

crossroads **connections**

connecting research across communities

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Bullying in Tucson Public Schools: Rates, Reasons, Prevention Programs, and Recommendations

"I am bullied almost every day and I think if I stand up for myself that it can change what that person thinks or feels."

Youth are frequently bullied in school. Bullying happens for many reasons, but youth report not always being aware of when it is occurring. Once youth are made aware of bullying, however, they are often motivated to stop it in their school.

The Crossroads Collaborative, in partnership with Nuestra Voz, a YWCA Racial Justice Program with local youth, strives to make a difference by educating others about bullying. In order to understand students' experiences of bullying, racism, and injustice, School Climate Surveys were given to students across Tucson. In addition to the survey, two youth programs were

About the Survey

A total of 403 youth from 11 different schools completed a survey that asked the reasons for bullying in their schools and the frequency of their personal experiences with bullying during the 2008-2009 school year. Fifty-three percent of the participants were female, 44% were male, and 3% did not report gender. Students surveyed ranged between the 5th and 11th grades, but most who completed the survey were from the 6th grade (42.9%). The sample included youth who self-identified as Latino/a (48.6%), White (27.7%), or Multiracial (8.9%).

implemented to educate and inform youth about bullying, and to provide tools for youth to make a difference in their community.

This report reviews youths' experiences in Tucson, what they want and need to know, and what adults and community groups can do to help. ●

"Bullying doesn't only hurt your life but also the ones around you."

 crossroads collaborative
youth • sexuality • health • rights

We, the Crossroads Collaborative, want to hear from youth. We believe that youth have the right to information that helps them experience and achieve both healthy sexuality and sexual health. This information has been made scarce and not widely distributed to youth, families, and policymakers. We want to change that.

What we know about bullying in Tucson high schools

Rates of Bullying in Tucson

Students were asked to report the types of bullying they have witnessed and how often they experienced, witnessed, or engaged in bullying.

Figure 1 shows the rates of bullying in Tucson. It is encouraging to see that half of teens report never bullying others. However, youth may be uncertain about the actions or words that represent bullying and whether they have bullied others. For example,

“Most bullies bully other people because they have been bullied or have similar problems.” 10.7% of students were not sure if they bullied another person. Knowing which words or actions represent bullying can help students identify whether or not they have

been bullied or bullied others. In addition, students who reported being bullied were also more likely

We define bullying as aggressive words or actions that are intentional and emphasize an imbalance of power. Most often, bullying is repeated over time.

to bully others. These findings highlight the risk associated with being bullied and suggest that all students may benefit from programs that raise awareness about bullying and build skills to stop it.

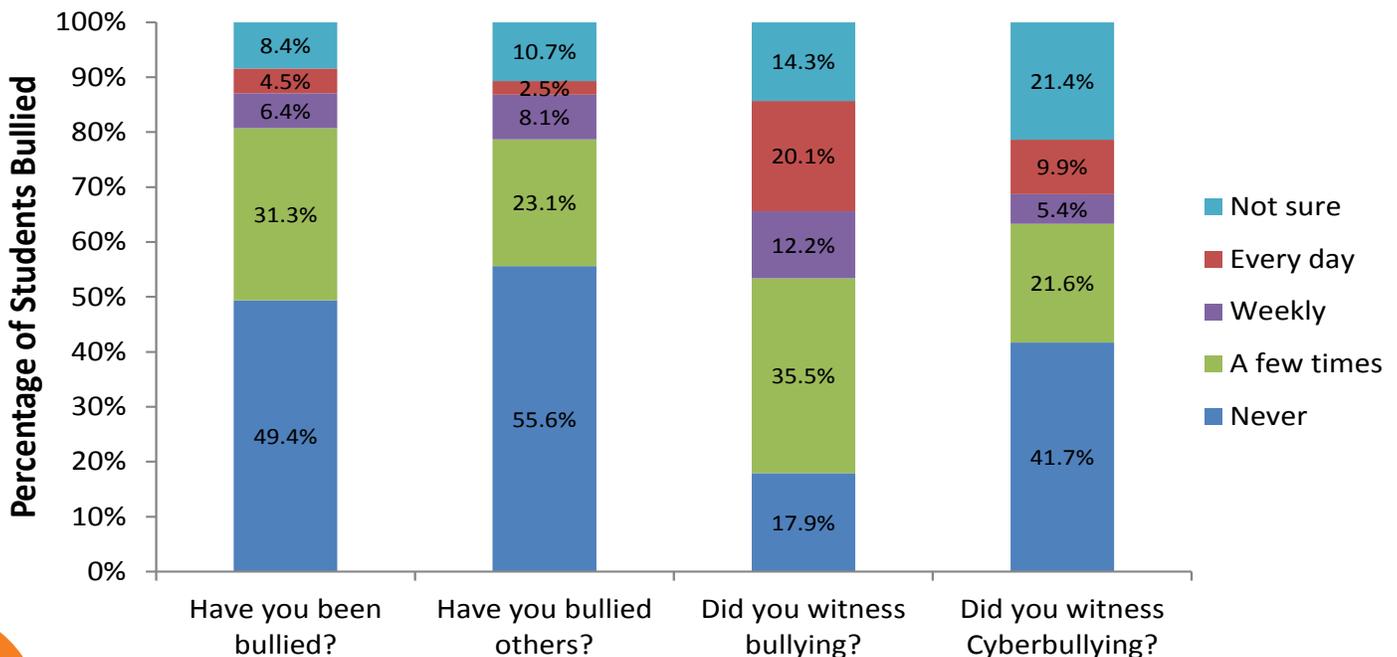
The Many Reasons Youth are Bullied

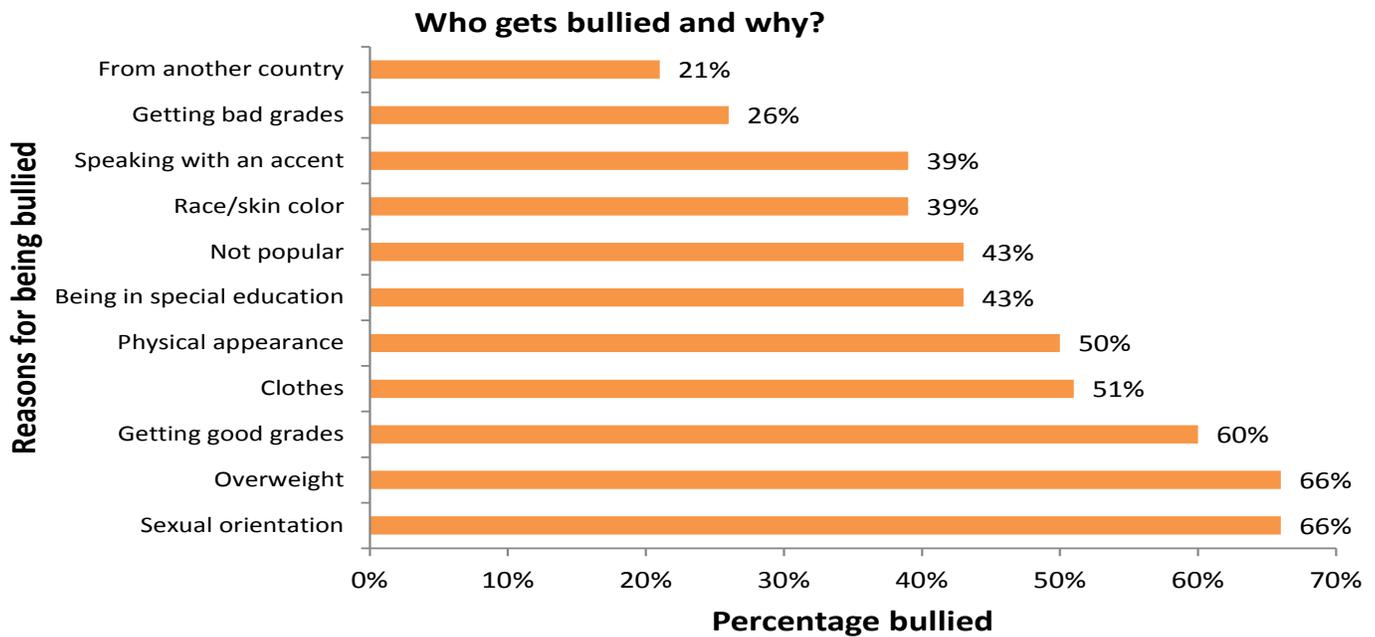
Students were asked to identify the reasons why they think students are bullied.

Figure 2 shows that youth are often bullied due to their appearance, achievement, and race/ethnicity, but youth are most often bullied for their weight and sexual orientation.



Figure 1: Prevalence of bullying in Tucson schools/organizations





Bullying Prevention in Tucson : Initial Steps

Eighty-two percent of students reported feeling changed by the film *Let's Get Real* (see box 3.1). Many youth were surprised to learn that bullying happens regularly and often has a profoundly negative impact on the person who is bullied. Students were also shocked to learn that some youth who are bullied try to hurt themselves or even engage in suicidal behavior. After the film, students were particularly interested to learn more about

“I see a kid bullied every day and now I feel like I have a fire in me and the power to stop it. I want to.”

why people bully and how they could help. Many students wanted to learn more about cyber-bullying, the origin of bullying, how bullies feel after they

bully, why bullies are the way they are, and how many bullies actually get disciplined. The reactions to this program revealed that though youth are often unaware that bullying is a serious problem at school, they want to learn how to stop bullying in their schools.

At the end of a week-long summer camp (see box 3.1), youth reported feeling that they could speak up for social justice. They also viewed themselves as activists and felt less confused about their rights. More than 80% of youth reported that

they learned a lot about youth, sexuality, health, and rights. Youth at the camp also felt these issues became more important to them. Finally, youth reported fewer feelings of victimization and confusion and more feelings of empowerment regarding recent laws in Arizona relevant to youth, sexuality, and racial justice. ●

Box 3.1 Let's Get Real

In 2009, the Nuestra Voz program showed an anti-bullying video called *Let's Get Real* to over 400 students in Tucson. This video provided an in-depth look at name calling and bullying told entirely from a youth perspective. After the film, students completed a survey to determine if and how students' views of bullying had changed.

Youth. Art. Activism.

Nuestra Voz hosted the Youth. Art. Activism. Summer camp in June 2011. Twenty-two youth participated in a week-long educational camp about youth, sexuality, health, and rights. Youth learned about the intersections of racial, economic, gender, and educational justice.

Bullying Prevention: Next Steps

“I didn’t know how hurt people felt after they got bullied. It’s really sad. I’m not going to do it again!”

Based on the work with the Tucson community and Nuestra Voz, a number of changes and recommendations are outlined that will help community members, educators, and youth stop and prevent bullying in their schools.

Recommendations for Community Members

Advocate for inclusive school and state-wide anti-bullying policies.

Community members can be advocates for youth by supporting legislation and policy that will protect all youth from bullying. As adult advocates, your support of anti-bullying policies that protect youth from being bullied or experiencing discrimination on the basis of their identities (such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability) is an effective way to reduce bullying and improve school safety for all youth. Contact your state legislators, superintendent, and school board members to advocate for inclusive anti-bullying policies at the state and local level.

Advocate for bullying prevention and intervention programs.

Many youth did not know how to identify bullying in their schools, and so they may be less likely to stop it. We recommend that community members support school and community-wide anti-bullying programs for youth of all ages.

Recommendations for Schools & Educators

Offer professional development for school personnel on how to stop bullying.

Teachers and other school personnel should be prepared to intervene when students are bullied, regardless of the reason. Many

individuals believe that bullying is normal for youth. However, all school staff should be educated in order to understand that bullying is not only harmful, but it can and should be stopped. Through regular training and professional development, educators should be given the tools to effectively intervene and prevent bullying in their classroom and school.

Track and monitor bullying in your school.

Bullying is a local, state, and national problem, and students are bullied for a variety of reasons. If schools systematically track and monitor bullying, more effective and targeted prevention and intervention programs can be implemented to address the specific types of bullying experienced by students within each school. If you would like help, contact us at the Crossroads Collaborative: we can help you assess safety and bullying at your school.

Recommendations for Youth

Speak up and speak out.

Youth can also help stop bullying in their schools by speaking up, and by reporting acts of bullying to teachers and school staff. No form of bullying is okay; everyone benefits when youth stand up against bullying.

Get educated and active.

Youth should advocate for and seek out opportunities to learn more about bullying. Youth have the power to create safer schools for all students. Youth can advocate for inclusive anti-bullying policies, organize school assemblies, invite guest speakers, design class projects, and start/join school clubs that oppose bullying and promote safe schools.

The Crossroads Collaborative, funded by the Ford Foundation, brings stories and numbers together through action-oriented research with academics, youth serving organizations, and youth from the community to develop knowledge, increase understanding, amplify youth voice and share what we learn with the broader community.

Crossroads Connections 1.1

Watson, R. J., Snapp, S. D., Licona, A. C., Russell, S. T., & the Crossroads Collaborative*. (2012). Bullying in Tucson public schools: Rates, reasons, prevention programs, and recommendations. *Crossroads Connections*, 1(1), 1-4. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona.

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For more information:

<http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/591202.pdf>

<http://mcclellandinstitute.arizona.edu/crossroads>

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