixed racial background	3%
Other racial or ethnic background	<1%
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	64%
Female	36%
<u>LGBT Status</u>	
LGBT	6%
Non-LGBT	94%
<u>Grade</u>	
5th	2%
6th	2%
7th	10%
8th	17%
9th	27%
10th	23%
11th	10%
12th	9%
Average Age = 14.7 years	

Table 2. School Characteristics	
<u>Grade Levels</u>	
K through 12 school	1%
Lower school (elementary and middle school)	1%
Elementary school	2%
Middle school	29%
Upper school (middle and high school grades)	1%
High school	66%
<u>Location</u>	
Urban area	11%
Suburban area	63%
Small town or rural area	27%
<u>School Type</u>	
Public school	98%
Private or parochial school	2%
<i>Religious-affiliated</i>	57%

Figure 1. Frequency of Biased Remarks From Students

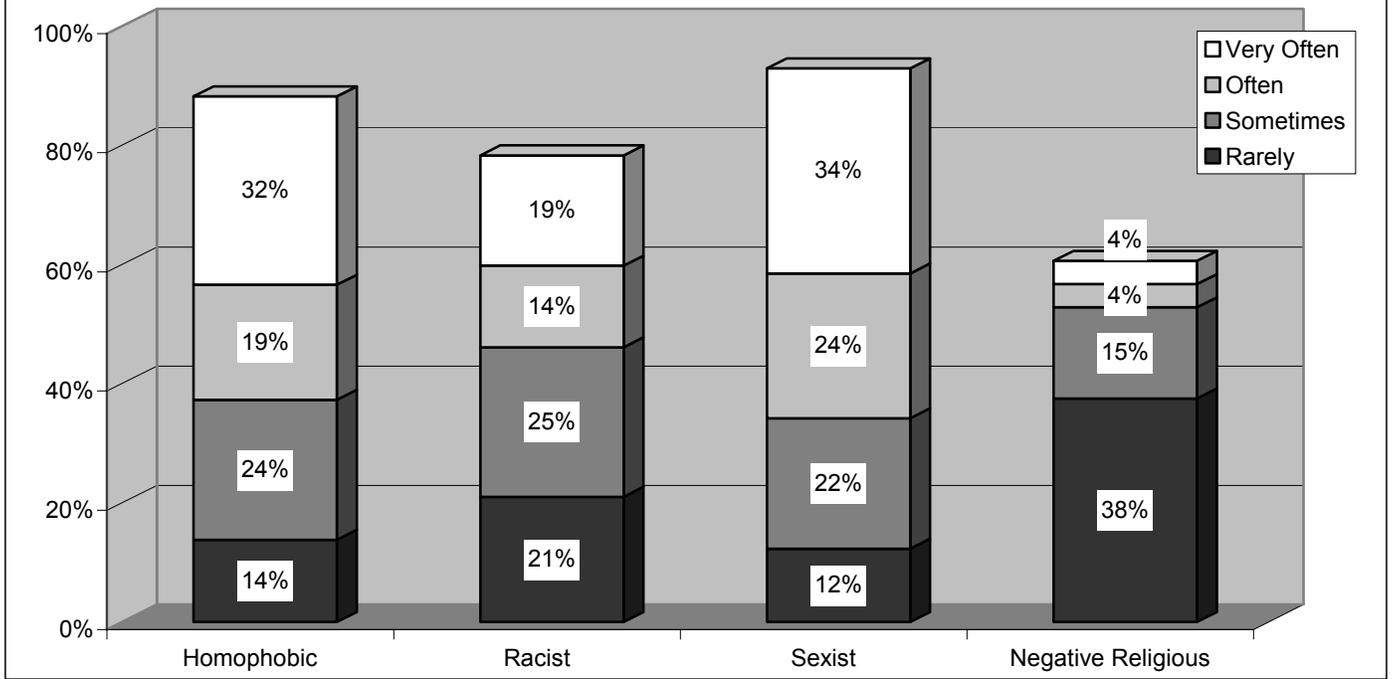


Figure 2. Number of Students Making Biased Remarks

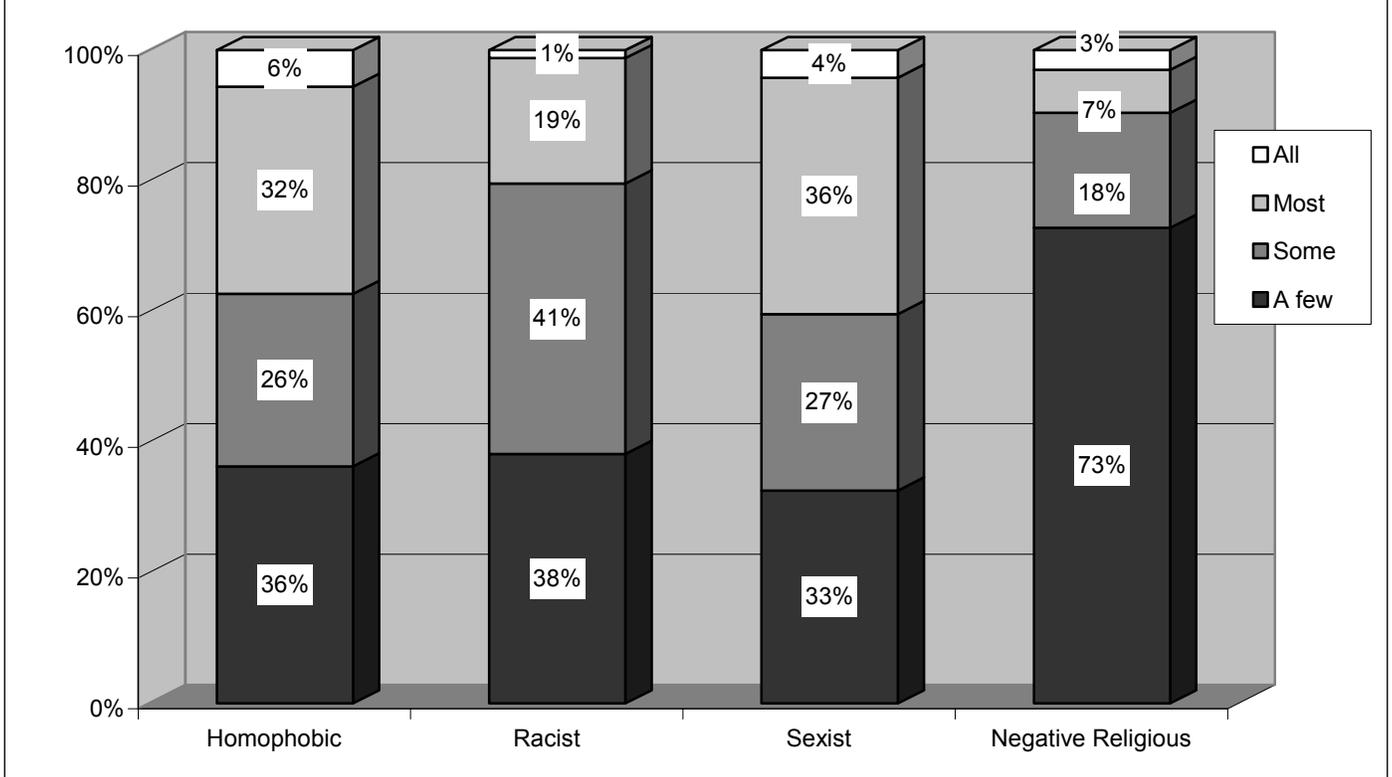
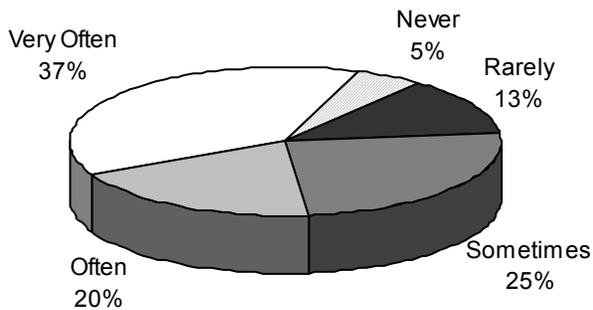


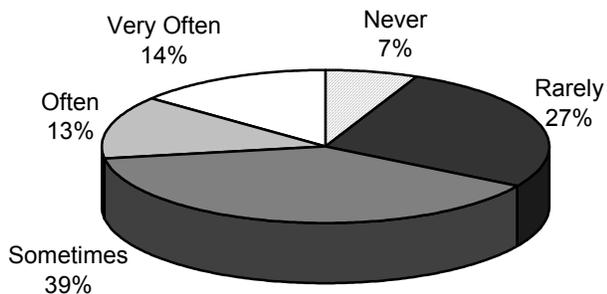
Figure 3. Frequency of Hearing "That's So Gay" or "You're So Gay" in School



not limited to a few students — over a third (38%) of respondents reported hearing homophobic remarks from most or all of the students in their school.

Respondents were also asked how often they heard the expressions “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” from students at their school, expressions where “gay” is used to indicate that something or someone is valueless or “stupid.” Use of these expressions was very common in Georgia schools—82% reported hearing “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” at least some of the time, and over half (57%) heard these expressions frequently (see Figure 3). With the exception of sexist remarks, respondents reported hearing these expressions more frequently than other types of biased language.

Figure 4. Frequency of Remarks About Gender Expression From Students



Negative Remarks About Gender Expression

Youth who do not express themselves in ways considered to be gender-appropriate must often contend with negative experiences, such as being called names or being harassed, especially at school.³ Respondents were asked how often they had heard remarks about a person’s 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, negative comments about someone’s gender expression were nevertheless frequently reported: two-thirds of (66%) Georgia students reported hearing such remarks in school at least some of the time and over a quarter (27%) reporting often or very often (see Figure 4).

Sexist Remarks

Sexist remarks, such as calling a girl a “bitch” or saying girls are not as capable as boys, were also commonly heard in Georgia schools. As shown in Figure 1, more than half (58%) heard these comments often or very often, which was somewhat higher than students reported nationally (51%). Additionally, 40% reported hearing these types of remarks from all or most of the students in their school (see Figure 2).

Racist Remarks

Although racist remarks were heard less frequently than homophobic or sexist remarks, they were not uncommon in Georgia schools. One-third (33%) said they heard these remarks often or very often (see Figure 1), which was slightly higher than students reported nationally (26%). Furthermore, one-fifth (20%) of respondents heard racist remarks from most or all students in their school (see Figure 2).

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.

Negative Religious Remarks

Negative remarks about a person’s religion were least commonly heard by respondents. As shown in Figure 1, about a quarter (23%) reported hearing negative religious remarks at least some of the time while in school, and less than a tenth (8%) heard these types of remarks frequently. Only 1 out of 10 Georgia students said they heard religious remarks from all or most of their peers (see Figure 2).

Biased Language from Faculty and Other School Staff

Respondents were asked how often they heard homophobic, sexist, racist or negative religious remarks from faculty and other school staff. Sexist remarks were the most frequently heard by Georgia students — nearly a quarter (22%) reported hearing school personnel make sexist comments. A sizable percentage of students reported hearing homophobic (18%), racist (18%), and negative religious (15%) remarks from school personnel.

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. In fact, students who reported that they heard biased remarks from teachers or other school staff were more likely to report hearing homophobic, racist and negative religious remarks from their peers at school. As shown in Figure 6, students who reported that school staff made homophobic remarks were more likely than those who said that school staff never made such remarks to report that their peers frequently (“sometimes,” “often” or “very often”) made homophobic remarks at school (89% versus 71%). There were similar relationships with regard to racist and negative religious remarks made by school personnel.

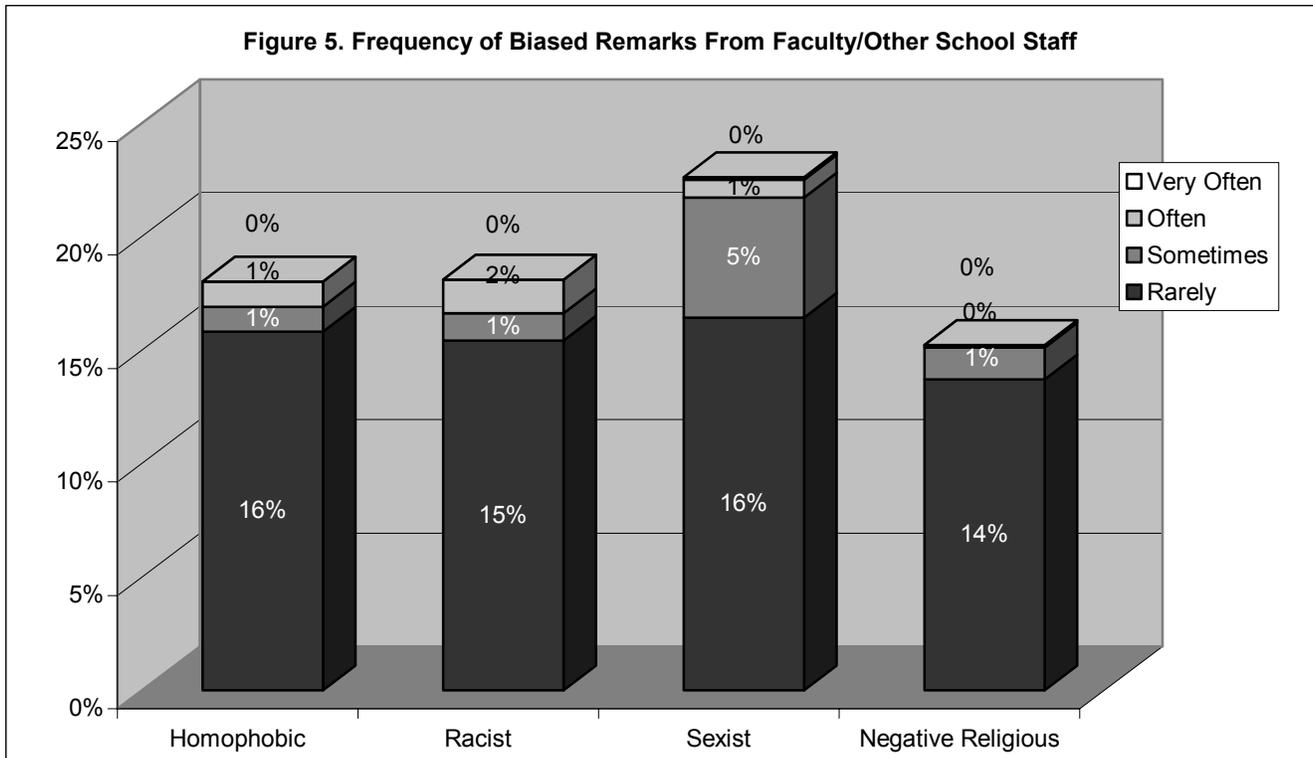
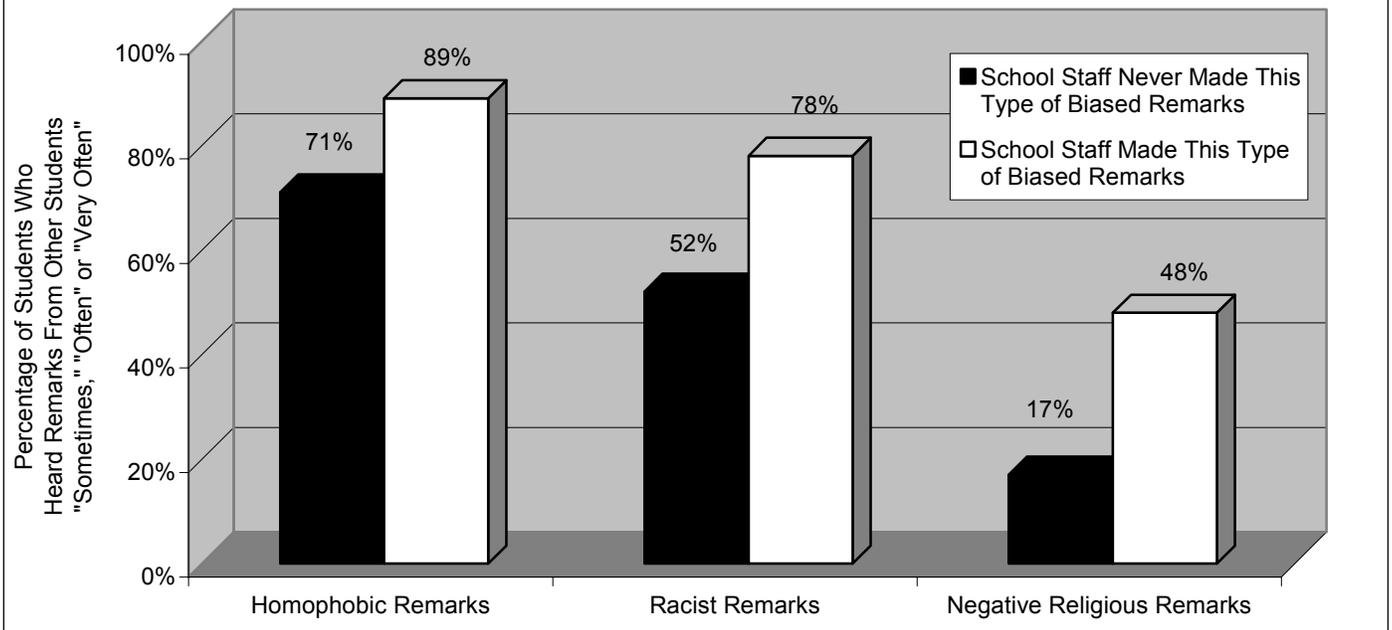


Figure 6. Frequency of Hearing Biased Remarks from Students by Biased Remarks from School Staff



Intervention Regarding Biased Remarks

The failure of school staff to intervene when hearing biased remarks from students may also send a message to students that the use of such language in school is permissible. Thus, respondents were asked how often teachers or other school staff intervened when hearing biased language. As shown in Figure 7, although the majority of respondents reported that school personnel intervened at least sometimes when overhearing biased remarks, less than a third reported that this happened frequently with regard to any of these types of remarks (23% for homophobic remarks, 26% for racist remarks and 30% for sexist remarks).

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

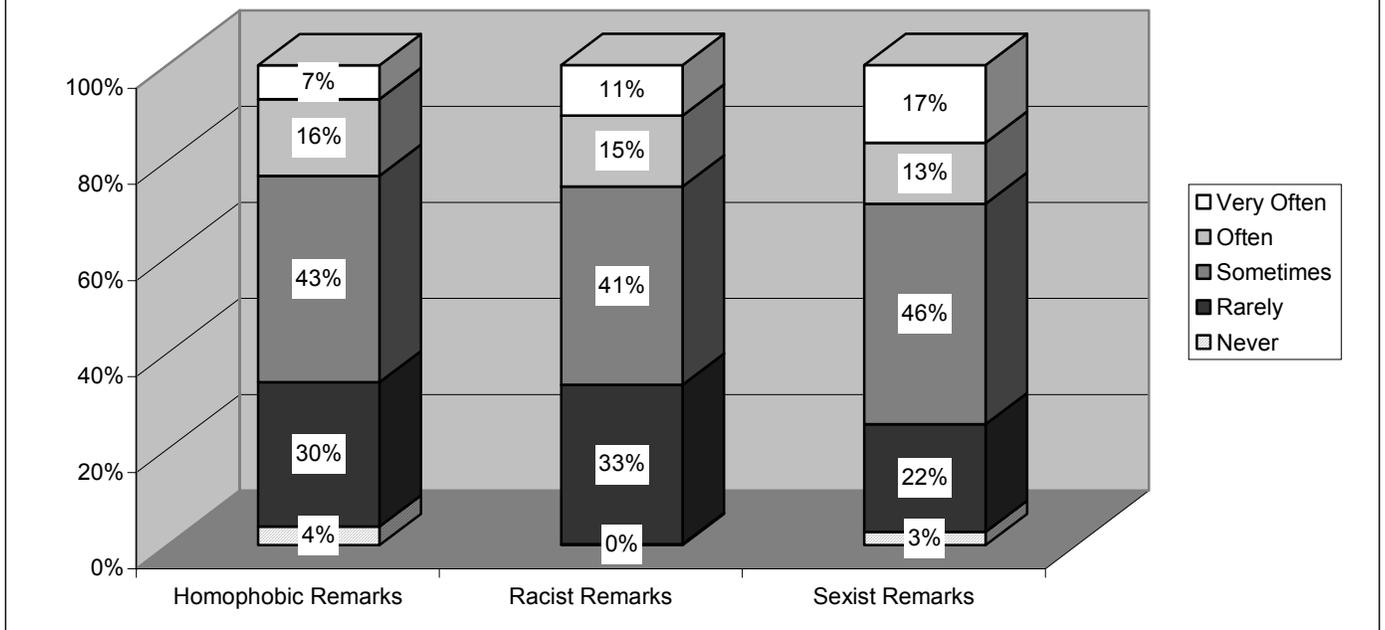
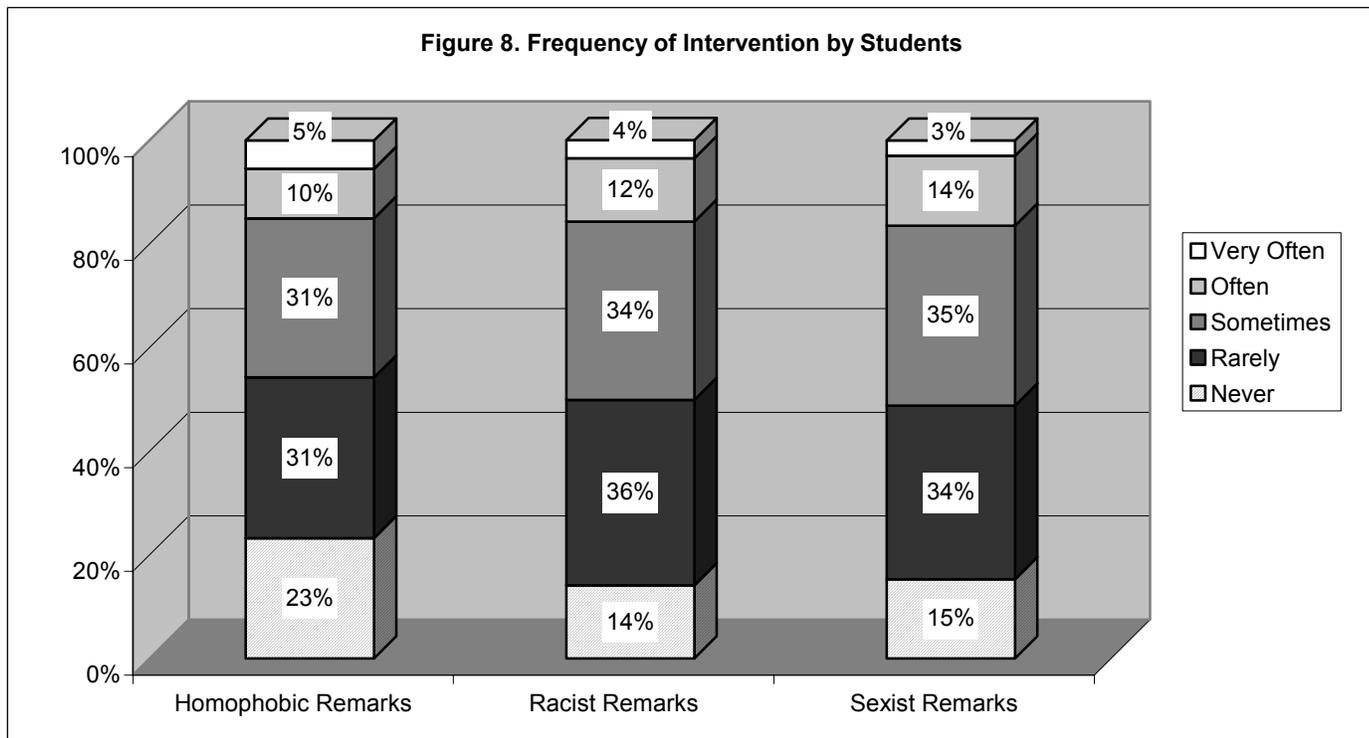


Figure 8. Frequency of Intervention by Students



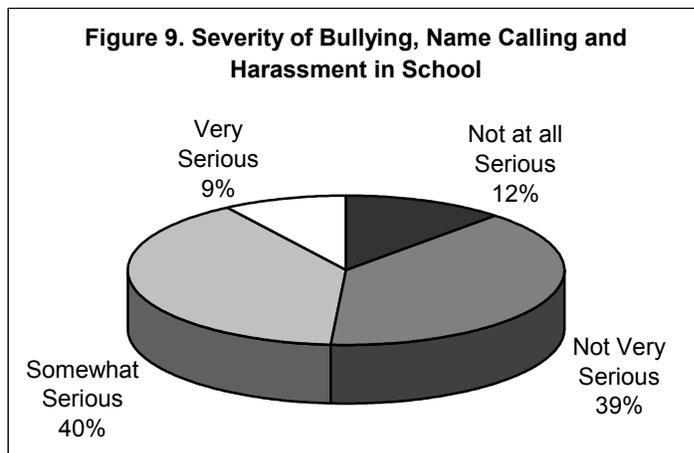
The degree to which students intervene when hearing derogatory language from their peers is another indicator of school climate. Students’ own failure to intervene may be indicative of a school atmosphere in which use of such language is considered acceptable. Students were much less likely than school staff to intervene when hearing biased language at school. As Figure 8 illustrates, less than a fifth of respondents reported that students intervened often or very often when hearing other students make homophobic (15%), racist (16%) or sexist (17%) remarks in school.

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 one-half (49%) of respondents reported that these behaviors were very or somewhat serious issues in their schools. This percentage from Georgia students was much higher than for students nationally (36%).

Respondents were also asked about the frequency of witnessing other students being bullied, called names or harassed in school. As shown in Figure 10, bullying, name-calling and harassment based on certain personal characteristics, especially physical appearance and sexual orientation, were reported to occur frequently in Georgia schools. The most commonly reported types of harassment were related to students’ physical appearance (looks/body size) and to actual or perceived sexual orientation, with about half of the respondents reporting that they occurred often or very often in their schools (52% for physical appearance and 45% for sexual orientation). In addition, about a third (32%) of respondents reported that students were harassed often or very often at school due to the way they expressed their gender.

Figure 9. Severity of Bullying, Name Calling and Harassment in School



Certain types of bullying and harassment may be a more serious problem in Georgia schools than in other states across the nation. As shown in Figure 11, Georgia respondents were more likely to report bullying, name calling and harassment based on sexual orientation, physical appearance, academic ability and family income than students nationally.

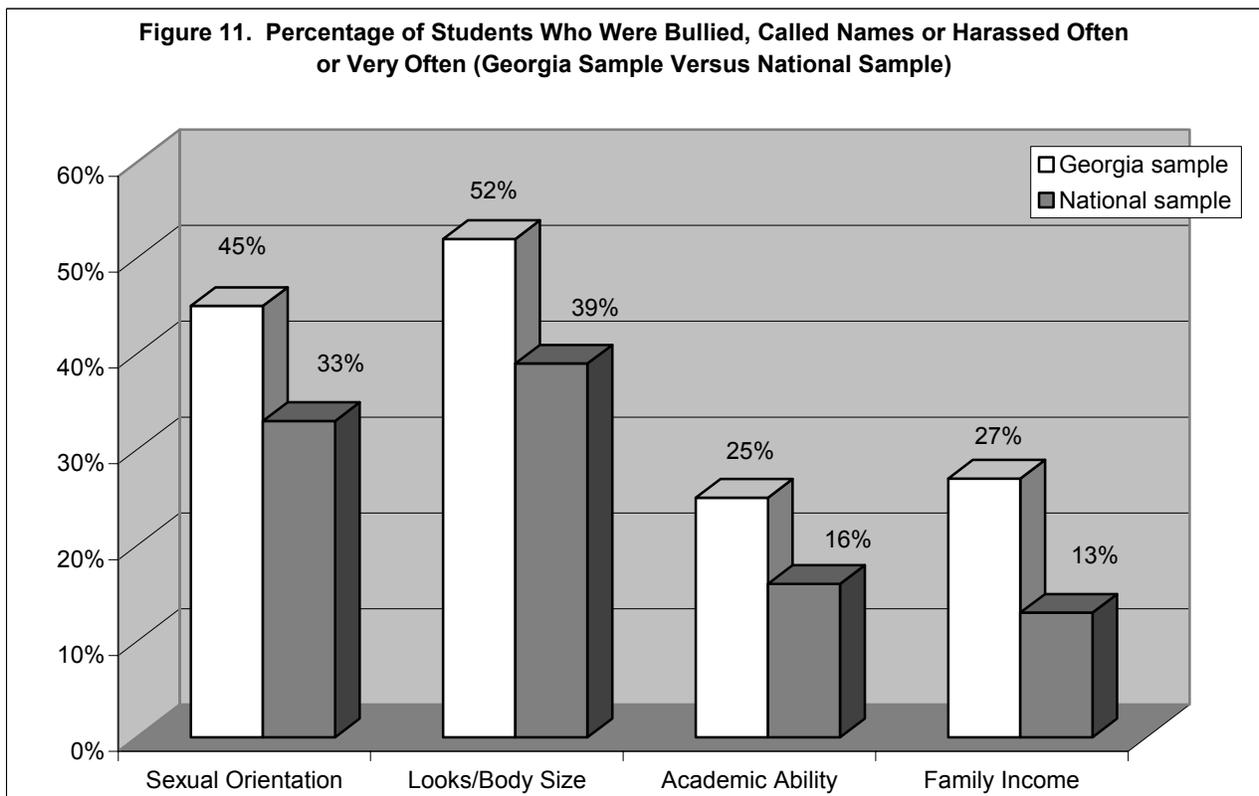
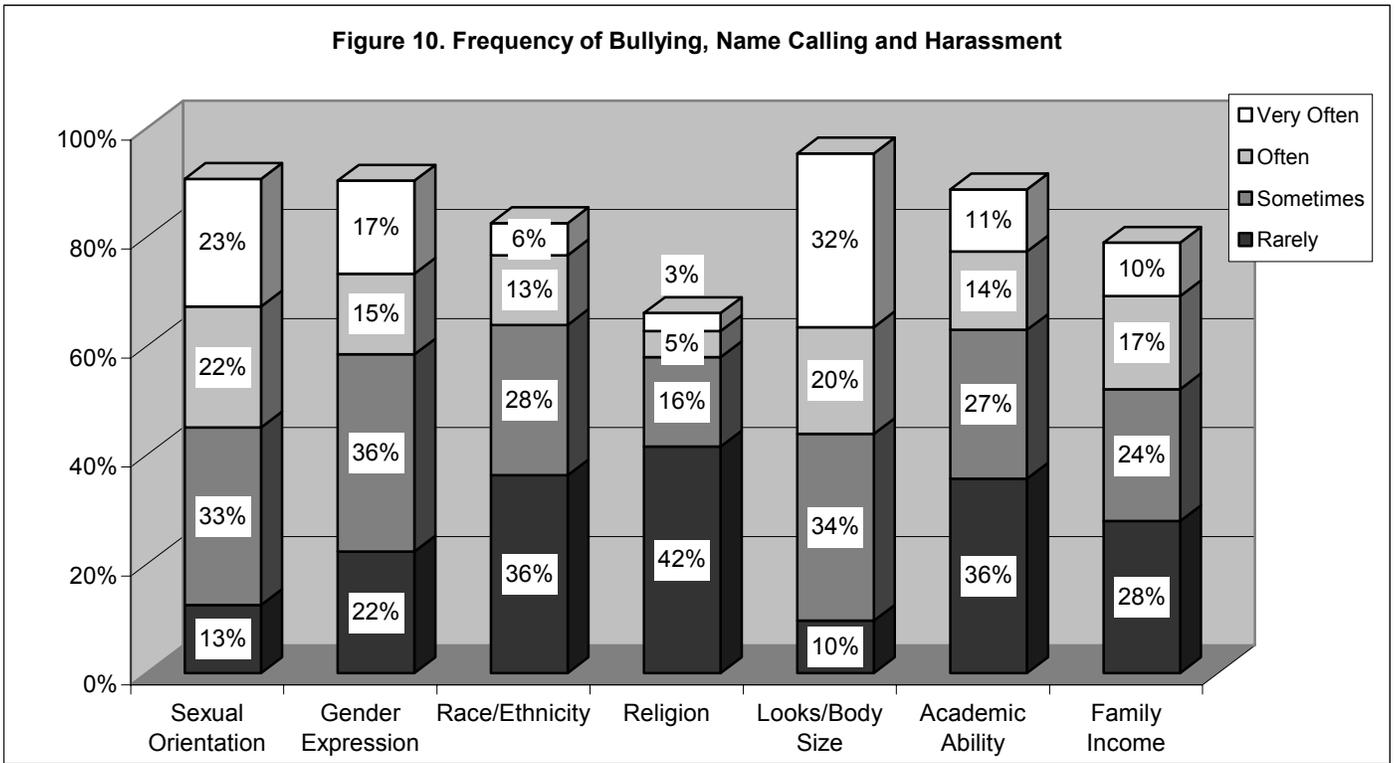
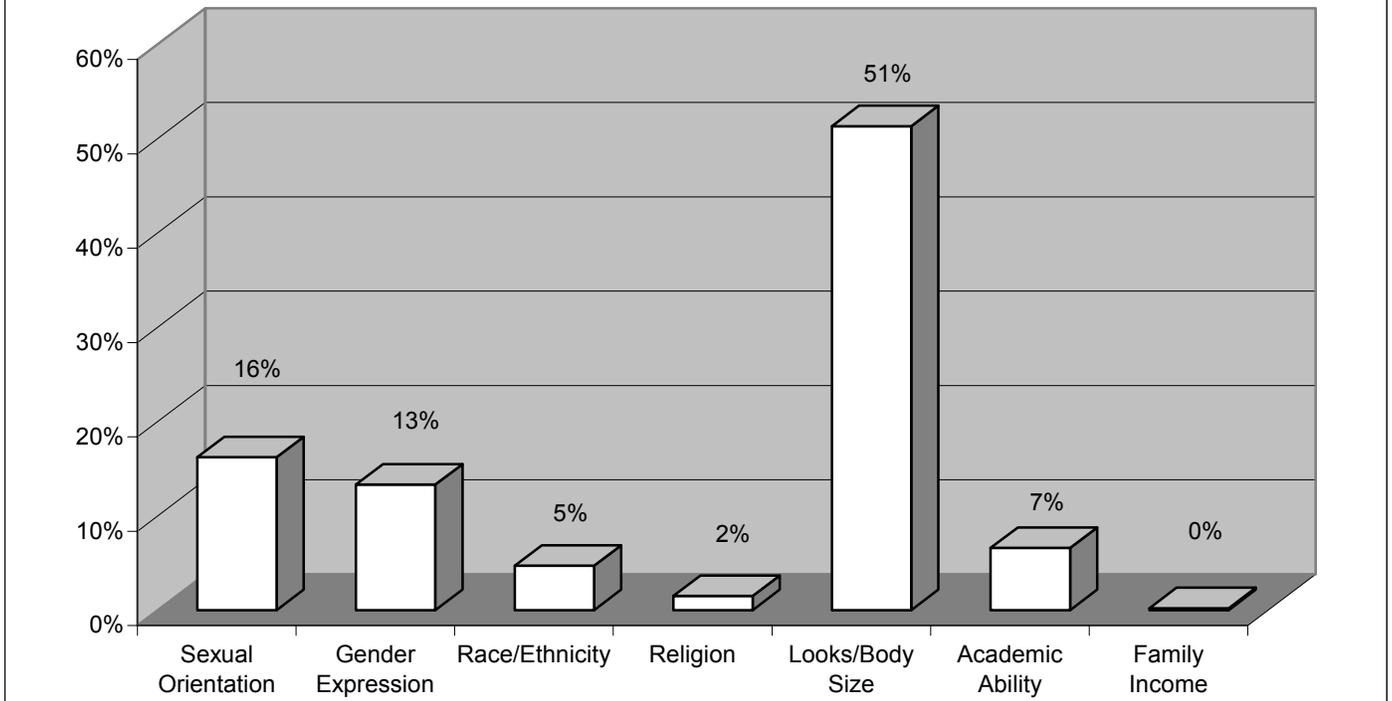


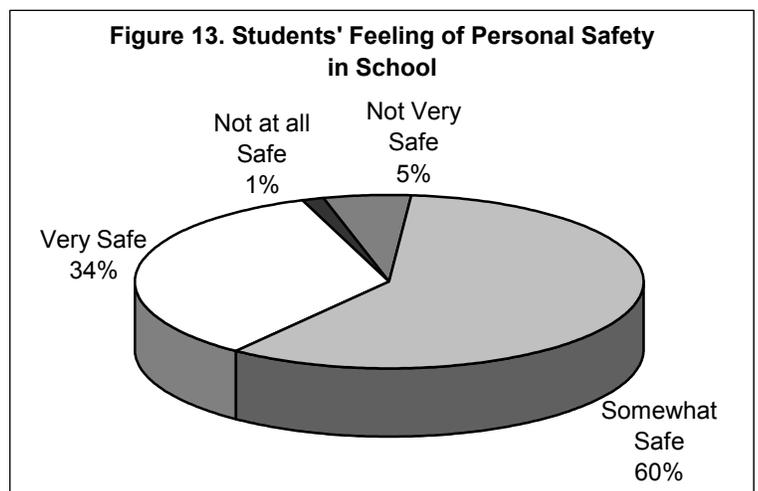
Figure 12. Reason Students Most Often Bullied, Called Names or Harassed in School



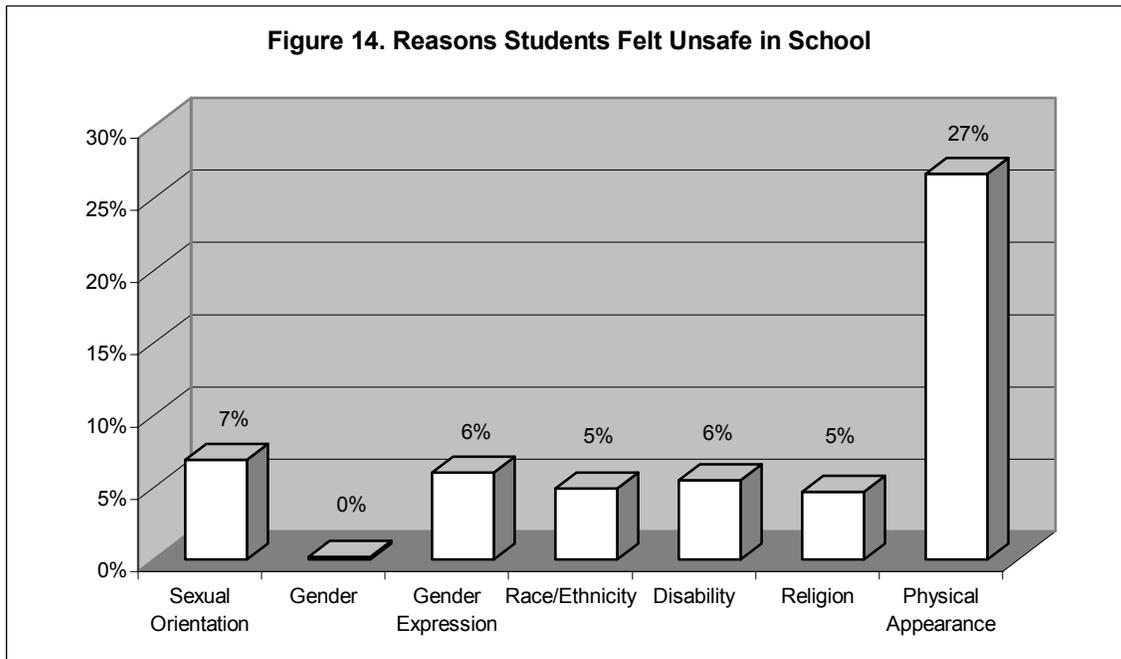
When asked to identify the most common reason that students were bullied, called names or harassed in school, half of the respondents reported that physical appearance was most often targeted and sizable percentages of respondents said that students were most often harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression (see Figure 12). Fewer respondents reported that students were bullied or harassed most often because of their academic ability, race/ethnicity, religion or family income.

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. Results from this survey revealed that many Georgia youth did not feel completely safe at school. As shown in Figure 13, only about a third (34%) of respondents reported feeling "very safe" in school.



To understand the reason why many respondents did not feel very safe at school, respondents were asked whether they felt unsafe because of one or more personal characteristics (sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, religion or physical appearance). Forty-six percent of Georgia students reported feeling unsafe because of at least one of the listed characteristics. As shown in Figure 14, students most commonly reported that they felt unsafe because of their physical appearance (27%). Less than 10% reported feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation, gender expression, a disability, race or ethnicity, religion or gender.



Personal Experiences of Bullying, Name Calling and Harassment

Verbal Harassment

Survey respondents were asked if they had been verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past school year. As shown in Figure 15, verbal harassment based on physical appearance was most common – five out of ten respondents reported being verbally harassed at some point in school because of their physical appearance (looks or body size). Almost a quarter (23%) of respondents had been verbally harassed because of their race or ethnicity. A sizable percentage of Georgia respondents reported being verbally harassed based on their gender expression (20%), gender (18%), sexual orientation (15%), religion (15%) or a disability (13%). Although respondents were more likely to report being verbally harassed because of their appearance than any other single characteristic, the results indicate that verbal harassment of all types is a serious problem in Georgia schools.

Physical Harassment and Assault

Survey respondents were also asked if they had been physically harassed (e.g., being pushed or shoved) or assaulted (e.g., being punched or kicked) at school in the past year. Given the extreme nature of these actions, it is not surprising that both physical harassment and physical assault were reported to occur less frequently than verbal harassment. Nevertheless, such behaviors were not uncommon in Georgia schools. As shown in Figure 16, physical appearance (looks and body size) were, again, the most frequently reported reasons for such behavior—about a quarter (24%) of respondents reported being physically harassed or assaulted in the past school year based on their physical appearance.⁴ Respondents had been harassed or assaulted in school based on their race or ethnicity (12%), gender expression, gender and religion (11% each) as well. Given the severity of these types of victimization, any occurrence of physical harassment or assault is unacceptable in our schools.

⁴ Given the low incidence of physical harassment and assault, Figure 16 represents only whether students ever experienced the particular event, i.e., those who reported “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often” or “very often.”

Figure 15. Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past Year

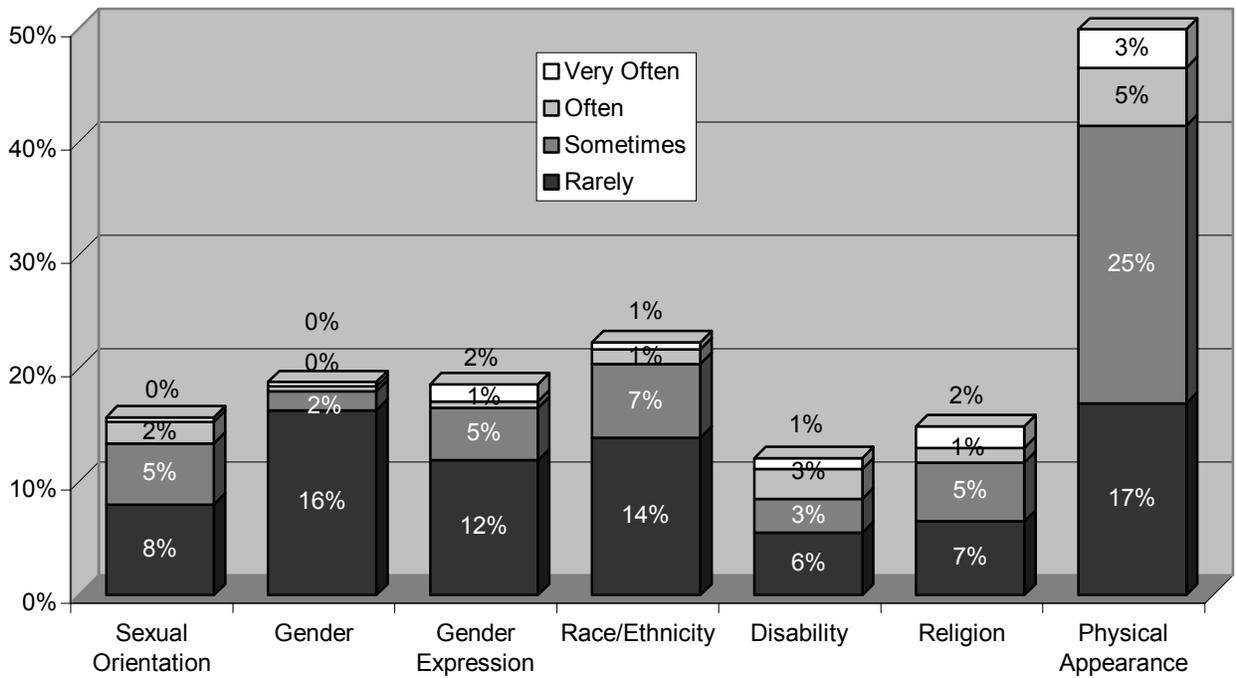
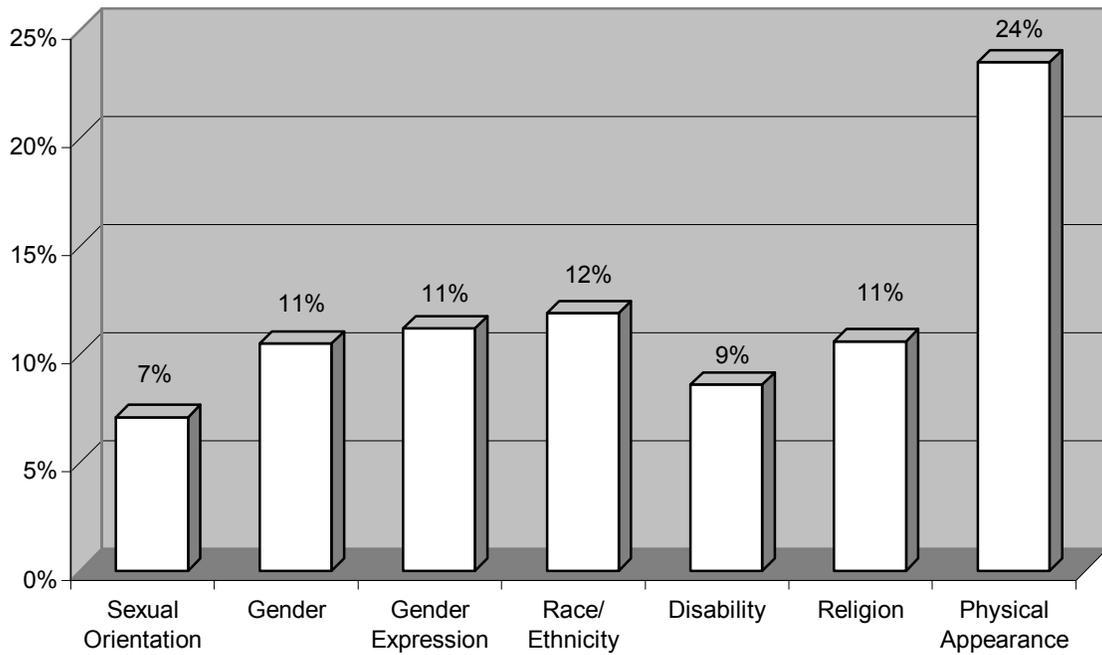
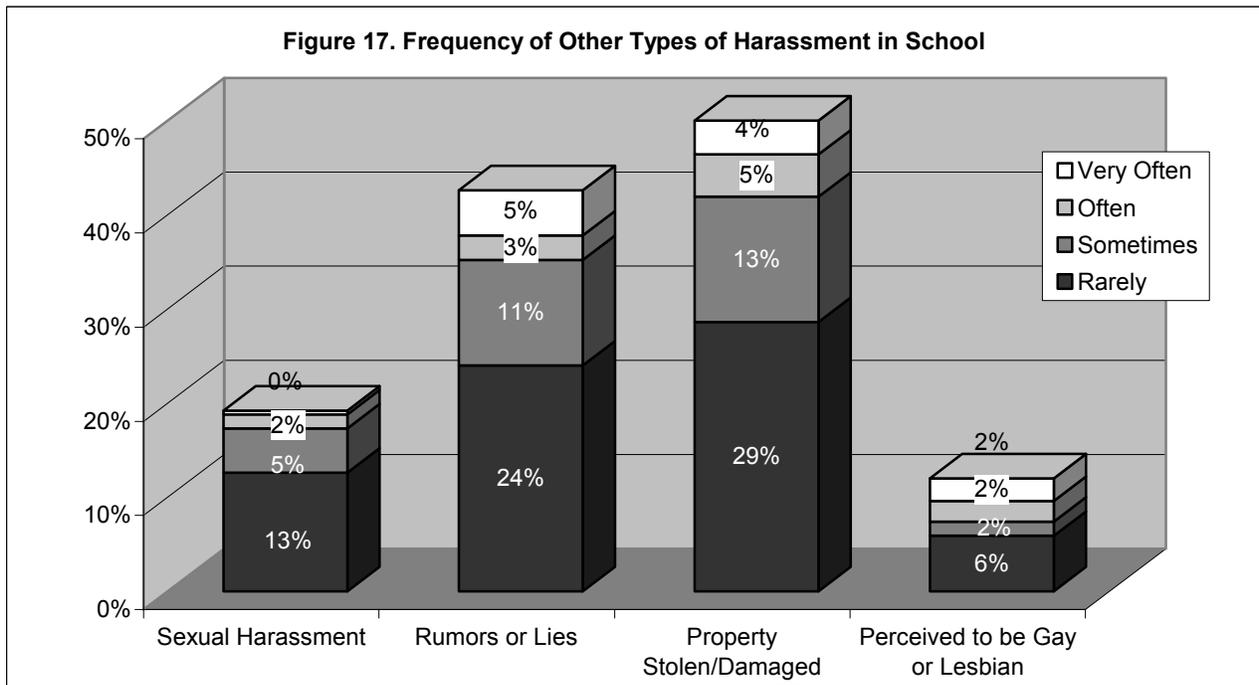


Figure 16. Percentage of Students Who Were Physically Harassed or Assaulted in the Past Year



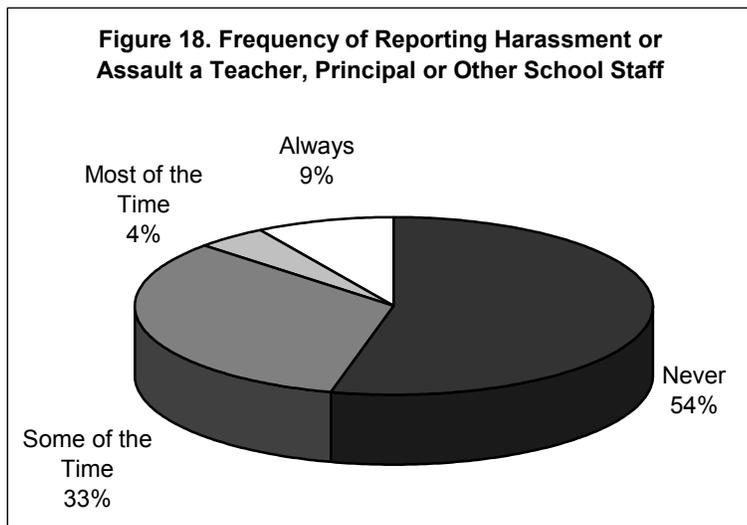


Other Forms of Harassment in School

Figure 17 illustrates other forms of bullying and harassment in school.⁵ About half (51%) of respondents reported having their property deliberately damaged or stolen in the past year, and 43% had rumors or lies told about them at least sometimes in the past school year. A fifth (20%) said they had been sexually harassed at school, and 12% reported that they had been harassed because people thought they were gay or lesbian.

Reporting Incidents of Harassment

Incidents of harassment and assault often went unreported to school personnel. Among Georgia respondents who experienced some form of harassment or assault at school, more than half (54%) never reported the incident to a teacher, principal or other school staff person (see Figure 18).



Respondents who did not report the incident were asked why they had not done so. A quarter of students (26%) believed that the incident was not serious enough to report (e.g., it was a joke or they did not feel threatened). For these students, it may be that the events were truly minor, but it may also be that some students have a high tolerance for victimization events in school or have become so inured to such experiences that they do not feel the need for intervention. For example, one 9th grade student said she did not report the incident because it "wasn't serious enough to be reported or to get

⁵ Unlike the previously discussed frequencies of verbal harassment and physical harassment or assault, students were not asked whether these 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.

anyone in trouble for. It was just a boy expressing that he liked me such as touching my butt." Such a comment raises concern that harassment of a sexual nature may be considered acceptable among some students attending Georgia schools.

Many Georgia students (21%) believed that telling a teacher or other school staff would exacerbate the situation in some way. Respondents' concerns ranged from less serious (e.g., being labeled a "tattle tale" or "punk") to serious safety concerns. One 10th grade student said that she was "afraid [she] would be assaulted for saying anything" about the incident to school staff. Teachers and school staff cannot effectively intervene when harassment occurs in school if students are too fearful to report the incidents. Thus, schools must take proactive measures, such as school-wide anti-bullying programs, to address these issues.

Nearly a quarter of students (23%) did not report incidents of harassment or assault because they believed that nothing would be done to address the situation:

It seems common....no one cares

Lack of response from teacher, too much response from perpetrator

The teacher wouldn't do anything any way.

One 12th grader felt that the school's existing policy for reporting incidents affected the ability of school staff to punish perpetrators: "The school administration's policy is that without [corroboration] of an accusation of harassment by onlookers, no punishment will be given without a confession."

In addition, 19% of respondents chose to handle the situation on their own rather than report it to school authorities. For example, a 9th grade student reported: "I handle my own problems. Me and my friends stick together and deal with people who give us problems in our own ways."

For many respondents, reporting incidents of harassment or assault to a teacher or other school staff did not elicit a helpful response – only a third (33%) of students who reported an incident to school personnel said that some sort of immediate action was taken (e.g., the perpetrator was suspended or given detention). A number of respondents felt that school personnel were not at all helpful in addressing the situation:

They did absolutely nothing.

On one occasion we (our high school band) had a big problem with sexual harassment. and we had at least 10 girls who reported an incident about the same guy. and the teacher just took him off to the side and asked him to stop. and that was all...and after the guy's meeting with the director, he continued. and the teacher this time did absolutely nothing. just turned his head and looked another way.

They said they would handle it and call the other person to the office. They never did the other person never got in any trouble.

These comments from students paint a bleak picture of school climate for many Georgia students. Most respondents who were harassed or assaulted did not report the incidents to school staff, often because they believed school staff would not effectively address the problem or that reporting it would make the situation worse. Furthermore, among students who reported incidents, only a third said that it resulted in some sort 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 are facing in school. Yet students may not increase their level of reporting until they see that teachers and other staff are consistently addressing these problems.

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.

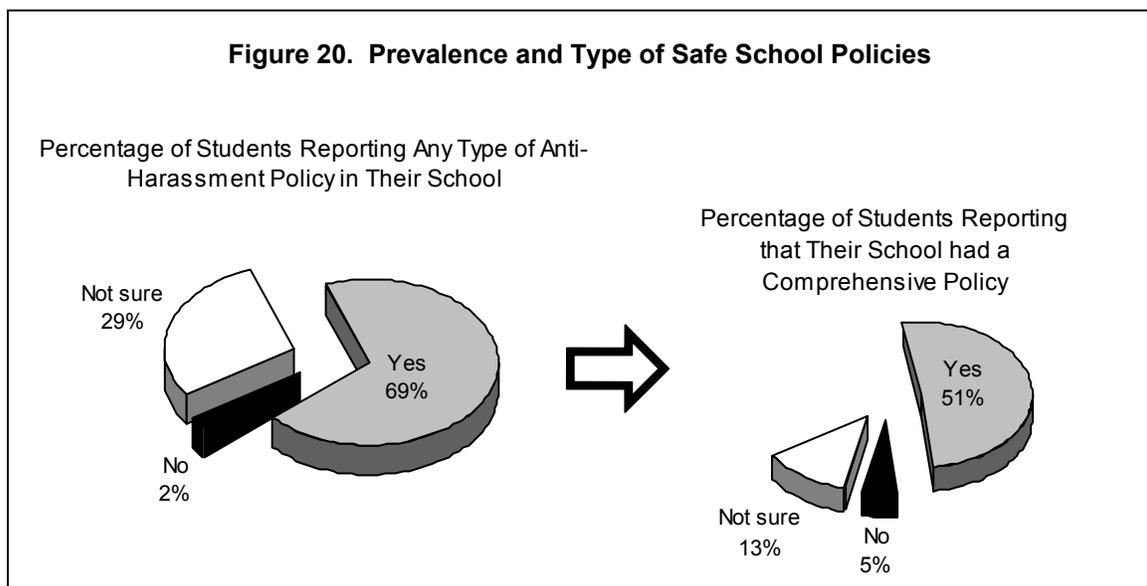
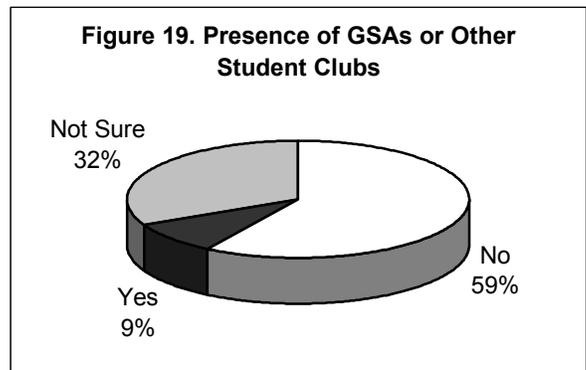
School Climate and Educational Indicators

Truancy, school engagement, and educational aspirations may be affected by the frequency of negative experiences such as bullying, name calling or feeling unsafe at school. More than one in ten students (12%) reported that they knew of a friend who had skipped class at least one time because they felt unsafe, and almost a fifth (18%) reported a friend missing at least one entire day of school for this reason. When asked about their own school attendance in the past month, 6% had skipped a class at least once in the past month because they felt unsafe and 9% of respondents had missed at least one entire day of school.

Georgia students who reported feeling unsafe in school were far less likely than those who felt safe to report that they liked school (14% versus 55%). Further, respondents who reported that harassment and bullying were serious problems at their school were less likely to report liking school (43% versus 62%), and to report plans to attend college (76% versus 92%).

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 Georgia schools. Such activities may create a hostile learning environment, particularly for LGBT students, and the existence of supportive resources may help mitigate the negative effects of such a climate. Student clubs that address LGBT student issues, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), are one potentially important source of support for LGBT students. As shown in Figure 19, only 9% of Georgia respondents reported that their school had a student club addressing LGBT student issues, which was much



lower than the national average (22%). Students whose schools had a supportive student club were less likely to say that bullying and harassment were very or somewhat serious problems in their school (17% v. 52%) and were less likely to report that they felt unsafe in their schools (3% vs. 7%). Given these findings, it may be that having a student club that addresses LGBT student issues is an indicator of a better learning environment for all students.

Another potentially important source of support is the existence of anti-harassment or safe schools policies that provide explicit protection for students by including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. As Figure 20 illustrates, a majority (69%) of respondents believed that their school had some type of policy for reporting incidents of harassment and assault, and almost three-quarters of those respondents also believed that their school had a comprehensive policy that specifically mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Thus, only about half (51%) of all Georgia respondents reported that they were protected by comprehensive school anti-harassment policies. It is important to note that over a quarter (29%) were unsure whether or not their school had a protective policy of any kind. 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 these Georgia schools need to do a more comprehensive job of informing their students.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For many Georgia students, school was an unsafe place in which bullying, name-calling and harassment were a regular part of their school day. Reports of verbal harassment, physical harassment and assault, particularly because of physical appearance race/ethnicity and gender expression, were not uncommon among Georgia youth. Nearly five out of ten respondents believed that bullying, name calling and harassment were serious problems at their school, and a majority reported that their peers were frequently bullied or harassed based on personal characteristics, especially physical appearance, sexual orientation or gender expression. Furthermore, a majority of Georgia students reported frequently hearing homophobic and sexist remarks and negative language about gender expression in school.

Biased language was even heard from some faculty and other school staff. Further, school personnel often failed to intervene when hearing biased remarks from students , and some school authorities did not take appropriate action when students reported incidents of harassment or assault. Experiences with harassment and bullying, hearing derogatory language in the classroom as well as in the hallways and a general lack of intervention by their 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 Georgia to ensure that all students have access to a safe and supportive learning environment. Findings from this report suggest that supportive student clubs and comprehensive anti-harassment policies may lower the frequency of bullying, name calling and harassment in Georgia schools. Students who attended Georgia schools that had a student club addressing LGBT student issues, such as a Gay-Straight Alliance, reported a safer learning environment. As such, every effort should be made to support students who seek to improve school climate by starting and sustaining these clubs in their schools. With regard to school policy, given that only half of Georgia 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 provides explicit protections to students who are targets of harassment and assault based on personal characteristics such as sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Georgia 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, Georgia 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.