



# From Teasing to Torment: A Report on School Climate in Missouri



**A Report from GLSEN's Research Department**

# From Teasing to Torment: A Report on School Climate in Missouri

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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 Missouri schools:**

- An overwhelming majority of Missouri youth reported hearing homophobic remarks such as “that’s so gay” (86%) or derogatory terms such as “faggot” or “dyke” (76%) in school. A majority of Missouri youth also reported hearing sexist remarks (85%) from students in their school.
- Two-thirds (65%) of youth reported hearing negative remarks about someone’s gender expression, such as a girl acting “too much like a boy,” and almost half (45%) reported hearing racist remarks in school.
- School authorities did not consistently intervene when hearing biased language in school. Less than half of Missouri youth said that teachers or other school staff frequently intervened when hearing homophobic (40%), sexist (45%) or racist (45%) language at school.
- Sizable percentages of youth reported hearing biased remarks from school personnel—17% heard sexist remarks, 12% heard homophobic or negative religious remarks, and 9% heard racist remarks from teachers or other staff at their school.

### **Bullying, name-calling and harassment were serious problems in Missouri schools:**

- Almost half (48%) of Missouri youth reported bullying, name calling and harassment to be somewhat or very serious problems at their school, which was greater than the national average (36%).
- Nearly half (43%) of Missouri youth felt at-risk because of at least one personal characteristic, such as their physical appearance, sexual orientation or gender expression.
- A majority of youth reported that other students were bullied and harassed at school because of their physical appearance (86%), gender expression (64%) and sexual orientation (61%).
- Reports of verbal harassment and physical harassment and assault, particularly because of physical appearance, were not uncommon among Missouri youth. Over half (56%) had been verbally harassed based on their physical appearance, and a third had been physically harassed or assaulted because of this characteristic.
- Many youth were verbally harassed because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (15%) and gender expression (19%), regardless of whether or not they were actually LGBT.

### **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:**

- Nearly one-half (48%) of youth who experienced harassment or assault at school did not report it to school authorities, often because they believed reporting incidents would make the situation worse or that school staff would not take action to resolve it.
- Among youth who did report incidents of harassment/assault, only 37% reported that some immediate action was taken by school authorities to address the situation.

### **LGBT students lacked access to resources and supports:**

- Less than 10% of Missouri youth reported that their school had a GSA or other type of student club that provided support to LGBT students, which was lower than the national average (22%).

- Only about half (52%) of Missouri youth reported that their school had a comprehensive anti-harassment policy that specifically mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. Nearly a quarter (22%) did not know if their school had a policy of any kind.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Missouri 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 half of Missouri 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 expression, 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.<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.glsen.org)). The following is a report of findings based on the responses of youth who were attending schools in Missouri 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 186 respondents were attending schools in Missouri at the time of the survey. As shown in Table 1, respondents were predominately white, male, and in 9th through 12th grades. Six percent of respondents were LGBT.<sup>2</sup> Almost all respondents (94%) attended public schools, the majority located in suburban areas (see Table 2). Of the few respondents (6%) who were attending private or parochial schools, almost two-thirds of these schools were religious-affiliated.

### Biased Language in School

#### Biased Language from Students

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

**Table 1. Demographics of Missouri Survey Participants**

**Race/Ethnicity**

White	84%
Black or African American	6%
Latino/a or Hispanic	6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%
Native American/Alaskan Native	1%
Multiracial	2%
Other race/ethnicity	<1%

**Gender**

Male	66%
Female	34%

**LGBT Status**

LGBT	6%
Non-LGBT	94%

**Grade**

5th	<1%
7th	9%
8th	34%
9th	23%
10th	13%
11th	10%
12th	11%

**Average Age = 14.6 years**

**Table 2. School Characteristics**

**Grade Levels**

K through 12 school	5%
Elementary school	1%
Lower school (elementary and middle school grades)	0%
Middle school	38%
Upper school (middle and high school grades)	4%
High School	52%

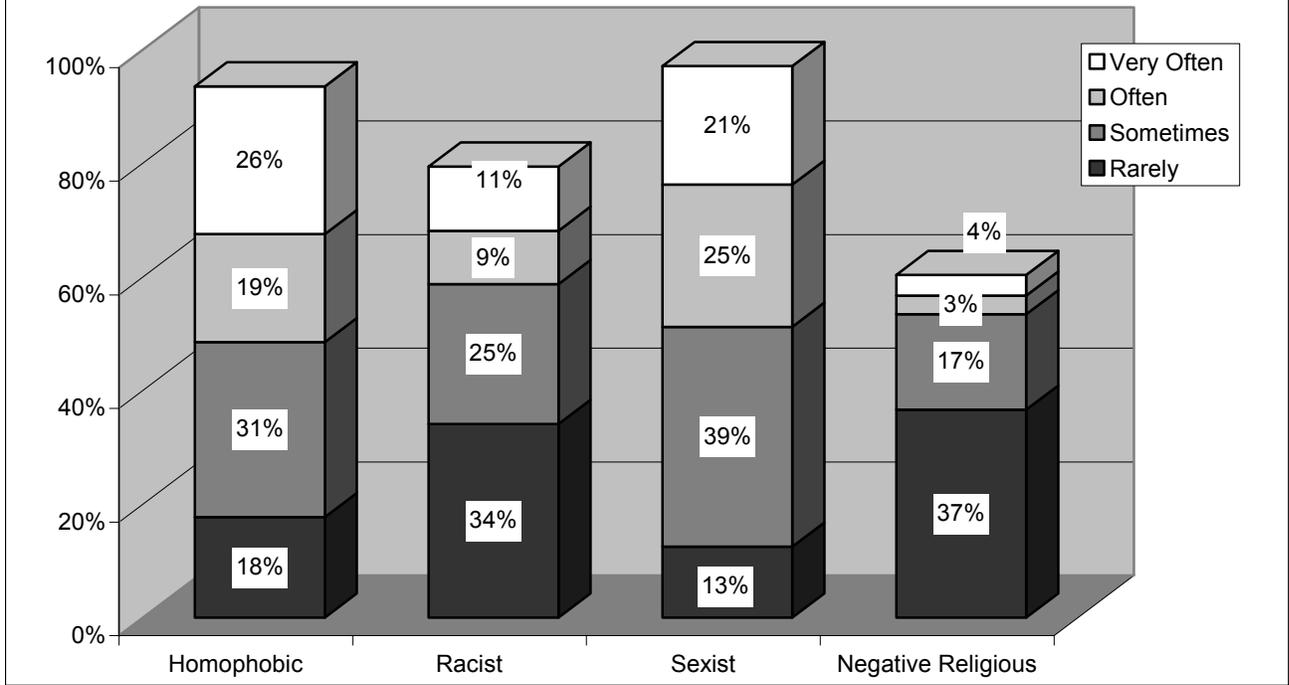
**Location**

Urban area	14%
Suburban area	54%
Small town or rural area	32%

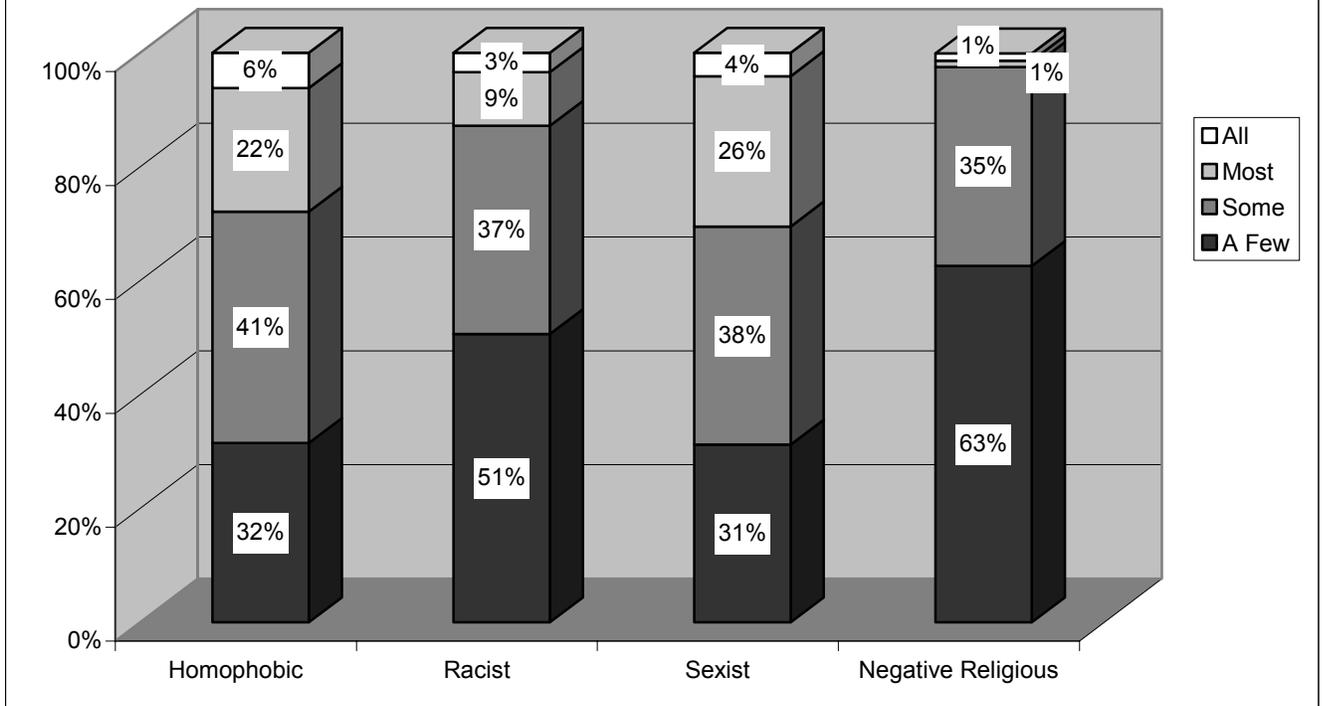
**School Type**

Public school	94%
Private or parochial school	6%
• <i>Religious-affiliated</i>	63%

**Figure 1. Frequency of Biased Remarks from Students**



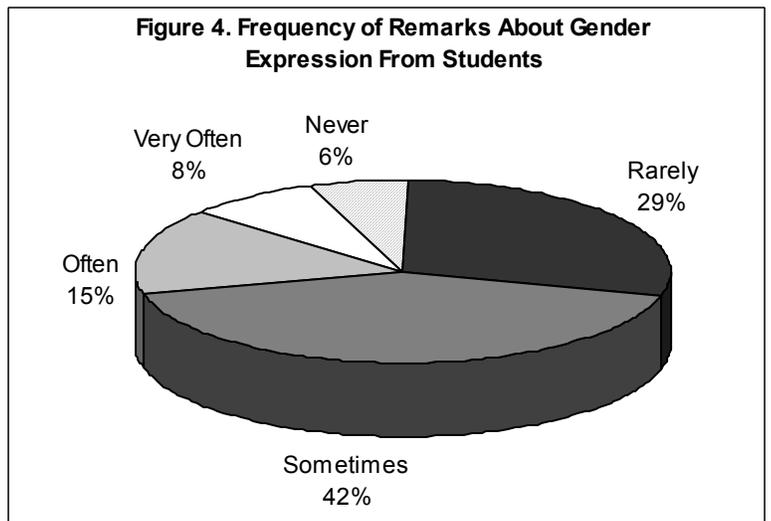
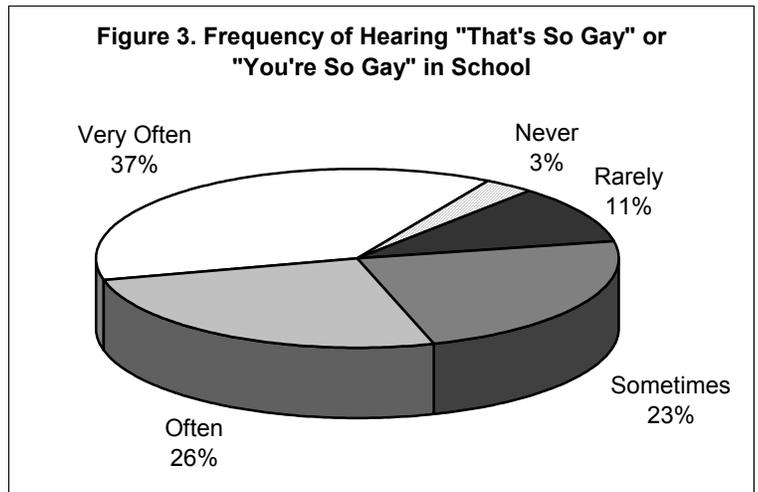
**Figure 2. Number of Students Making Biased Remarks**



### Homophobic Remarks

Homophobic remarks, such as “faggot,” “dyke” or “queer,” were one of the most frequently heard types of biased language that Missouri respondents reported hearing in school. About three-quarters (76%) of respondents said that they heard such remarks from students at least some of the time, and nearly half (45%) reported hearing homophobic remarks often or very often (see Figure 1). Furthermore, as shown in Figure 2, use of such language was not limited to a few students—a little more than a quarter (28%) of respondents heard homophobic remarks from most or all of their peers.

Respondents were also asked how often they heard the expressions “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” from other students at school. “That’s so gay” and “you’re so gay” are commonly used as another way of calling something or someone valueless or stupid. An even larger number of Missouri students reported hearing these expressions at school—86% of respondents reported hearing “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” at least some of the time. Almost two-thirds (63%) reported hearing these expressions often or very often from other students at school (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.<sup>3</sup> 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.” As Figure 4 illustrates, about two-thirds (65%) of respondents reported hearing negative comments about someone’s gender expression, and almost a quarter (23%) heard such remarks frequently (see Figure 4).

<sup>3</sup> 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.

### 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 Missouri schools. As shown in Figure 1, 85% reported hearing sexist remarks from students at least some of the time, and almost half (46%) said they heard such remarks often or very often. Additionally, 30% of respondents reported hearing sexist remarks from most or all of the students at their school (see Figure 2).

### Racist Remarks

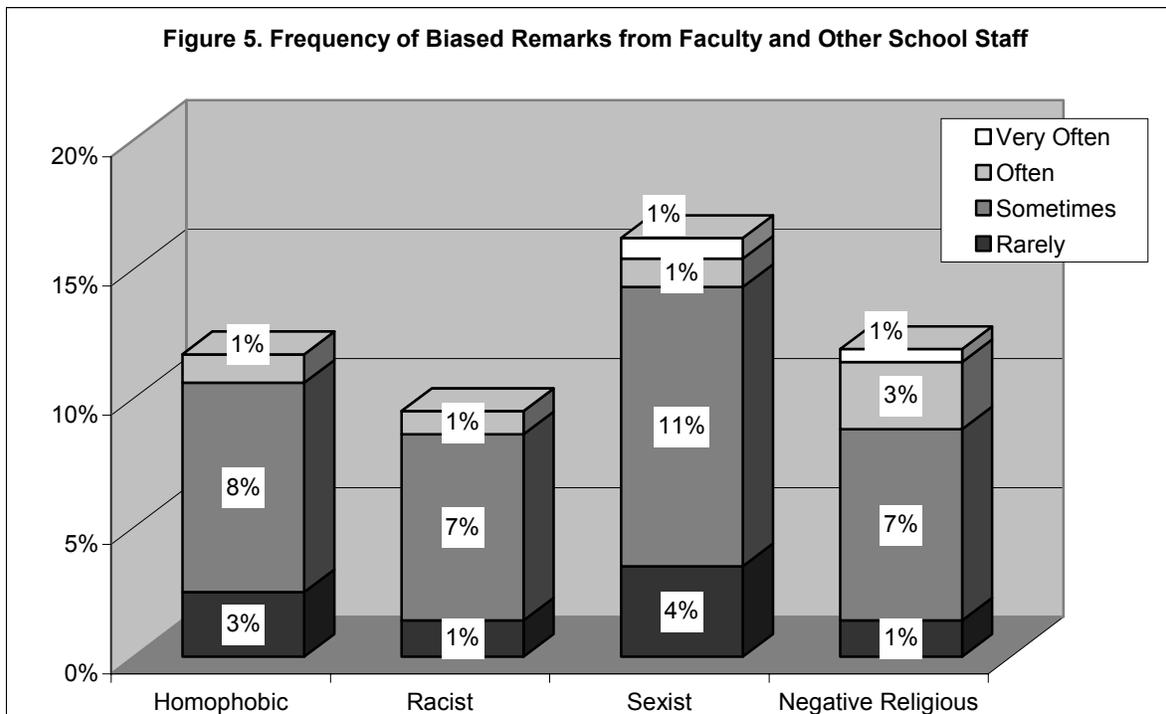
Although racist remarks were heard less frequently than other types of remarks, particularly homophobic and sexist remarks, they were not uncommon in Missouri schools. Nearly half of respondents (45%) reported hearing racist remarks from students at least some of the time, and a fifth (20%) said they heard these remarks often or very often (see Figure 1). Over a tenth (12%) of respondents heard racist remarks from most or all students at their school (see Figure 2). In addition, respondents were less likely to hear racist remarks from other students at school than to hear homophobic or sexist remarks or negative remarks related to someone’s gender expression.

### Negative Religious Remarks

Negative remarks about individuals’ actual or presumed religion were least commonly heard by respondents. As shown in Figure 1, about a quarter (24%) of respondents reported hearing such remarks at least some of the time, and less than 10% heard them more frequently. As Figure 2 shows, only 2% reported hearing these negative religious remarks from most or all of their peers.

### Biased Language from Faculty and Other School Staff

Hearing biased remarks 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, racist, sexist and negative religious remarks from school staff. Although 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 fifth (17%) of respondents reported hearing school personnel make sexist remarks. A sizable percentage also reported hearing homophobic remarks (12%), negative religious remarks (12%) and racist remarks (9%) from teachers or other staff at their school.

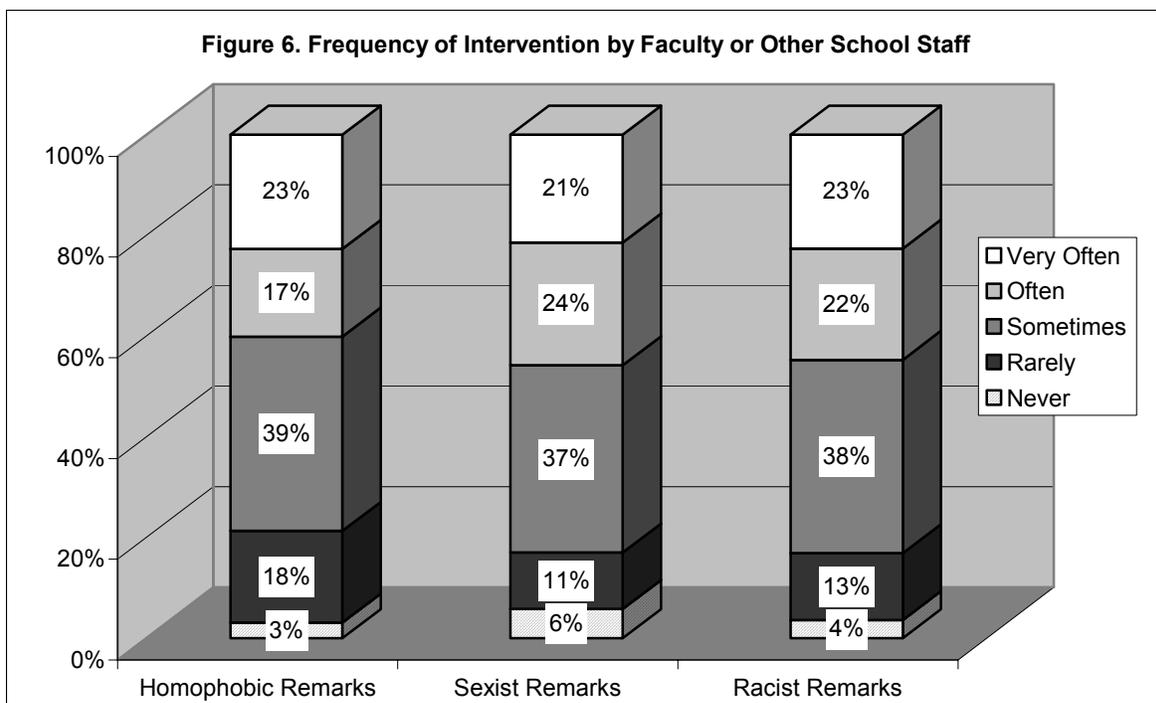
### Intervention Regarding Biased Remarks

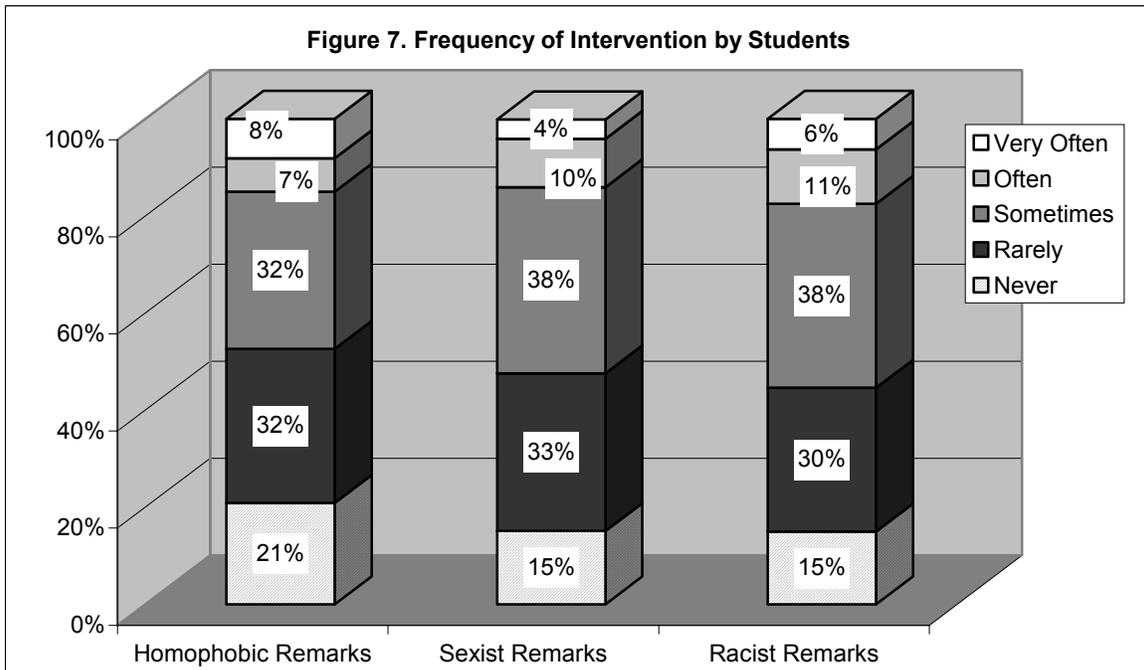
#### *Intervention by Faculty and Other School Staff*

The failure of school staff to intervene when hearing biased remarks from students may also send a message to students that use of such language in school is permissible. Unfortunately, school staff did not frequently intervene when hearing biased remarks in school. As Figure 6 illustrates, less than half of school personnel frequently (“often” or “very often”) intervened when hearing racist or sexist remarks (45% each). They were slightly less like to frequently intervene when hearing homophobic remarks (40%).

#### *Intervention by Students*

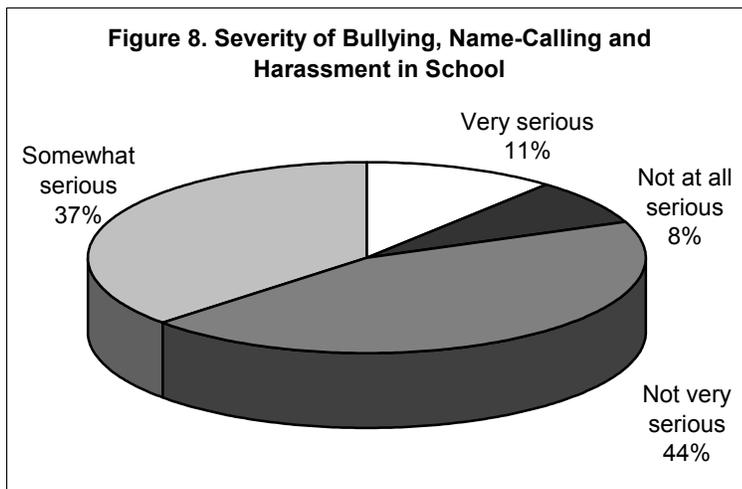
Students were much less likely than school personnel to intervene when hearing biased language at school. Less than a fifth of respondents reported that students frequently intervened with hearing sexist (14%), homophobic (15%) or racist (17%) remarks from their peers (see Figure 7.)





### Severity of Bullying, Name Calling and Harassment in School

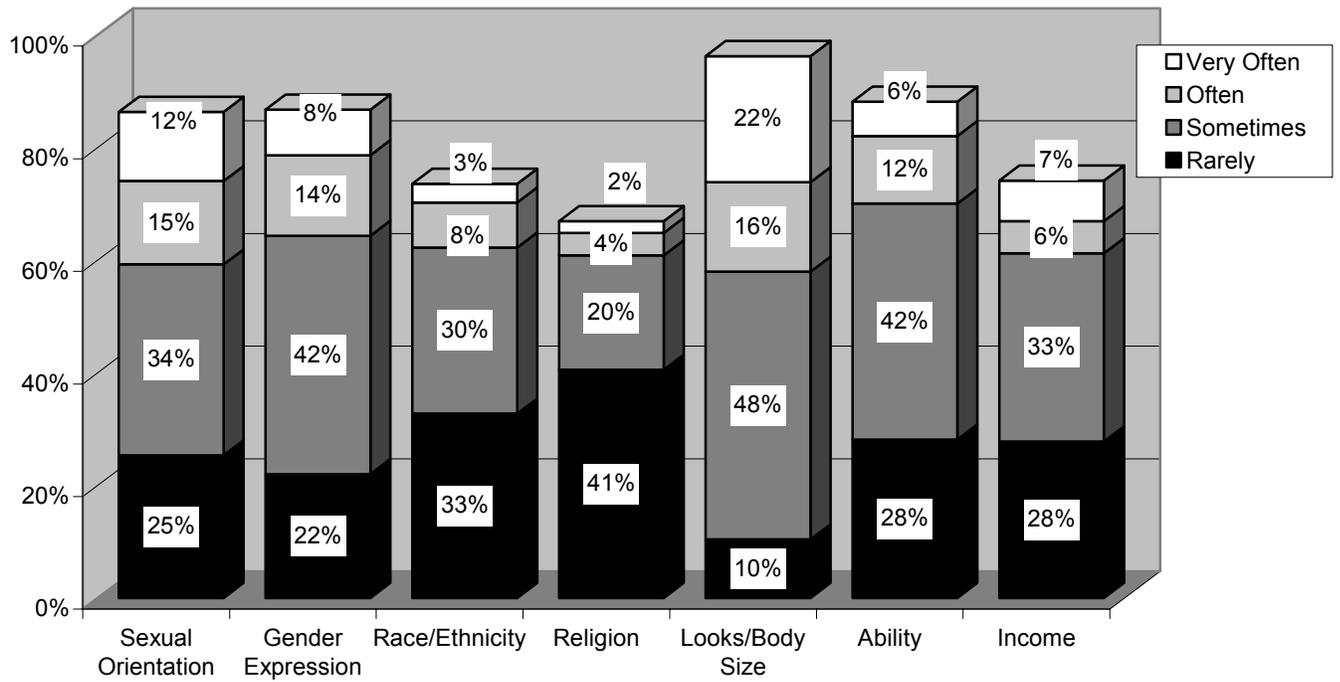
Survey respondents were asked about their perceptions of the severity of bullying, name-calling and harassment in their schools. As illustrated in Figure 8, almost half (48%) believed bullying, name-calling and harassment to be somewhat or very serious issues troubling Missouri schools. This percentage was much higher than for students nationally (36%).



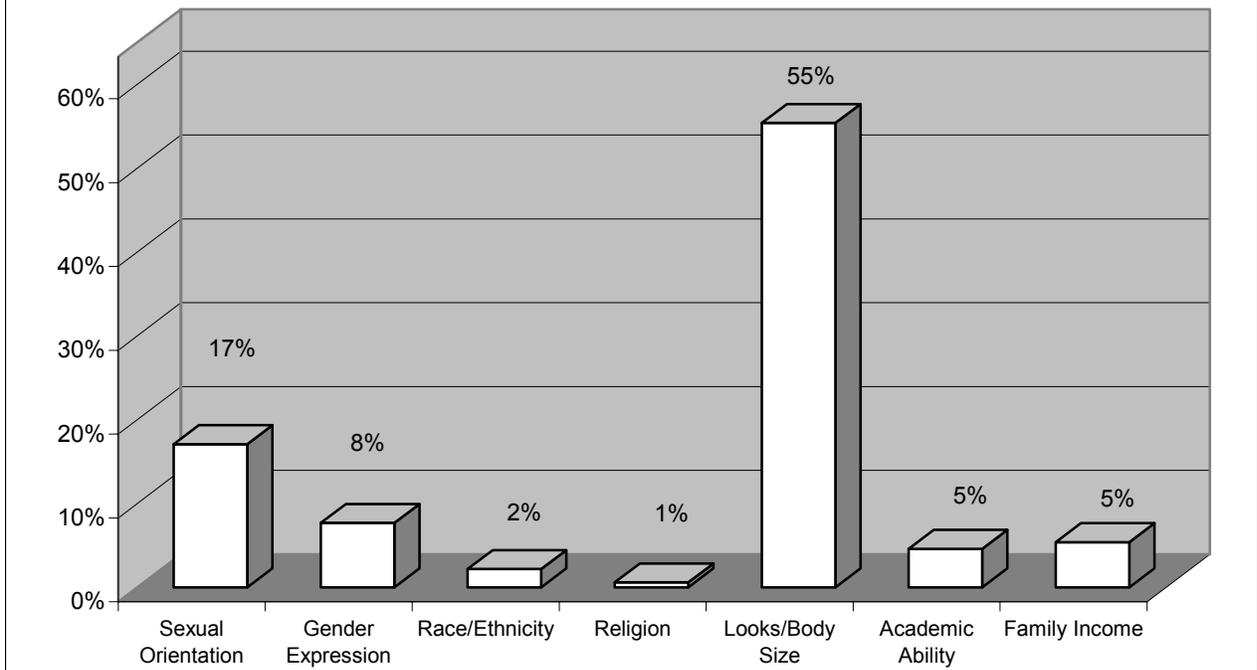
Respondents were also asked about the frequency of witnessing other students being bullied, called names or harassed at school. Figure 9 shows that students in Missouri schools were most commonly bullied and harassed because of their physical appearance—86% of respondents reported that students were harassed at least sometimes because of their looks or body size, and 38% said this occurred frequently. A majority of respondents reported that students were bullied and harassed at least sometimes because of their gender expression (64%), their sexual orientation (61%), or their academic ability (60%). Furthermore, many respondents said that these types of harassment occurred often or very often (22% for gender expression, 27% for sexual orientation, 18% for academic ability).

Although not as frequent, harassment based on race/ethnicity, family income and religion also occurred. Forty-six percent of respondents said that students were bullied and harassed at least sometimes because of their family's income, 41% said students experienced harassment based on their race or ethnicity, and about a quarter (26%) said students were harassed because of their religion.

**Figure 9. Frequency of Bullying, Name Calling and Harassment**



**Figure 10. Reason Students Most Often Bullied, Called Names and Harassed**



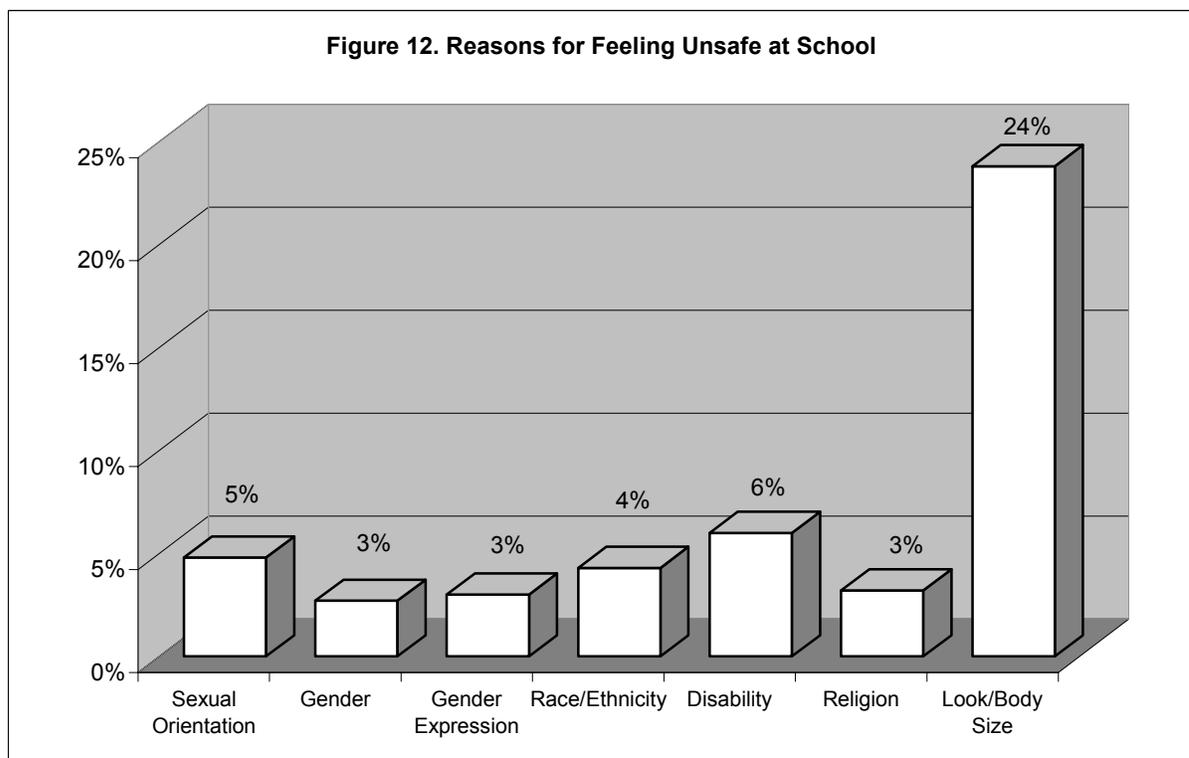
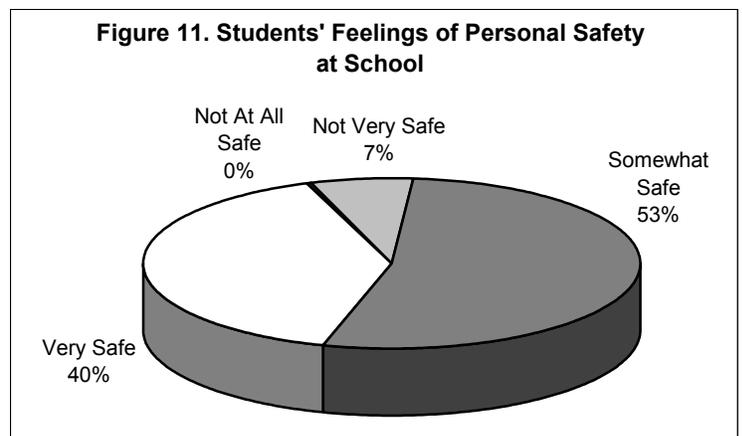
Bullying and harassment because of physical appearance occurred more frequently than bullying and harassment because of any other characteristic. Missouri students were also more likely to report that people were bullied, called names or harassed at their school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression than because of their race/ethnicity, family income or religion.

When asked which characteristics were most often targeted, the largest number (55%) of respondents reported that physical appearance was most common (see Figure 10). After physical harassment, sexual orientation was reported to be the most commonly targeted characteristic. Fewer than 10% of respondents reported that students were harassed most often because of their gender expression, family income, academic ability, race/ethnicity or religion.

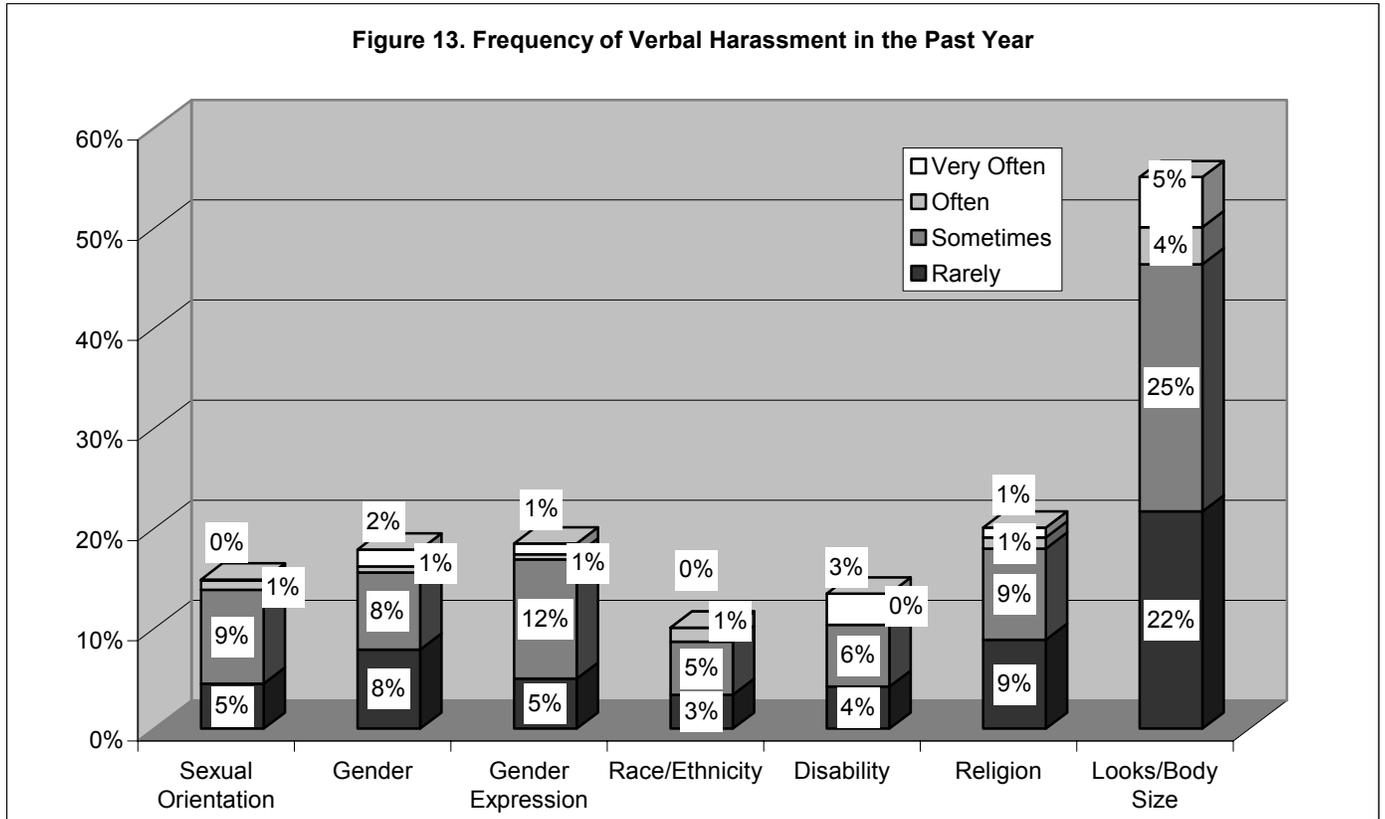
### Safety in School

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 11, only 40% of respondents reported feeling very safe at school, which was slightly lower than in the national sample (47%).

To understand the reasons why many students did not feel very safe at school,



**Figure 13. Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past Year**



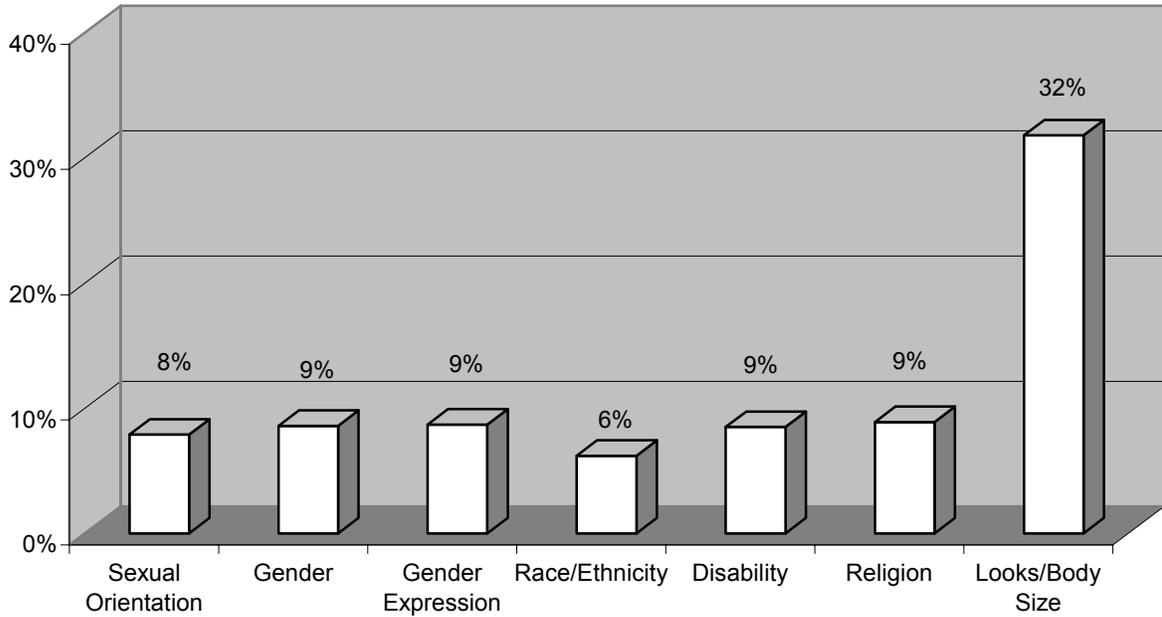
respondents were asked whether they felt unsafe because of one or more personal characteristics (sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race or ethnicity, disability, religion or physical appearance). Nearly half (43%) of Missouri students felt unsafe because of at least one of the personal characteristics listed. As Figure 12 illustrates, respondents most commonly reported feeling unsafe because of the way they looked or their body size (24%).

### **Personal Experiences with Bullying, Name Calling and Harassment**

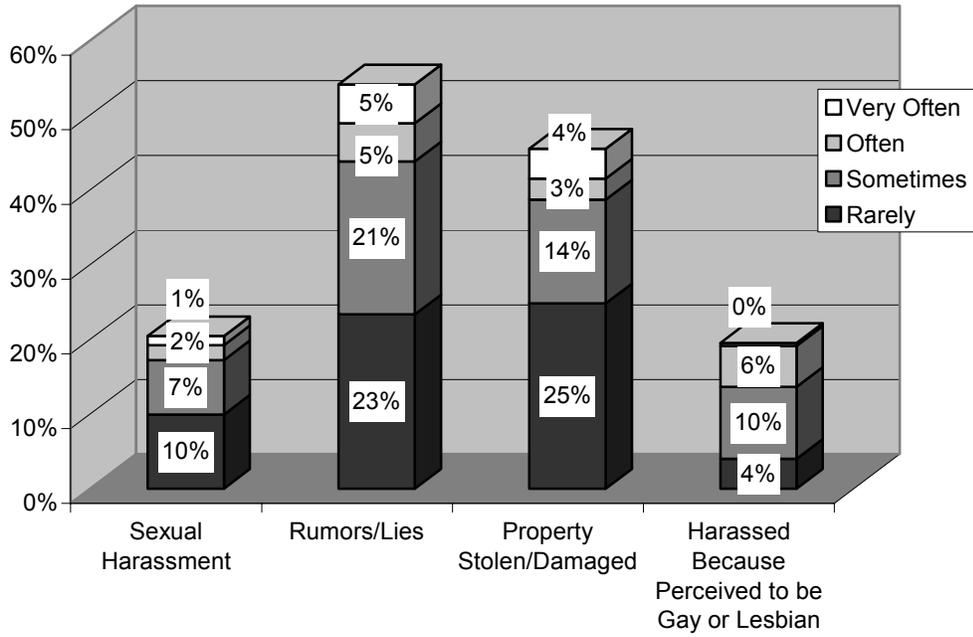
#### Verbal Harassment

Survey respondents were asked how often they had experienced verbal harassment (e.g., been called names or threatened) in the past school year. As shown in Figure 13, harassment based on physical appearance occurred most frequently—over half (56%) of respondents reported being verbally harassed at some point at school because of their physical appearance. A sizable percentage of respondents reported being verbally harassed because of other characteristics, such as their religion (20%), their gender (19%), their gender expression (19%) or their sexual orientation (15%). Furthermore, 13% of respondents had been verbally harassed in the past year because of a disability, and 9% because of their race or ethnicity. Although respondents were more likely to report having been verbally harassed because of their physical appearance than because of any other characteristic, the results of this study demonstrate that verbal harassment of all types was an unacceptable problem in Missouri schools.

**Figure 14. Percentage of Students Who Were Physically Harassed or Assaulted in the Past Year**



**Figure 15. Frequency of Other Types of Harassment**



## Physical Harassment and Assault

Survey respondents were also asked if they had been physically harassed (e.g., being pushed or shoved) or physically assaulted (e.g., being punched or kicked) 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 Missouri schools. As shown in Figure 14,<sup>4</sup> looks and body size were, again, the most frequently reported reasons for such behavior. About a third (32%) reported being physically harassed or assaulted in the past school year because of their physical appearance, a distressingly large proportion. About a tenth of respondents reported being physically harassed or assaulted because of their gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or religion. In addition, 6% of respondents had been physically harassed or assaulted because of their race or ethnicity. Although physical harassment and assault were reported to occur less frequently than verbal harassment, given the severity of these types of victimization, any occurrence of physical harassment or assault is unacceptable in our schools.

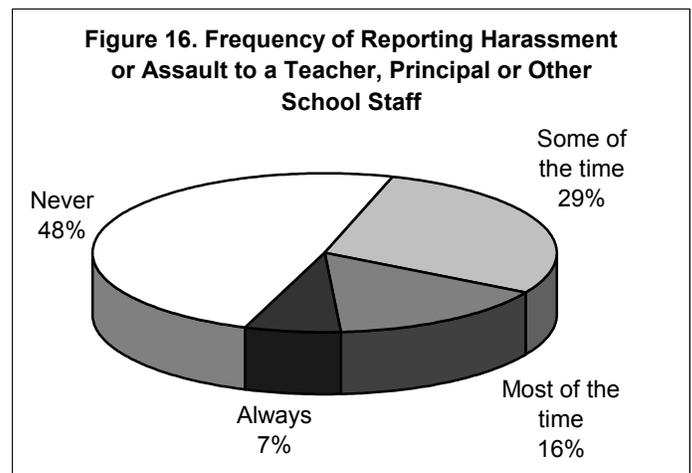
## Other Forms of Harassment in School

Figure 15 illustrates the frequency of other forms of bullying and harassment that students may experience in school.<sup>5</sup> Respondents most frequently reported being the target of mean rumors or lies with more than half (54%) reporting that it had occurred in the past year. Following rumor/lies was property theft or deliberate damage—46% of respondents had their property stolen or deliberately damaged in the past year. A fifth of respondents had been harassed because people thought they were gay or lesbian, and a fifth had experienced sexual harassment in school.

## Reporting Incidents of Harassment

Incidents of harassment or assault often went unreported to school personnel. Among Missouri students who experienced any form of verbal or physical harassment or assault, nearly half (49%) did not report the incident to a teacher, principal or other school staff person (see Figure 16). Respondents who did not report the incident were asked why they had not done so.

Thirteen percent of respondents said they did not report the incident to school authorities because they believed that nothing would be done to address the situation. For example, a 12th grade student did not report being harassed because she “doubted it would have made a difference.” An 11th grader commented that the incident “didn’t seem like it was important enough and the teachers at my school don’t really care or discipline anybody.”



<sup>4</sup> Given the low incidence of physical harassment and assault, Figure 14 represents only whether students ever experienced the particular event, i.e., those who reported that they “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often” or “very often” experience physical harassment or assault.

<sup>5</sup> Unlike verbal and physical harassment and assault, respondents 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 their religion or for no apparent reason.

A 10th grade student who had been harassed by one of her teachers believed that school personnel would not listen to her because they are "often as bad or worse than the students." Being harassed or assaulted by a teacher or other school staff person can certainly cause a student to feel more vulnerable and isolated at school. An examination of the extent to which harassment and assault are committed by faculty and other school personnel was beyond the scope of this study, however it is a serious issue deserving of further investigation.

Not knowing who to turn to was another concern expressed by respondents. After being sexually harassed at school, a student in the 10th grade did not report the incident because she was "scared and didn't know who to talk to" about it. Students not knowing to whom they should report an incident of harassment or assault or not feeling comfortable talking to their principals, teachers or other individuals responsible for ensuring a safe learning environment may also create a hostile school climate.

Thirteen percent of respondents believed the reporting incidents of harassment or assault would worsen the situation in some way (e.g., they were scared that reporting would label them a "nark" or affect their popularity at school). For example, a 10th grade student did not report an incident because she felt that "in the end, nobody would get in trouble except for [her] because everyone would know that [she] told on them and [she] would only receive more ridicule." A number of other respondents expressed similar concerns:

*Because i guess it will only worsen the situation and make me look bad. Not the 'cool' thing to do i guess.*

*Because then the harassment would increase because they know i told.*

*Other kids make things worse when you tell on somebody.*

*Telling a teacher ruins a persons popularity.*

More than a third (39%) of respondents said 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 someone was "just messing" with them). In addition, 22% of respondents said they handled the situation on their own rather than report it to school authorities. For example, a 12th grade student said that he and the other students involved were able to "resolve it ourselves peacefully." However, other incidents that respondents did not report were more disconcerting and suggested that, for some students, certain types of harassment may be so commonplace or expected that they do not see a reason to report it:

*I felt at the time that I should just get over it. Complaining to an authority seemed like a babyish way to deal with these things that have become just a part of life at my school.*

*Because it's verbal cat fighting. Not too serious, but still hurtful to a person's self esteem.*

*Because it's not that big of a deal until it gets physical.*

For many respondents, reporting incidents of harassment or assault to a teacher or other school staff did not elicit a helpful response. Less than half (37%) of the respondents who reported victimization events to school authorities said that some sort of immediate action was taken (e.g., the perpetrator was suspended or a teacher reported it to the principal).

When asked what school staff did, several respondents said “not much” or “nothing.” In addition, several respondents said that they were school staff assured them that they would handle the situation and later found out that nothing was done.

The comments from these students paint a bleak picture of school climate for many Missouri students. 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 the students who reported incidents, less than half said that it resulted in immediate action being taken. Because students did not often report harassment to school staff, they may not be fully informed as to the dangers their students face at school. Yet students may not increase their level of reporting until they see that teachers and other school staff are consistently addressing the 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.

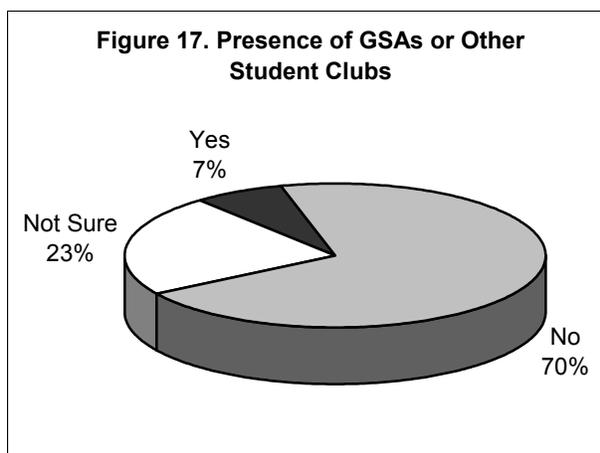
### School Climate and Education Indicators

Students’ school attendance, level of school engagement and education aspirations may be affected by the negative experiences of harassment or feeling unsafe at school. When asked about their school attendance, 5% of respondents reported that they had skipped a class at least one time or missed at least one entire day of school because they felt unsafe at school or while going to/from school. Fifteen percent of respondents reported that they had a friend who had skipped class at least one time due to safety concerns, and 12% reported a friend missing at least one entire day of school for this reason.

A majority of respondents reported that they liked school (58%) and planned to attend college (70%). However, respondents who felt safe at school were four times more likely to report liking school than those who felt unsafe (62% vs. 15%). Respondents who reported that bullying and harassment were not serious problems at their school were nearly twice as likely to say that they liked school as those at schools with a severe bullying problem (74% vs. 42%). The severity of bullying and harassment at school was related to respondents’ educational aspirations as well. Respondents who reported that bullying and harassment were not serious problems were more likely to have plans to attend college (86% vs. 53% of respondents who reported that bullying and harassment were serious problems at their school).

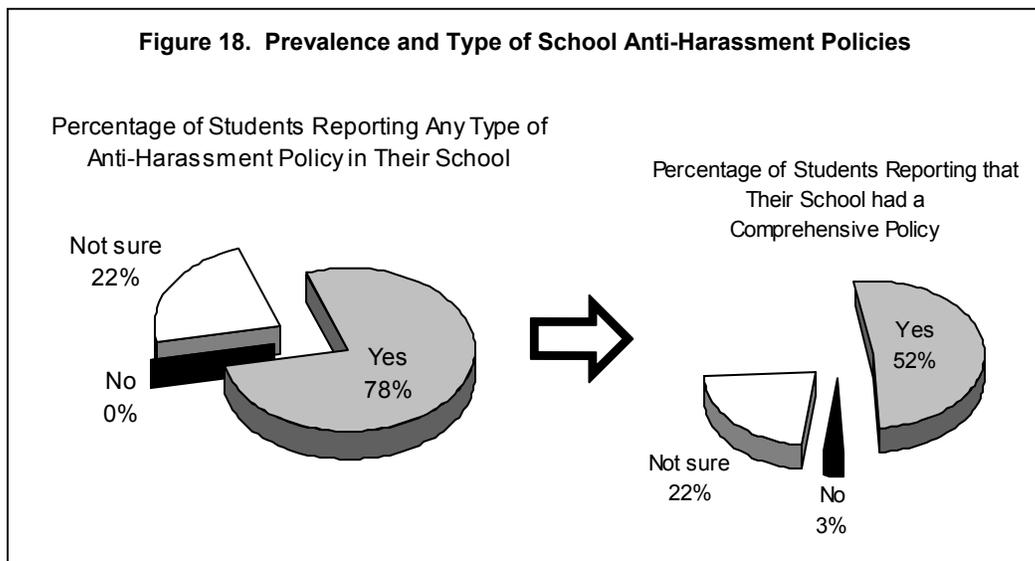
### LGBT Resources and Supports in School

Bullying, name calling and harassment because of sexual orientation as well as hearing homophobic remarks were reported to be common occurrences in Missouri schools. A high frequency of homophobic remarks, bullying and harassment 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. Unfortunately, as Figure 17 shows, only 7% of Missouri respondents reported that their school had this type of resource in place for LGBT students, which is much lower than the national average (22%).

Another potentially important source of support is the existence of anti-harassment policies that provide explicit protection for students by including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. As shown in Figure 18, about three-quarters (77%) of respondents believed that their school had a general policy for reporting incidents of harassment and assault. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents also believed that their school's anti-harassment policy was comprehensive in that it specifically mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. Thus, only about half (52%) of all Missouri respondents reported that they were protected by comprehensive anti-harassment policies (see Figure 18). It is important to note that almost a quarter of respondents were unsure whether or not their school had any kind of protective policy. While it is possible that these respondents were not aware of a policy because one did not exist, it is also possible that the respondents were not informed about existing policies and that Missouri schools need to do a more comprehensive job of informing their students about their rights and protections.



## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

For some Missouri students, school was an unsafe place in which bullying, name calling and harassment were a regular part of their school day. Reports of verbal and physical harassment and assault, particularly because of physical appearance, were not uncommon among Missouri youth. Furthermore, the majority the students reported that other students were frequently bullied, called names or harassed because of personal characteristics, especially their physical appearance, sexual orientation, and gender expression.

Homophobic and sexist language and negative language about gender expression were frequently heard in Missouri schools. Although not as pervasive, the use of biased language by teachers or other staff in Missouri schools was not uncommon. Teachers and other school staff often failed to intervene when hearing biased language from students, including when anti-LGBT remarks were made. Furthermore, many teachers did not take appropriate action when youth reported incidents of harassment or assault, which may be an important factor underlying students' reluctance to report such incidents.

The results of this study indicate that much work needs to be done in Missouri to ensure that all students have access to a safe and supportive learning environment. Given that only half of Missouri 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. Missouri 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, Missouri 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.

