When students are bullied, they’re impacted emotionally, mentally, and academically. Understanding students’ experiences with bullying is crucial for schools and communities to build safe and supportive environments for learning. So, what does bullying in schools look like, according to the students themselves?

YouthTruth analyzed anonymous feedback from over 180,000 students across 37 states in grades five through twelve to understand how much, in what ways, and why students are being bullied. This analysis also explored how students of different gender identities are experiencing bullying, and uncovered valuable insights.

1. It’s still true that 1 in 4 students are bullied.

2. Most bullying happens in person.

3. The top three reasons students believe they are bullied include their appearance, their race or skin color, and because other students thought they were gay.

youthtruthsurvey.org
@youth_truth
In our 2016 report, YouthTruth data echoed what previous studies have shown: 1 in 4 students are bullied. This broad statistic still holds true as 26.5 percent of students report being bullied.

However, not all student groups experience the same prevalence of bullying. When examining the data by students’ self-reported gender identity we see that students who do not identify as male or female, but instead identify in another way, are slightly more likely to be bullied than their peers.¹

While students who identify in another way account for less than two percent of the sample that we analyzed, these findings merit reflection. All students deserve to have a school experience free of bullying, and every student’s voice matters. Creating safe schools for all requires that teachers, administrators, and district leaders be aware of the varying rates of bullying that different students may experience.

**PRACTITIONER STORY**

**Penn-Delco, Pennsylvania**

Once aware of students’ experiences with bullying in their schools, there are actions that education leaders can take to decrease bullying. Dr. George Steinhoff, Superintendent of Penn-Delco School District, heard from parents who were worried that bullying was becoming a very real and growing problem in the secondary schools. School staff, however, were not observing regular, problematic bullying behaviors to such an extent.

Dr. Steinhoff knew that to better understand this discrepancy, the district should ask the students directly. The YouthTruth data was surprising. It revealed that bullying was indeed a problem: rates were higher than typical when compared to all other schools in YouthTruth’s national dataset and to other suburban schools. But the data also affirmed that while bullying was an issue — 28 percent of students reported being bullied — it was not the norm for all students.

Armed with this baseline data, district leadership partnered with principals and school staff to use their student feedback data to inform anti-bullying programs and strategies. The next year, rates of bullying decreased, with 23 percent of students reporting being bullied. The district continues to administer school climate and culture surveys to track progress and inform improvements over time.

**During this school year, have other students bullied or harassed you?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Suburban Schools</th>
<th>Typical YouthTruth School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Gender identity is someone’s internal sense of being male, female, or something different.
We know that 1 in 4 students are bullied, but that's just the beginning of the story. It's also important to identify how that bullying is happening.

Students who reported being bullied were asked about what form of bullying took place, and could select multiple options. The most common type of bullying that students reported is verbal, followed by social. While the narrative about bullying in recent years has often highlighted cyberbullying, this type of bullying — as well as physical bullying — is less prevalent in our data.

Girls and students who identify in another way are slightly more likely than their peers to be bullied socially or to be cyberbullied. Students who identify in another way are also slightly more likely than their peers to be bullied physically.

"I dislike that a lot of kids at this school judge each other and bully each other for no reason. When you walk down the halls you have to put on a tough face because if you don't, you'll get eaten alive."

Anonymous High School Student

"Bullying is a constant problem. I get picked on and messed with every day. Almost every day I go home and cry my eyes out because it is added stress on top of schoolwork, my home life, and extracurriculars... I don't feel comfortable talking to anybody about it because I feel like it’ll lead to more bullying."

Anonymous High School Student
Understanding the most common reasons that students believe they are being targeted for bullying can help educators guide conversations, interventions, and supports for students.

When students who were bullied were asked why they thought it happened, 44 percent of students said it was because of how they look. The other leading reasons students believe they were bullied include their race or skin color (17 percent) and because other students thought they were gay (15 percent).

When disaggregating by students' gender identity, however, we see some slight differences. Male students and students who identify in another way are slightly more likely than their peers to be bullied because other students thought they were gay.

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because students were able to choose multiple options for this question.*
DIVING INTO THE DATA: BULLYING AND GENDER IDENTITY

There are various facets of a student’s identity — for example, their grade level, gender identity, or race/ethnicity — that might be related to the degree to which they experience bullying.

We found that, when controlling for other student demographic characteristics, students’ gender identity makes a difference in their experience with bullying at school. Overall, students who identify as other than male or female are about twice as likely to be bullied as compared to their peers. Of students who were bullied, students who identify as other than male or female are also:

- About two times as likely to be bullied socially
- About 2.5 times as likely to be cyberbullied
- About three times as likely to be bullied physically
- About 4.6 times as likely to be bullied because other students thought they were gay

We know bullying is a problem in schools, and that the effects of bullying are real. Studies show that students who are bullied are at increased risk for anxiety and depression and that students who bully others are at increased risk for substance use, academic problems, and violence later in life.

We also know that students are the experts of their own experience. Asking — and truly listening — to what students have to say about their experiences is a crucial first step in understanding and decreasing bullying.
Resources

**PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center**
Information and resources about anti-bullying efforts, as well as information about National Bullying Prevention Month.

**Facing History and Ourselves**
Classroom materials and media resources related to bullying and ostracism.

**Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)**
Lesson plans on bullying, diversity, and bias with a focus on building leadership and encouraging ally behavior.

**StopBullying.gov**
Compilation of anti-bullying resources from across the country.

**Stomp Out Bullying**
Suggestions for a month of anti-bullying activities and action to support National Bullying Prevention Month.

**Tyler Clementi Foundation – #Day1**
Toolkit with resources for anti-bullying campaigns for schools, workplaces, and afterschool organizations.

**Common Sense Media**
Resources focused on addressing and combating cyberbullying.

**The Bully Project**
Tools for educators, students, parents, and advocates to help address bullying in conjunction with the documentary film BULLY.

**Character.org**
Database of promising anti-bullying practices from schools across the country.
FOR PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

To what extent do you think these findings speak to the experiences of students at your school? Which findings seem most relevant?

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__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

How do you think students’ experiences with bullying on your campus might be similar to or different from these findings? What sources inform your hypothesis?

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__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

What anti-bullying efforts is your school engaged in? Which do you think have been most effective and why?

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__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

What questions do you have after reflecting on this data?

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__________________________________________________________________________________

continued on next page
FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IN CONVERSATION WITH STUDENTS

To what extent do you think this data reflects the experiences of students at your school? Which findings seem most relevant?

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_________________________________________________________________________

What do you usually do when you see bullying at school or online? Have you ever told an adult? What happened as a result?

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_________________________________________________________________________

What anti-bullying efforts at your school do you think have been most effective?

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What other strategies and resources do you think would be helpful to address bullying at your school? What can adults do? What can students do?

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