Dear Commissioners Bowen and Mayhew:

We are excited to present you with the background and results of the Maine Youth Voices Survey. This data relating to school climate, connectedness, and health and safety comes from students all over the state of Maine in conjunction with a national research project. We both have been honored to partner with the State of Maine since 2005 when the Maine legislature charged the Children's Cabinet with the development and distribution of the Maine's Best Practices in Bullying and Harassment prevention policy, guide and website now housed together at www.maine.gov/education/bullyingprevention .

From this important, yet still incomplete, work at the state-level, we have been inspired to expand our collective work in the field of bullying prevention. As we see it, bullying prevention initiatives should focus on school climate improvement through staff and student collaborative strategies that build connection and inclusion for all. As documented in the national report *Hard-Wired To Connect: A Report to the Nation from the Commission on Children at Risk* documenting rising rates of mental problems and emotional distress among U.S. children and adolescents, students are most likely to learn in a school environment in which they feel safe and connected. It is also clear that youth involvement and participation in building school culture is a crucial element of positive school functioning. Young people can tell us how their schools are functioning as supportive learning communities. Young people can give educators valuable feedback about the programs and practices that help them feel connected and safe at school. In addition, students can tell us how their schools should improve to become more supportive and inclusive communities. Greater academic gains are made by helping schools, their administrators, staff, students and parents better understand the relationship between effective and positive culture and climate and student emotional well-being and school performance
.
Therefore, towards the end of the former administration, we partnered again with the Children's Cabinet to conduct this Maine Youth Voices Survey, the results of which are enclosed for your review. Please consider the ways in which this report and related data might be best communicated and disseminated so it is used to support and align with some of the other work going on across your departments and programs. Please let us know how we can work with you to make this data usable and to implement efforts to improve education for all Maine youth.

We were both involved with the crafting of the recent bullying and cyberbullying legislation and also know that Lauren Sterling in the DOE and Children's Cabinet and Brandon Baldwin in the Attorney General's Office are collaborating on a valuable tool that will assist school administrators in implementing clear and consistent procedures and protocols for addressing incidents of bullying and harassment.

At the recent Maine Positive Youth Development Institute, we heard from Harvard's Tony Wagner and Commissioner Bowen about the need to reinvent our schools as places of innovation and student-centered learning and instruction. We agree wholeheartedly with

this vision and hope that this data can be used to support the good work currently underway within your agencies.

We also understand that under the leadership of the Office of Substance Abuse, your cross-systems department staff from the Children's Cabinet partners at DOE, DHHS, and Public Safety is in the midst of a statewide, comprehensive assessment of supports and gaps in school-related prevention efforts. We hope that the Maine Youth Voices data is a useful part of this assessment. We think the school strengths and weaknesses described by Maine youth and the patterns of mistreatment which young people told us about can help focus interventions.

Maine has led the nation in initiatives to promote student learning, school climate, and safety because advocates for youth within state government and in the community have worked together collaboratively. We look forward to that continued collaboration. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours,

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by Stan Davis, Chuck Saufler, and Julia McLeod

Through a grant from the Maine Parent Federation, students at fourteen schools in Maine were surveyed in spring 2011 using an online survey. We attempted to get as close to full student participation at each school as possible. 3,733 students completed our survey. Individual schools will not be identified in this report. The schools are distributed throughout the state and mix high- and low- income communities. Schools represented include K-12, K-8 and 6-8 grade schools. Eleven High Schools volunteered to participate in this project, but did not follow through this spring, likely because of the time demands of other surveys and required testing. The Maine Youth Voices survey is modeled on the national Youth Voice Project research being carried out by Stan Davis and Charisse Nixon, PhD (Penn State Erie). This summary will list the questions used and interpret the pattern of responses for each question.

Demographics
The following tables illustrate the demographics reported by the students who took this survey:
Grade:

	Percentage	Response count
4	1%	20
5	5%	168
6	28%	984
7	33%	1133
8	31%	1063
9	1%	33
10	1%	29
11	1%	20
12	1%	23

Gender:

	Percentage	Response count
Male	45%	1561
Female	48%	1675
Prefer not to answer	7%	249

We added "prefer not to answer" as an answer option to allow youth who may not define themselves within traditional gender boundaries an option. It is not certain which other youth may have chosen this answer option.

Special Education status:

	Percentage	Response count
Yes	13%	443
No	87%	3010

Race

	Percentage	Response count
African-American	2%	60
Asian-American	3%	88
Hispanic	1%	38
White	77%	2684
Native American	2%	57
Mixed race	5%	166
Prefer not to answer	11%	375
All students of color	12%	409

NOTE: The small numbers of students
reporting themselves as African-American, Hispanic, and Native American in this survey population mean that survey results comparing youth from different racial and ethnic backgrounds should be considered preliminary. We recommend a larger survey, including some of Maine's communities that include more youth of color, to further test what we found in regard to racial differences in mistreatment.

Our first set of questions measure school climate and connectedness, These are protective factors working against negative effects which may come from student mistreatment by peers.

Do you believe the discipline system (rules and punishments) at our school is fair?
Answers to this question indicate student buy-in with regard to discipline procedures and youth perception of staff consistency in discipline. We suggest setting a goal of at least 80 percent of students answering either "agree" or "strongly agree." The answers to this question can be analyzed by demographics to get a sense for how different groups experience the school discipline system. We can increase the number of students who see discipline as fair by involving students in deciding about rules and expectations and by building consistency of staff action when rules are broken. We can involve students in advance in identifying which consequences are likely to be helpful when different specific rules are broken. We can work toward predictability of consequences based on behavior, so students know that the outcome of their behavior will depend on what they did, rather than on who they are. Results are listed below and in graphs A, B, C, and D (see appendix)

Maine overall	77%	(Range of Maine schools surveyed: 65%-82%)
Grade 5	81%	
Grade 6	81%	
Grade 7	80%	
Grade 8	70%	
Male	75%	
Female	80%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	64%	
Help from special education	74%	
No help from special education	77%	
African-American	53%	
Asian-American	81%	
Hispanic	53%	
White	78%	
Native American	70%	
Mixed race	65%	

Discussion: Overall results are close to the 80% target figure. It is notable that African American and Hispanic youth report much lower perceptions of fairness in discipline than do White youth.

How many adults at our school do you have a positive relationship with? That means they welcome you to school and you would go to them if you had a problem.
A large body of research shows that youth who have positive connections with adults outside the family are more resilient – that is, they are less likely to be traumatized by negative events. In addition, developing research on the effects of social isolation or ostracism suggests that social isolation at school is uniquely damaging and that connections with both peers and adults are a key element in preventing harm. In the Youth Voice Project, Dr. Charisse Nixon and I found that elementary and middle school youth who said they feel they belong at school reported lower levels of trauma due to peer mistreatment. High school youth who said they were valued and respected at school also reported less trauma from peer mistreatment. Feeling connected to school staff is a key element of feeling a sense of belonging and of being valued and respected. Youth who feel connected to adults at school are more likely to seek help from adults if support is needed. Youth are also more likely to respond to efforts to change their behavior. For a summary of research on the positive effects of connectedness to school, see the *Wingspread Declaration* [Journal of School Health, http://www.jhsph.edu/wingspread/Septemberissue.pdf].

We suggest schools set the goal of having 95 percent or more students report they feel connected to one or more staff members. This should also be our goal across subgroups at the school – for both males and females, for youth in special education and not in special education, and for minority racial and ethnic groups.

Maine results (see also graphs A, B, C, and D in appendix)
% of youth reporting that they have a positive connection with at least one adult at school:

Maine overall	90%	(Range of Maine schools surveyed: 76% to 93%)
Grade 5	92%	
Grade 6	93%	
Grade 7	91%	
Grade 8	89%	
Male	89%	
Female	92%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	84%	
Help from special education	92%	
No help from special education	90%	
African-American	76%	
Asian-American	85%	
Hispanic	82%	
White	92%	
Native American	86%	
Mixed race	89%	

Discussion: The overall student sample reports 90% of students saying that they have a positive adult connection at school. This is a positive finding and also indicates a need to build increased connection for the youth who do not, and to build connections to multiple adults for those young people who are connected with only one adult at school. Youth choosing not to answer the gender

question reported a somewhat lower rate of connection, as did African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth. Males were slightly less likely to report connection than females, though this was a small difference. Youth in Special Education report strong connections with school adults.

We asked students: "*What do those adults* [the adults you have a positive connection with] *do that helps you connect with them?*" Here are some of their answers, reflecting the importance of positive feeling tone, welcoming and greeting, and showing interest in students in building these crucial connections:

- Actually try to understand things from the kids point of view
- First off, they are very nice and I feel like I can tell them anything if something is wrong. I feel that they really do care about their students and are willing to do anything to help us.
- Give a warm welcome.
- Give me advice.
- Greet you outside before the day starts, help you with questions, friendly and open
- He welcomes me to this class room every morning and another one says hello to me every morning.
- I feel connected to them because when I have a problem I will go to them for advice and they don't judge me.
- Provide a humorous and warm environment
- They make me feel like I can be safe here at school, they watch over me and I feel comfortable.
- They talk to me about problems.
- They accept me for who I am, and comfort me when I feel troubled.
- They fix the problem without yelling at me or somebody else.
- They are not strict and are very supportive. They embrace learning and creativity.
- They don't act like kids are beneath them and treat us as equals.
- They don't get mad at you for doing something that you didn't know was against a rule.
- They don't give lots of negative feedback. If the feedback is negative, it doesn't seem negative to me, because it's worded in a way that helps me understand my mistake(s).
- All adults at this school will treat me as if I have been in this school all my life and will always help me if I have problem, big or small.
- By seeing that I need help in a certain subject and offering to help me. Or being kind and answering my questions.
- If I have a problem they listen and help me figure it out.
- If I have a problem they will always try to solve it. They always make me take my mind off of things and try to make me smile when I am down.
- They're always a strong role model and have personal relationships with all of their students.
- ...they always say hi to me when they pass by, and they just make me feel good about school.
- The adults are kind, nice and respectful of our ideas and problems. The adults know what is necessary for us children to succeed.

- The adults are very nice to me. They give me compliments. They'll say "how's it going?" and stuff like that.
- The adults are welcoming and say hi and if I need help on something in that subject they always help me and then I understand the problem.

Do you feel that you are part of this school? Do you feel valued and respected at school?

These two parallel questions measure young peoples' connectedness with the entire school, not just with a few teachers. They let us identify the extent to which all students, and subgroups of students, feel part of the school, and to set goals and work toward connections. These two questions were included in the National Youth Voice Project survey, and we are reporting national results for comparison purposes. In the Youth Voice Project, students who answered these questions YES! or yes reported lower rates of trauma if they were mistreated. For graphic comparisons, see graphs E, F, G, and H in the appendix, which also compare mistreatment rates and school responsiveness by group.

Do you feel that you are part of this school? Percent responding YES! or yes.

Maine overall	89%	(Range of Maine schools surveyed 84%-94%)
National youth voice project	81%	
Grade 5	90%	
Grade 6	93%	
Grade 7	89%	
Grade 8	88%	
Male	90%	
Female	91%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	75%	
Help from special education	85%	
No help from special education	90%	
African-American	73%	
Asian-American	83%	
Hispanic	79%	
White	91%	
Native American	79%	
Mixed race	85%	

Do you feel valued and respected at school? Percent responding YES! or yes.

Maine overall	81%	(Range of Maine schools surveyed 73%-89%)
National youth voice project	70%	
Grade 5	80%	
Grade 6	85%	
Grade 7	80%	
Grade 8	80%	
Male	83%	
Female	81%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	69%	
Help from special education	76%	
No help from special education	82%	
African-American	73%	
Asian-American	78%	
Hispanic	68%	
White	83%	
Native American	68%	
Mixed race	76%	

Discussion: Overall, Maine's schools compare quite favorably with the national Youth Voice Project (YVP) data on these measures of connectedness. African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth were less likely to report belonging and being valued at school in the Maine survey population than were White youth. Youth in special education were somewhat less likely to report belonging and being valued at school than youth not in special education. Youth who chose not to indicate gender were much less likely to report belonging or being valued at school than youth identifying themselves as males or females.

In the past month, how often have you seen students do ___ at school?
In many bullying prevention efforts, survey data has focused primarily on the frequency and location of negative peer-to-peer behavior. Often, youth are given a definition of bullying and then asked to indicate how often they have been bullied, witnessed bullying or bullied others.

There are several problems with using frequency data as the **primary** indicator of the effectiveness of school programs over time. It is clear that the number of reports varies dramatically from survey to survey, based on the exact wording of the definition of bullying used. Many often-used definitions of bullying ask youth to judge the intentions of the person who mistreats others to decide if a behavior is bullying or not. Sometimes youth are asked to make a judgment about the social status or popularity of a young person who mistreats someone else. Other times, survey respondents are asked to judge whether the mistreated youth was hurt by the behavior. These are all difficult distinctions to make with any certainty.

Additionally, before they even read the definition provided, youth have diverse, culturally-derived meanings of the concept of "bullying." Some youth will respond according to their own understanding of the word and not according to the given definition. As we raise students' awareness of bullying, we may expand the range of actions which they label as bullying. If a

follow-up survey shows an increase in the rate of bullying, we will have no way to know whether there is more peer mistreatment or increased awareness. For those reasons, our survey asked Maine youth about how often they observed a wide range of **specific** behaviors.

This list shows the percentage of surveyed youth who reported seeing the behaviors described once a week or more at school:

79%	Indirect use of biased language (that's retarded; that's so gay; etc.)
75%	Talking negatively behind someone's back
73%	Swearing at someone
64%	Starting or spreading rumors (true or false)
53%	Namecalling based on appearance or body shape
50%	Namecalling based on ability, either intelligence or athletic
48%	Taking things that belong to other students
45%	Threatening others with words or actions
41%	Obscene gestures
41%	Punching, Kicking, or Jabbing
39%	Exclusion
30%	Threatening physical harm or violence
29%	Namecalling based on sexual orientation
27%	Namecalling based on gender
26%	Namecalling based on disability
24%	Namecalling based on race or ethnic/religious background
20%	Touching or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies
17%	Namecalling based on family income

Discussion: The most frequently-reported negative action, indirect use of biased language to describe an object or an event, does not fit into most definitions of bullying, because it is not directed at an individual – yet this behavior does harm because it creates a pervasive atmosphere of bias and of negative attitudes aimed at subgroups. Even the behaviors reported less frequently on the list above have the potential to cause harm when 1/5 to 1/4 or more of students report seeing or hearing them weekly or more often.

If students do these actions, what do you think staff should do? Options are:

- **There should always be a fair consequence for this behavior to keep people safe**
- **There should be a fair consequence if this behavior is repeated**
- **Staff members should discourage the behavior**
- **Staff members should stay out of this unless they are asked for help**

We can survey both staff and students about how school staff should react to a wide range of specific negative peer-to-peer behaviors. The total percentage of youth choosing any of the first three options represents the number who think school staff should intervene to stop the behavior. Basing discipline interventions on student and staff input increases buy-in. When students' responses to these questions indicate that 75 percent or more take potentially harmful actions seriously and want them stopped, we can feed that survey data back to young people so they are influenced by the positive norms of their peers. When fewer than

75 percent of youth think adults should act in the face of potentially harmful behaviors, this indicates a need for further education about the harm these behaviors can do.

Maine student survey results: % of students who indicated that they believe adults at school should take action to stop the listed behaviors.

91%   Namecalling based on disability
91%   Threatening physical harm or violence
90%   Namecalling based on race or ethnic/religious background
90%   Punching, Kicking, or Jabbing
89%   Threatening others with words or actions
88%   Namecalling based on sexual orientation
88%   Touching or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies
88%   Namecalling based on appearance or body shape
87%   Pushing/Shoving/Slapping/Running into other students roughly
86%   Namecalling based on family income
85%   Namecalling based on ability, either intelligence or athletic
85%   Taking things that belong to other students
85%   Obscene gestures
83%   Namecalling based on gender
82%   Indirect use of biased language (that's retarded; that's so gay; etc.)
81%   Swearing at someone
78%   Exclusion
76%   Starting or spreading rumors (true or false)

Discussion: It is clear that the students surveyed want the behaviors listed to stop. These results, and the accompanying text comments in the survey, could be the basis of a statewide social norms campaign helping youth to see that their peers share their positive values and concerns. They can also communicate to educators that Maine youth want them to take effective action to stop these behaviors.

If students do these things, do you think other students should tell adults?

This question, and the concept of asking about students' thoughts of what peers should do, comes from an influential article: "*Rethinking the Bystander Role in Violence Prevention[1].*" The authors propose following the lead of students and community adults in defining which potentially harmful actions youth should tell adults about. These answers let us build widespread agreement that youth should tell adults about the behaviors at the top of the list. When actions that have moderate to high potential for harm are rated low on the "tell adults" list, this is an indicator of the need for education about the harm of these behaviors and about the importance of telling adults about them.

Maine student survey results:

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[1] Stueve, A., Dash, K., O'Donnell, L., Tehranifar, P., Wilson, R., Slaby, R., et al. (2006). *Rethinking the bystander role in school violence prevention.* Health Promotion Practice, 7(1), 117-124.

% of students saying that students should tell adults when they become aware of the listed behaviors:

88%   Threatening physical harm or violence
88%   Touching or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies
87%   Namecalling based on disability
86%   Namecalling based on race or ethnic/religious background
86%   Punching, Kicking, or Jabbing
86%   Namecalling based on sexual orientation
81%   Threatening others with words or actions
80%   Namecalling based on appearance or body shape
79%   Taking things that belong to other students
78%   Namecalling based on family income
72%   Namecalling based on ability, either intelligence or athletic
70%   Namecalling based on gender
68%   Exclusion
67%   Obscene gestures
63%   Swearing at someone
58%   Starting or spreading rumors (true or false)
57%   Indirect use of biased language (that's retarded; that's so gay; etc.)

Discussion: More than 75% of students reported a belief that students should tell adults for some of these behaviors, reflecting school cultures that encourage youth to tell adults their concerns. This data can be used for social norms interventions to show youth how many of their peers believe they should tell adults about these serious actions. It is also notable that many fewer reported that they.should tell adults about behaviors involving relational aggression (exclusion and rumors). It is also notable that only slightly more than half of students report that students should tell adults about indirect use of biased language, which was the most frequently-observed negative action, and which most students said they want stopped. Schools may not have communicated to youth that they wish to be involved in stopping these particular behaviors.

In the past month, how often have students at your school hurt you emotionally or excluded you? In the past month, how often have students at your school threatened to hurt you or hurt you physically?
Answers to these two questions can be compared to those from the national Youth Voice Project. In that study of more than 13,000 students around the United States, **26 percent** of students said other students at school hurt them emotionally or excluded them twice a month or more in the past month. **11 percent** said other students at school threatened to hurt them or hurt them physically twice a month or more in the past month.

Maine results show higher rates of mistreatment than the Youth Voice Project's national data. These percentages of Maine youth reported mistreatment twice a month or more in the past month at school. Rates of mistreatment are summarized graphically in graphs E, F, G, and H in the appendix
In the past month, **how often have students at your school hurt you emotionally or excluded you?** Percent responding twice a month or more.

Maine overall	37%
National youth voice project	26%
Grade 5	40%
Grade 6	35%
Grade 7	37%
Grade 8	35%
Male	33%
Female	37%
Gender: prefer not to answer	48%
Help from special education	41%
No help from special education	35%
African-American	44%
Asian-American	36%
Hispanic	51%
White	35%
Native American	39%
Mixed race	41%

In the past month, **how often have students at your school threatened to hurt you or hurt you physically?** Percent responding twice a month or more.

Maine overall	17%
National youth voice project	11%
Grade 5	19%
Grade 6	14%
Grade 7	19%
Grade 8	18%
Male	21%
Female	12%
Gender: prefer not to answer	27%
Help from special education	26%
No help from special education	16%
African-American	25%
Asian-American	19%
Hispanic	46%
White	16%
Native American	20%
Mixed race	20%

Discussion: there are dramatic differences reported in mistreatment rates for African-American, Hispanic, and Native American youth compared to White youth. Males are more likely to report physical mistreatment than females, and females are somewhat more likely to report being hurt emotionally or excluded than males. Youth in special education are much more likely to report mistreatment (especially physical mistreatment) than youth not receiving special education services. The graphs in the appendix will be useful in clarifying these patterns.

When other students teased, hit, threatened, or excluded you, did you tell an adult at school? When you told an adult at school, what happened?

This series of questions helps us judge a school's responsiveness to reports of peer mistreatment. We learn to what extent mistreated students are telling adults and what happens when they do tell adults. Youth perceptions of fairness or unfairness of discipline interventions influence their willingness to report negative actions. These perceptions influence the way young people interpret disciplinary action. Gathering youth perceptions of the fairness and effectiveness of disciplinary interventions helps schools to evaluate their efforts in using consequences to deter mean peer behavior. The Youth Voice Project found dramatic differences between schools based on young peoples' answers to this question. Clearly students' perception of a school's disciplinary interventions is important to their feeling of safety. The Wingspread Declaration summarized these themes in this way: *"Based on current research evidence, the most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school include…applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are **collectively agreed upon** and fairly enforced."*(emphasis added)

When other students teased, hit, threatened, or excluded you, did you tell an adult at school? Of those who were mistreated, percent who told an adult.

Maine overall	38%	(Range of Maine schools surveyed 29%-41%)
National youth voice project	33%	
Grade 5	61%	
Grade 6	48%	
Grade 7	36%	
Grade 8	29%	
Male	37%	
Female	39%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	38%	
Help from special education	52%	
No help from special education	36%	
African-American	38%	
Asian-American	43%	
Hispanic	36%	
White	40%	
Native American	56%	
Mixed race	34%	

Discussion: Maine students who were mistreated reported being more likely than students in the national YVP sample to seek help from adults. This was especially true for younger grades

represented, for youth in Special Education, and for Native American and Asian-American youth. There does not seem to be a gender difference in this response.

When you told an adult at school, what happened? See graphs I,J,K, and L in the appendix for a graphic illustration of these results				
	I told and things got worse	I told and there was no change	I told and things got better	
Maine overall	23%	36%	42%	Range of % saying things got better after telling adult at school- Maine schools surveyed: 17%-55%
National youth voice project	27%	35%	38%	
Grade 5	30%	20%	50%	
Grade 6	19%	27%	54%	
Grade 7	26%	39%	35%	
Grade 8	24%	47%	30%	
Male	21%	36%	43%	
Female	22%	37%	41%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	30%	32%	38%	
Help from special education	27%	32%	41%	
No help from special education	22%	38%	41%	
African-American	44%	33%	22%	
Asian-American	29%	7%	64%	
Hispanic	44%	22%	33%	
White	21%	37%	42%	
Native American	21%	50%	29%	
Mixed race	33%	38%	29%	

Discussion: Maine schools did somewhat better overall than the Youth Voice Project. Overall, more Maine students reported a positive outcome from telling adults at school about what was done to them than in the national sample. This rate of positive outcome, though, still falls below 50%, indicating that Maine's schools have work to do to become more responsive to student reports of mistreatment. African-American, Hispanic, and Native American youth reported dramatically lower rates of positive outcomes after telling adults at school about what others did to them. Youth who

did not indicate gender reported a somewhat lower rate of positive outcomes if they told an adult. Youth in special education, the third group reporting a higher frequency of aggression toward them compared to the overall school population, reported an equal rate of positive outcome after seeking adult help as did youth not in special education, which is a positive indicator of responsiveness.

Positive actions by peers
We asked young people what their peers had done that helped them. Here are some of their answers, chosen to reflect the results of the Youth Voice Project survey, in which almost 3,000 mistreated youth said that they benefited from peers who connected with them and supported them more than they benefited from peers confronting bullying youth. Some youth wrote about the painful experience of *not* receiving peer support, as described in this way by one student: *"No one has ever stood up for me when I'm made fun of. Some people who are RIGHT THERE don't do anything but watch. No one has ever tried to stop someone hurting me, not even who I thought was my bff."* Others wrote about positive actions by peers:

- A student went on my side and helped me ... not by talking to the student, but just by being there for me.
- My friends explained to me that these people are not worth thinking about and they are very supportive
- The only student that helped me was my best friend. She hung out with me all day and said they are wrong and stuff like that. If I was hurt, she would go tell a teacher with me. When she spent time with me, I felt more important and that I could trust her.
- When I told my friends about getting bullied about my drawings they told me to keep drawing what I wanted to draw. They said that they didn't care what I drew and to keep drawing my favorite things and I have been ever since. After they did that the person still kept bullying me but I ignored them until they finally stopped.
- I'm not usually teased, hit, threatened, and well yesterday when I got kicked out of my volleyball team for no reason I talked to my other friends who all agreed that the person who kicked me out was being mean.
- Other students would cheer me up. When things like that happen it's good to have someone to talk to that you can trust.
- Well, it didn't really bother me that much, because we often tease each other a little more roughly than other kids, so I wasn't hurt emotionally or physically. It really bothered me when I was teased by being called lesbian or comments about my gender the most, then my friends were really supportive.
- I felt like someone cared and the person that did it got in trouble because the person helping me told on them

Many youth in our survey wrote about what they did for others and what happened when they did that. Here are some examples of positive actions by Maine youth, who can serve as positive examples:

What have you done to help someone who was mistreated or who was alone? What happened when you did that?
- A kid at lunch was sitting alone and I came over and sat and all my friends came too.
- Do you want to play with us? They play with us
- Encouraged them and told them it would be ok.

- I ask them if they want to work with me if they look alone, or if it is a friend will try to cheer them up and tell a joke which makes them laugh so they feel better and join me with my friends. I also will smile at people who look lonely!!!! :) :)
- I asked a girl in our class who came from Italy to come over and play with us, and she did come and played with us.
- I brought my best friend and my new friend in to the guidance teacher because my best friend was excluding my new friend and making her feel really bad! They are now best friends and get along with their differences
- I comforted them because they were alone and I made them happy
- have included somebody into my group in a class because they were alone and didn't know how to ask to be in somebody group. They accepted the invitation and joined our group. None of the group members showed negativity towards my choice.
- I have just let them talk to me about it so they will let it out instead of doing something rash that they might regret later.
- I have made friends with new people who seemed to be a bit timid, and now I have a few really good, close friends out of that.
- I help someone who was alone and seemed to need someone to hang out with for a bit, I decided to leave my group and friends for a bit and hang out with the lonely person. When I did that the person that was lonely thought it was nice of me to do so and my friends even joined up with us and we became friends and now she joins us at recess to hang out with us.
- I joined peer helpers to help people that need a friend or need some help with their disabilities. I feel like it is a great way to show your kindness to other people and a great way to make some new friends! I have played games with this person and just simply talked with them. It has been fun!
- I've tried to comfort them and make them feel better. This has lead to either a blooming friendship or a comfort zone for the person who I was defending.
- Made them be my friends and ask do you want to come and chill with us?
- My friends tried to ditch someone and I said no, and waited for him.
- I went over and talked to them and we became closer and she felt better
- If they were alone I would go over and talk to them and ask them what's wrong and bring them over with me and my friends.
- When I saw someone that was really upset or all alone I would go up to them and ask them what made them sad? When I did that they were really glad to tell me what their problem was.
- I asked them if they wanted to come into my group and after they did they were having fun
- I asked them if they wanted to sit with me at lunch and we became friends.
- I became friends with a student that not a lot of people seemed to like. We became good friends and we hang out a lot. He seems to be happier now that he has a good friend.
- I went and talked to them and told them everything was going to be alright

Overall summary

Strengths:

Students responding to our surveys said that most of the Maine schools surveyed had significant protective factors. More than 3/4 of youth in most of the schools said they perceive discipline to be fair. More than 9/10 of students surveyed said that they have a positive connection with at least one adult at school. Maine schools were reported to do better in building a sense of belonging for students and a sense of being valued and respected at school compared with the average of the 31 schools in the national Youth Voice Project survey. Maine students reported somewhat more likelihood of a positive outcome if they told an adult at school about mean peer behavior, compared to the national Youth Voice Project survey. Youth in special education reported themselves more likely than youth not in special education to have positive connections with adults at school, and to experience positive outcomes if they told an adult at school about mean behavior.

Youth responding to this survey reported strong positive values. First, Maine youth surveyed stated clearly, by substantial majorities, that they want adults to take action to stop a wide range of peer mistreatment. Second, large majorities of Maine youth told us that they believe students should tell adults about most negative peer actions. Third, a large majority of Maine youth indicated through their text responses that they have acted supportively toward isolated and mistreated peers. These findings can be the foundation of a peer norms campaign by and for Maine's teens.

Needs:

Maine youth report higher rates of relational and physical mistreatment than do the youth in the national Youth Voice Project study. This finding parallels other recent Maine survey findings indicating that Maine youth are more likely to report being bullied than the national average.

Minority youth, youth who chose not to indicate gender in this survey, and youth who get special education services reported an increased likelihood of being the targets of both relational and physical aggression compared to the survey group overall, with marked increases in physical aggression toward these groups. African-American, Hispanic, and Native American youth reported less connection with adults and with their school than White youth and reported that telling adults was less likely to lead to positive outcomes compared to White youth. These indications of bias are strengthened by our overall finding that almost 4 in 5 Maine teens surveyed reported hearing biased language at school once a week or more often, and that 1/4 of youth reported hearing or witnessing name calling based on race, sexual orientation, or disability weekly or more often at school. These findings indicate that Maine's schools – and Maine as a society – has work to do in reducing bias.

While rates of youth telling adults about mean peer behavior and the likelihood of positive outcomes for youth who tell adults about what others have done to them are slightly better than the national YVP findings, a majority of mistreated youth said they did not tell adults at school about what was done to them. Similarly, a majority of mistreated youth who told an adult at school did not report that things got better afterwards. These findings indicate that work needs to be done in developing and implementing telling school cultures and positive responses by schools in the event of mean peer behavior.

Future plans:

This survey to date has focused almost exclusively on the middle school grades. We plan to make the survey available again in the fall to High Schools and would like to extend the survey to more students in Maine in grades 4-12, so further information can be collected, so schools can compare their functioning with the composite figures, and so schools can collect this data annually to track efforts to maintain program strengths and supplement areas of weakness.

Appendix- graphs

Graph A

Maine students (1)

	Discipline fair	Pos connection with at least 1 adult
■ Maine students	77%	90%

Graph B

Gender (1)

	Discipline fair	Pos connection with at least 1 adult
■ Female	80%	92%
■ Male	75%	89%
□ gender prefer not to answer	64%	84%

Graph C

Racial comparisons part 1- Maine

	discipline is fair	have pos relationship with at least one adult at school
☐ African-American	53%	76%
☐ Asian-American	81%	85%
☐ Hispanic	53%	82%
☐ Native American	70%	86%
☐ Mixed race	65%	89%
☐ White	78%	92%
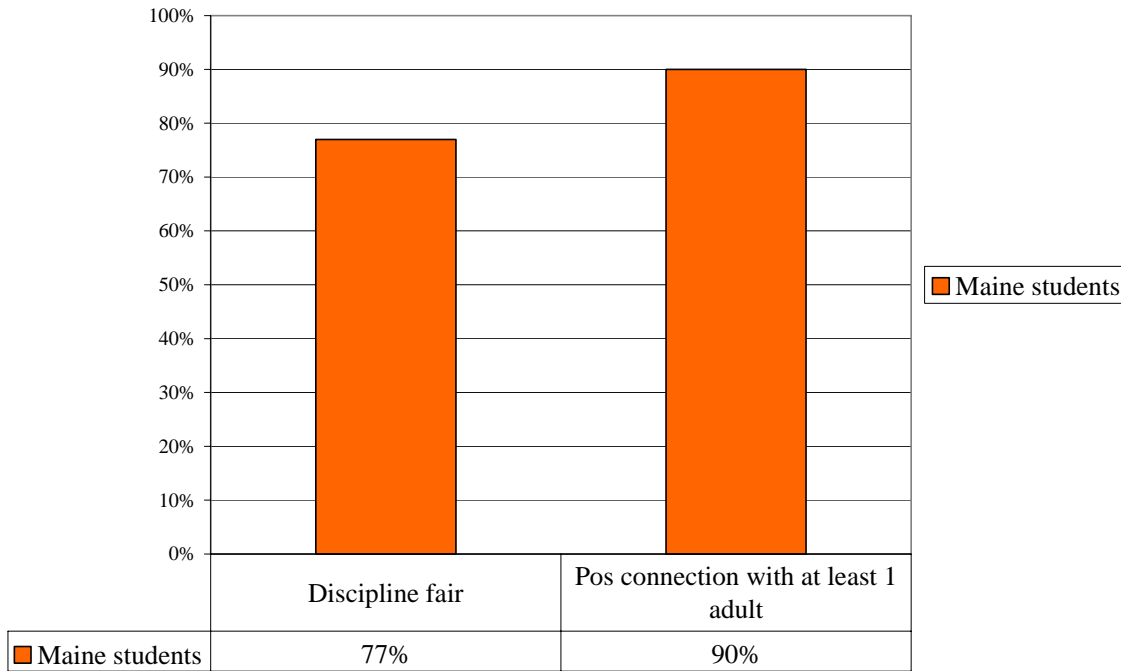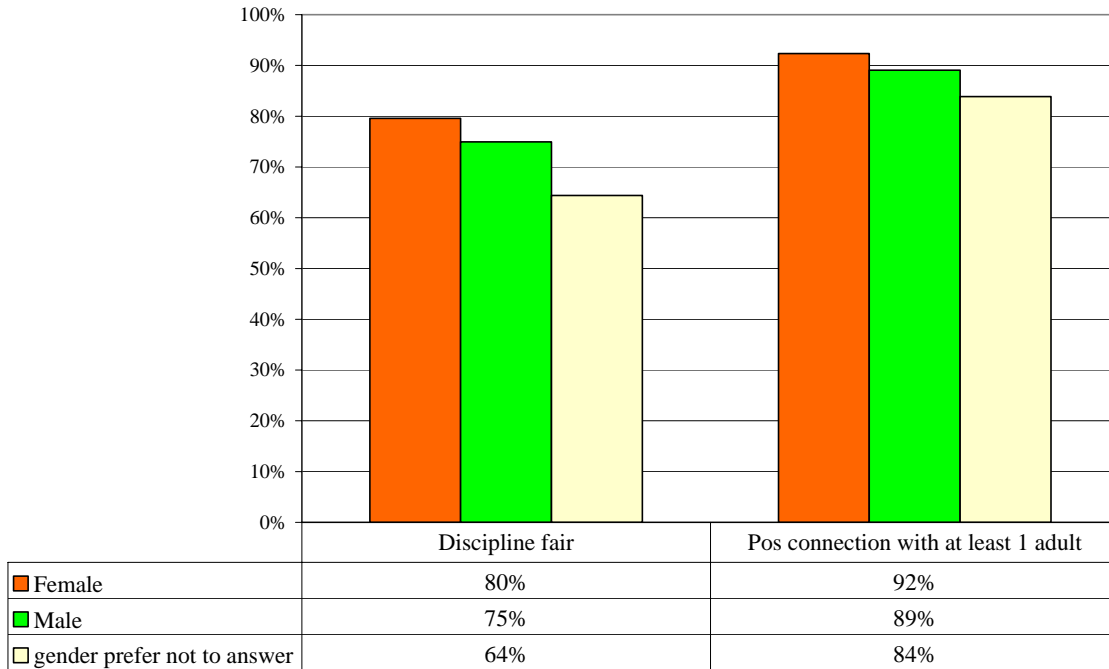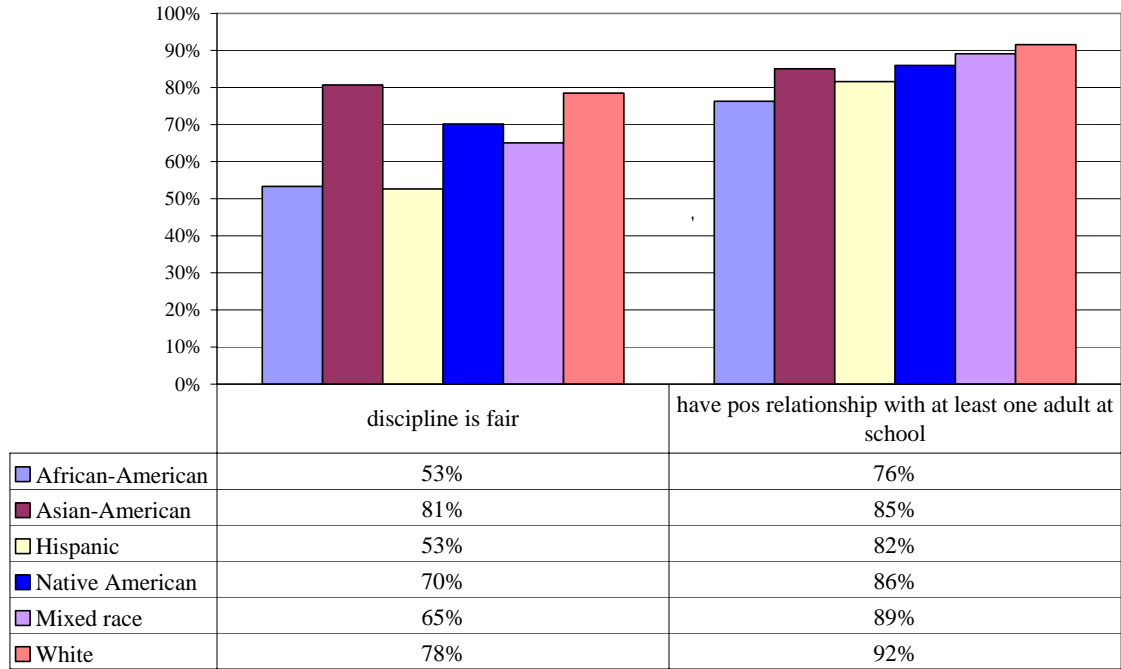
Graph D

Special education regular education comparison (1)
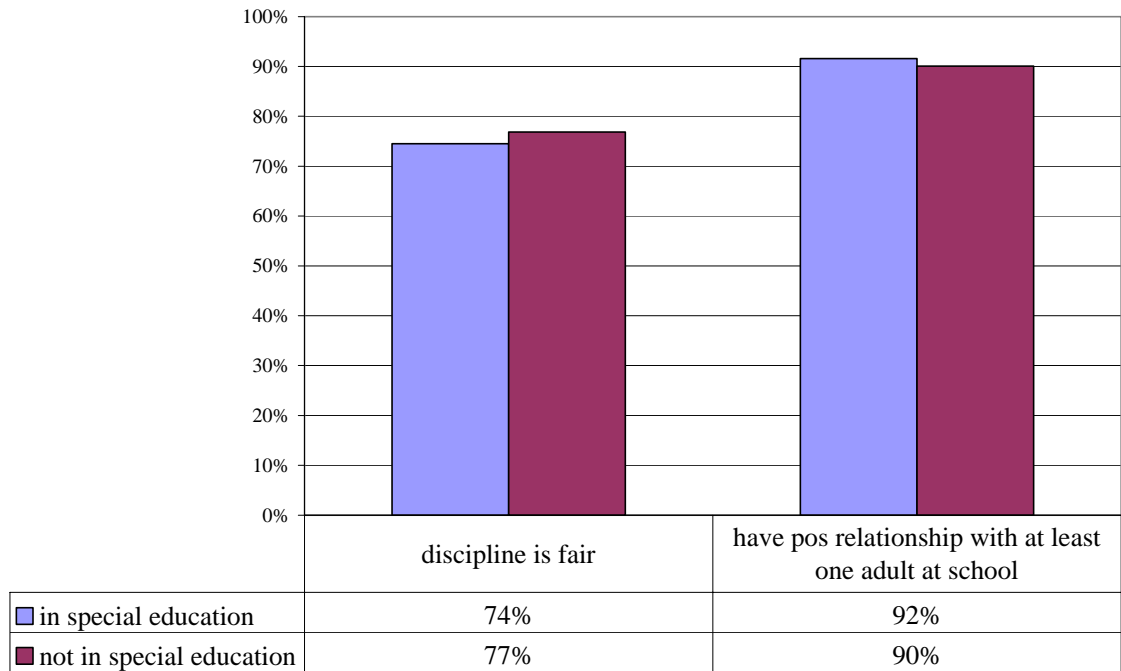
	discipline is fair	have pos relationship with at least one adult at school
☐ in special education	74%	92%
☐ not in special education	77%	90%

Graph E

Maine students (2)

	Feel part of school	Feel valued at school	If mistreated told adult	If told adult things got better
■ Maine students	89%	81%	38%	42%
■ National YVP	81%	70%	33%	38%

Graph F

Gender (2)

	Feel part of school	Feel valued at school	If mistreated told adult	If told adult things got better
■ Female	91%	81%	39%	41%
■ Male	90%	83%	37%	43%
□ gender prefer not to answer	90%	83%	37%	43%
■ National YVP	81%	70%	33%	38%
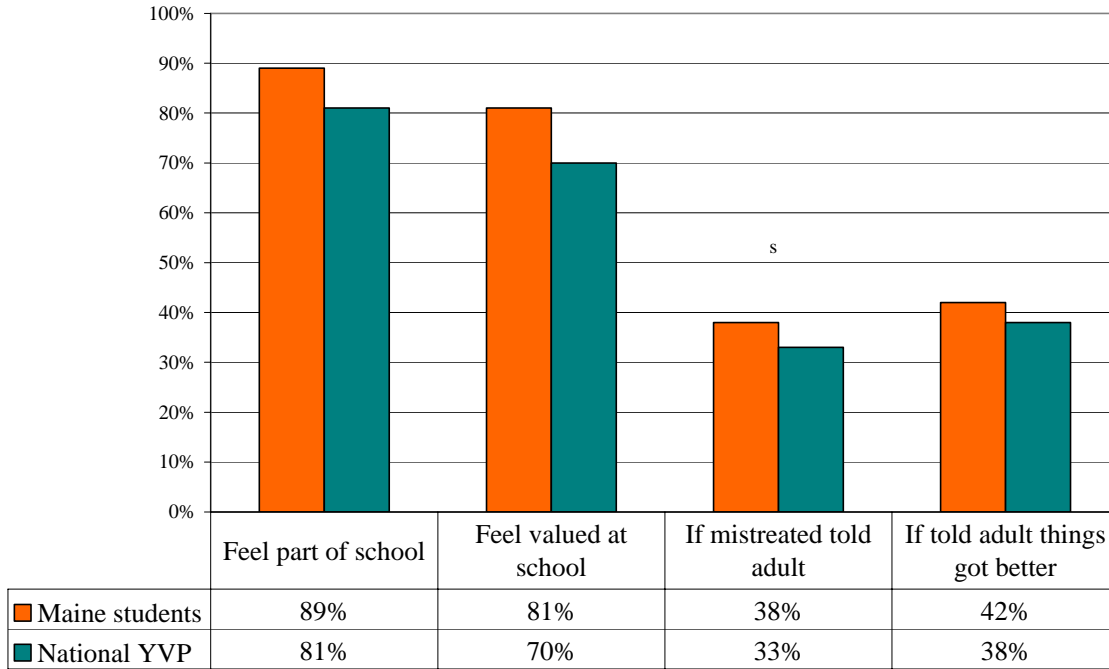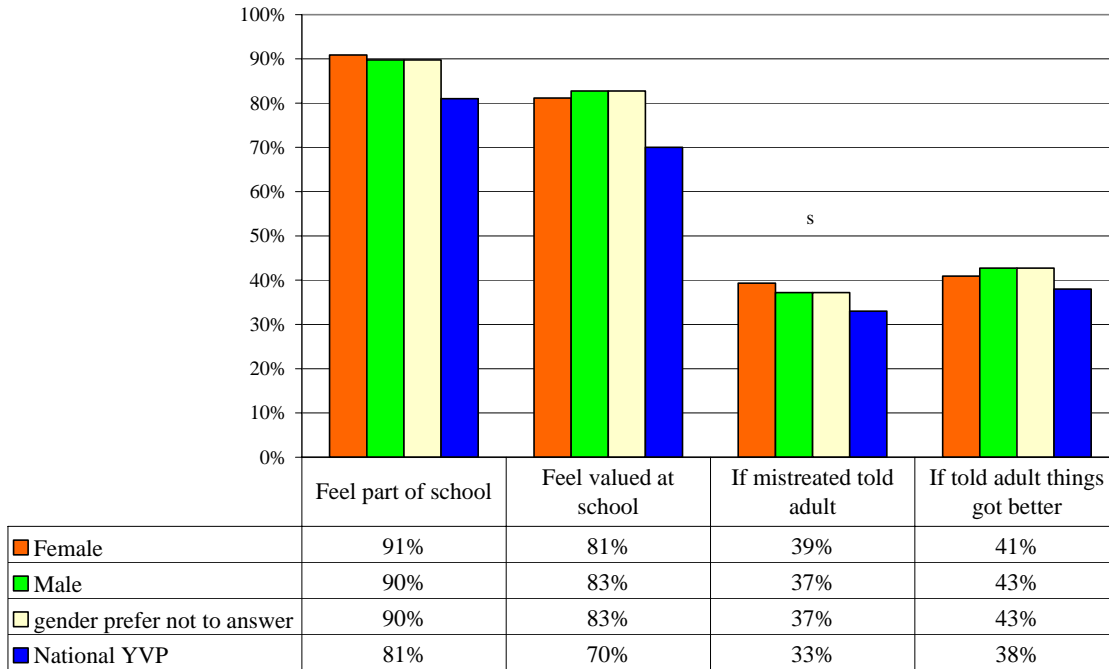
Graph G

Special education regular education comparison (2)

	feel I am part of school	feel valued at school	if mistreated told adult	if told adult positive outcome
in special education	85%	76%	52%	41%
not in special education	90%	82%	36%	41%
national YVP	81%	70%	33%	38%
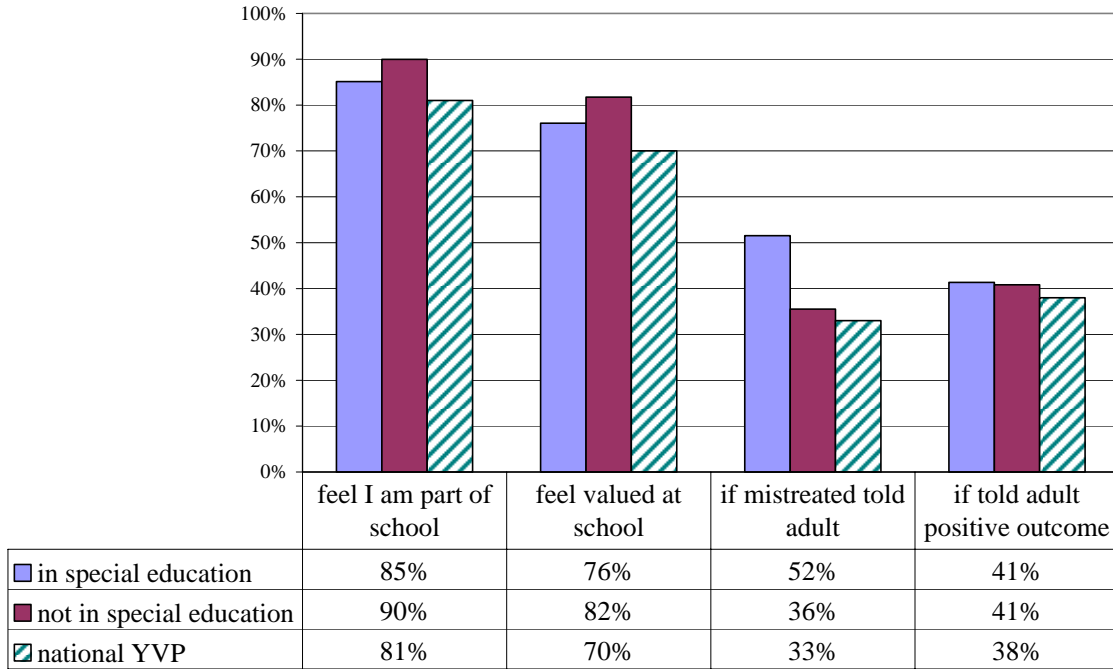
Graph H

Racial comparisons part 2- Maine

	feel I am part of school	feel valued at school	if mistreated told adult	if told adult positive outcome
African-American	73%	73%	38%	22%
Asian-American	83%	78%	43%	64%
Hispanic	79%	68%	36%	33%
Native American	79%	68%	56%	29%
Mixed race	85%	76%	34%	29%
White	91%	83%	37%	42%
national YVP	81%	70%	33%	38%

Graph I

What happened when students told
an adult at school about peer
mistreatment

	Things got better	no change	Things got worse

Maine overall — 42% | 36% | 23%

National YVP — 38% | 35% | 27%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Graph J

What happened
when students told
an adult at school
about peer
mistreatment- Maine
students by gender

	things got better	no change	Things got worse

YVP national — 38% | 35% | 27%

Prefer not to answer — 38% | 32% | 30%

Female — 41% | 37% | 22%

Male — 43% | 36% | 21%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Graph K

What happened when students told an adult at school about peer mistreatment

	things got better	no change	Things got worse
National YVP	38%	35%	27%
Not in special education	41%	38%	22%
In special education	41%	32%	27%

Graph L

What happened when students told an adult at school about peer mistreatment

	Things got better	no change	Things got worse
African-American	22%	33%	44%
Native American	29%	50%	21%
Mixed race	29%	38%	33%
Hispanic	33%	22%	44%
White	42%	37%	21%
Asian-American	64%	7%	29%
National YVP	38%	35%	27%

Why use data? Which questions should we ask? How can data help school staff implement successful interventions?

Without ways to measure the effectiveness of any school program, we cannot know how close we are to achieving our goals. Without data in the beginning of an intervention, we cannot tell whether school actions are already working, nor can we tell what changes are needed. In schools where staff are already doing well in key areas of bullying prevention, we risk disregarding their good work and lowering staff buy-in by adding interventions that are not needed. In schools where significant changes or improvements are needed, we risk overlooking our most crucial needs and instead implementing interventions that consume time and money without fixing the problem. Without collecting ongoing data, we will not know if our efforts are leading to improvements for students.

Many kinds of data can assist in building safe and accepting schools, including disciplinary data, qualitative data gathered from focus groups and discussions, observational data, and data from anonymous surveys. This article will discuss why we should use anonymous online surveys, what questions we should ask, and how we can use the data we collect to build buy-in, improve effectiveness, and encourage positive youth culture. Specific suggestions will be given for analyzing and using data from each question in the survey.

We can examine our school's functioning by comparing our survey data to that of similar or nearby schools. In doing this, we should keep in mind that there may be demographic or local differences, which contribute to schools having different levels of connectedness, responsiveness, and mean behaviors.

Why use anonymous online surveys?
Anonymous online surveys give all students a voice. Since the surveys are anonymous, no student needs to fear peers' or adults' reactions to their statements, and responses can be more authentic.

Online survey data is easily disaggregated. We can analyze data to find out if youth of color and white youth have similar or different experiences of school. We can look at the differences and similarities between the experiences of females and males. We can assess the school experience of youth in special education and those who are not in special education.

Online surveys can be repeated to compare student answers to the same questions many years in a row. Looking at trends in these repeated surveys allows school staff to set goals and measure progress toward goals. We can look at schoolwide trends and follow the reports of a grade cohort as they move through our schools.

Online surveys can combine quantitative questions, which allow us to compare numbers and percentages, with qualitative questions, which allow youth to write in detail about their experiences. This combination of numerical and written data allows us to gather a multidimensional picture of what is going on in our schools.

Survey questions:

The following is a discussion of how to use your survey data to guide bullying prevention interventions. The survey questions described here may not be identical to those used in your school, but the information provided should be helpful when the questions are focused on similar themes.

Sample demographic questions

What grade are you in?
Are you male or female?
Do you receive any help from special education?
What is your racial and ethnic background?

Asking questions about demographics helps us identify how different groups within our schools experience school differently. You will see that answers to several survey questions are analyzed by gender, special education status and ethnic background. In schools with less than 20 students within any of these groups, answers should not be separated out to maintain anonymity and because there isn't enough data to make analysis meaningful. Additionally, for any data set of fewer than 40 students, you should be aware that data may not be reliable. Discovering that students in different categories, for example, lack connections with staff members can help staff focus attention on those groups to remedy the situation.

Do you believe the discipline system (rules and punishments) at our school is fair?

Answers to this question indicate student buy-in with regard to discipline procedures and their perception of staff consistency in discipline. I suggest setting a goal of at least 80 percent of students answering "agree" or "strongly agree." The answers to this question can be analyzed by demographics to get a sense for how different groups experience the school discipline system.

We can increase the number of students who see discipline as fair by involving students in deciding about rules and expectations and by building consistency of staff action when rules are broken. We can involve students in advance in identifying which consequences are likely to be helpful when different specific rules are broken. We can work toward predictability of consequences based on behavior, so students know that the outcome of their behavior will depend on what they did, rather than on who they are.

How many adults at our school do you have a positive relationship with? That means they welcome you to school and you would go to them if you had a problem.

A large body of research shows that youth who have positive connections with adults outside the family are more resilient – that is, they are less likely to be traumatized by negative events. In addition, developing research on the effects of social isolation or ostracism suggests that social isolation at school is uniquely damaging and that connections with both peers and adults are a key element in preventing harm. In the Youth Voice Project, Dr. Charisse Nixon and I found that

elementary and middle school youth who said they feel they belong at school reported lower levels of trauma due to peer mistreatment. High school youth who said they were valued and respected at school also reported less trauma from peer mistreatment. Feeling connected to school staff is a key element to feeling a sense of belonging and of being valued and respected. Youth who feel connected to adults at school are more likely to seek help from adults if support is needed. Youth are also more likely to respond to efforts to change their behavior. For a summary of research on the positive effects of connectedness to school, see the *Wingspread Declaration* [Journal of School Health, http://www.jhsph.edu/wingspread/Septemberissue.pdf].

I suggest schools set the goal of having 95 percent or more students report they feel connected to one or more staff members. This should also be our goal across subgroups at the school – for both males and females, for youth in special education and not in special education, and for any racial subgroups of sufficient size to allow meaningful comparisons. If a school has, for example, three youth of color, it will be difficult to calculate the percentage of those students who feel connected to school staff from a survey. In that case, surveys should be followed up with discussions with minority youth and their parents.

If, as in a survey I did with a vocational high school in Maine, we find that nearly 100% of both male and female students report being connected with at least one adult at school, it is important that school staff identify which of their actions led to that positive result. This can be done by taking a look at text answers in the survey and through discussion with staff and students. Without clear identification of the formal and informal initiatives that have led to high levels of connectedness, there is a real risk that staff will respond to positive survey results by putting less effort into building connection with students because this is something the school has already done successfully. Progress should be monitored from year to year, even with schools that score high the first year.

If survey results show significant discrepancies between the level of connectedness of subgroups differentiated by gender, race, disability or special education status, it is important to disseminate these results to staff and to find ways to address these inequities. One junior high school in Wyoming addressed the marked differences in reports of connectedness by subgroups. A follow-up survey the next year indicated that school staff had built stronger connections with minority youth and with youth in special education. When asked what they did to accomplish this positive result, most staff said they tried to be more present in the halls, work harder to build connection with every student, enhance their advisor-advisee program and show interest in students' lives. Their experience shows that when an administrator and school staff take responsibility for addressing inequities, consistent small actions can make a big difference. It is important to reflect on what has made a difference. When staff identify how they made improvements, it is more likely that they will maintain those improvements.

When the overall connectedness level with individual staff members is below 95 percent, we can employ two parallel strategies. We can work to increase connectedness with all students and we can identify individual youth who are disconnected and enhance their connection to school.

Many of the actions that lead to improvement for subgroups of students are also those that improve connectedness for all students, including greeting, showing interest in students' lives and

thoughts, listening, learning and using names, structuring activity times to build connection and using frequent positive behavior feedback. Many of these interventions are simple and quick.

> *"When we ask young people … how do you know a teacher or an adult in your school cares about you? The most frequent response was that the adult simply says hello and knows my name and greets me using my name."* (From Bonnie Benard: www.cde.ca.gov/ls/yd/tr/schoolconnectach.asp).

> *"The 'meet and greet' that teachers do before class begins seems to be a critical benchmark for many students. They tell me how much it means when teachers hang out by the door saying 'Hello' and calling students by name. Furthermore, kids say that teachers who 'meet and greet' are the ones who also care about them personally, and this personal interest motivates them to do better in class." (From Partners in Learning: From Conflict to Collaboration,* by Carol Miller Lieber, quoted at http://www.teachervision.fen.com/teaching-methods/classroom-management/6706.html.)

As quoted above, one of the most valuable interventions to build connectedness is one that we all know how to do. Yet how many staff members greet and connect with students on a regular basis? In two well-thought-of schools I visited, I spent hours observing in the halls, in the cafeteria and in other common areas. In both schools I rarely saw teachers initiate positive interactions with students. One school was grades K-5, the other was 6-8. In the middle school I visited, only one of the four adults on cafeteria duty used the time to talk with young people, ask how they were doing or praise positive actions. The other three adults walked around the cafeteria apparently looking for negative behavior to deal with. They did not initiate positive interactions with any student while I was observing. Increasing the frequency of greeting and other brief positive interactions is the easiest way to build connections. On the other hand, a high school I visited recently makes a conscious effort to have every staff member greet students at the beginning of the day, and wish students a good evening at the end. In this high school, 94 percent of students reported that they had a connection with at least one staff member. At another school I visited, staff discussed the idea that every child needs a H*U*G several times each day. H*U*G stands for "Hello, update, goodbye."

We also build connectedness to school through activity times. Common interests and having fun together in a voluntarily-chosen activity builds connection with peers and adults. Working together in service projects also builds connection.

Other interventions that build a sense of connectedness for all groups include naming and formally valuing all subgroups, creating decorations and signs in school buildings that welcome all groups and asking adult representatives of different cultures, races, and religions to visit the school and tell us what they see when they walk the halls. These visits help us see what impact school decorations and practices have on people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. We can ask young people in different subgroups directly what helps them experience school positively. One middle school youth in an alternative program said, "I like it when teachers don't *assume* I need academic help just because I am in this program."

In addition to increasing connection with all students, we can focus on individuals who lack connection to adults. We can start by giving teachers a list of all the students they teach and ask them to make a mark next to the name of each student who they have had a conversation with about something beside schoolwork in the last month. Similarly, we could ask them to mark the names of each student who they feel they have a strong relationship with. By doing this, we can identify those students who are on no teacher's list. At the same time, we can distribute index cards to all students and invite them to write down their own name and the names of adults at school who they would go to if they had a problem. Students who list no adults identify themselves as disconnected. We can also ask students to write on the back of the card why they feel connected to those particular adults. The index cards can be used in three different and complementary ways:

- We can work to connect with youth who identify themselves as disconnected.
- We can privately recognize the adults whose names come up over and over on young peoples' cards. Some of these adults, who may be bus drivers, school secretaries, playground or lunch monitors, teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, or other school staff, build connections with and offer a listening ear to students school wide, and they may not know how important their actions are in building the health of the school community. Recognizing those adults' positive actions will help them continue their important work.
- We can disseminate to all staff a list of the actions that youth say build connectedness.

Once we have identified disconnected youth, we can attempt to build connection with them using a variety of interventions. With a silent mentoring program, a staff member commits to greeting and showing interest in a particular young person more often than previously. Staff may also increase the frequency of positive feedback and encourage disconnected youth to assist in classroom preparation and find a shared interest to pursue.

What do those adults do that helps you feel connected to school?

Text responses to survey questions are also useful. They can provide specific descriptions of what youth see as positive staff interventions, which affirms adults' efforts, increases buy-in and helps us maintain effective actions. These text responses can help school staff see the positive effects of small actions of greeting, kindness and encouragement, and thus make them more likely to increase the frequency of those behaviors. Selected and de-identified responses can be published to staff. The side benefit of using these responses in this way is that youth see themselves as improving their teachers' professional behavior through their feedback, which may make students more likely to accept adults' feedback aimed at improving youth behavior.

Do you feel that you are part of this school? Do you feel valued and respected at school?

These two parallel questions measure young peoples' connectedness with the entire school, not just with a few teachers. They let us identify the extent to which all students, and subgroups of students, feel part of the school, and to set goals and work toward connections.

What does our school do that helps all students feel safe and belong? What else would you like our school to do to help all students feel safe and belong?

Text responses to these two questions let us give staff members feedback about the positive results of their actions and help youth suggest additional strategies. Some students will use these questions as an opportunity to commend specific staff members, and those comments should be conveyed to the specific staff person directly. Some students use these questions as an opportunity to criticize a specific staff member anonymously. I generally delete those answers.

In the past month, how often have you seen students do these things at school?

In many bullying prevention efforts, survey data has focused primarily on the frequency and location of negative peer-to-peer behavior. Often, youth are given a definition of bullying and then asked to indicate how often they have been bullied, witnessed bullying or bullied others.

There are several problems with using frequency data as the **primary** indicator of the effectiveness of school programs over time. It is clear that the number of reports varies dramatically from survey to survey, based on the exact wording of the definition of bullying used. Many often-used definitions of bullying ask youth to judge the intentions of the person who mistreats others to decide if a behavior is bullying or not. Sometimes youth are asked to make a judgment about the social status or popularity of a young person who mistreats someone else. Other times, survey respondents are asked to judge whether the victim was hurt by the behavior. These are all difficult distinctions to make with any certainty.

Additionally, before they even read the definition provided, youth have diverse, culturally-derived meanings of the concept of "bullying." Some youth will respond according to their own understanding of the word and not to the given definition. As we raise students' awareness of bullying, we may expand the range of actions which they label as bullying. If a follow-up survey shows an increase in the rate of bullying, we will have no way to know whether there is more peer mistreatment or increased awareness.

There is one additional problem with using even the best-gathered survey data about the frequency of negative peer behavior as the primary measure of the effectiveness of our work in bullying prevention. Schools are not the source of mean peer behavior. Today's youth are bombarded with negative behavior modeling during the time they spend watching and participating in electronic media away from school. Social cruelty of one kind or another makes up the content of many TV shows and movies they watch, the conversations they participate in on social networking sites and even the daily news. Some youth are exposed to cruelty of various kinds at home. Peer-to-peer mistreatment surfaces at school because school is the only place where most young people spend large amounts of time with peers they do not like. The frequency of negative peer actions can increase over time for many reasons that school has little influence over. Yet, as has so often been the case in recent history, schools can and will be blamed when that happens.

Even if we move past asking about "bullying" and instead ask about the frequency of name-calling, rumor-spreading, hitting and other categories of behaviors, we still do not get a full picture of the *content* and *focus* of those actions. It is useful to know if youth at a school are seeing or

hearing negative actions that focus on sexual orientation, disability, social class, race, high achievement or other categories. Asking about a wider range of more specific actions gives us a more complete picture. As I see it, asking all students whether they have *seen or heard* different behaviors, instead of asking whether they experienced or perpetrated the behavior, gives us the most comprehensive picture of what is going on at school.

Though measures of frequency should be accompanied with other survey questions, student observations are important, as is knowing what behaviors are common or uncommon in school. It is helpful to ask school staff which frequency ratings surprise them. Behaviors that are frequent *and* which have higher potential to harm should be targeted for improvement.

If students do these actions, what do you think staff should do? Options are:
- **There should always be a fair consequence for this behavior to keep people safe**
- **There should be a fair consequence if this behavior is repeated**
- **Staff members should discourage the behavior**
- **Staff members should stay out of this unless they are asked for help**

We can survey both staff and students about how school staff should react to a wide range of specific negative peer-to-peer behaviors. The total percentage of youth choosing any of the first three options represents the number who think school staff should intervene to stop the behavior.

Basing discipline interventions on student and staff input increases buy-in. When students' responses to these questions indicate that 75 percent or more take potentially harmful actions seriously and want them stopped, we can feed that survey data back to young people so they are influenced by the positive norms of their peers. When fewer than 75 percent of youth think adults should act in the face of potentially harmful behaviors, this indicates a need for further education about the harm these behaviors can do.

There are generally four outcomes of this series of survey questions:

1. **High differentiation, aligned with adults**
   This is the ideal situation. In this case, students' answers are highly differentiated. This means that the percentage of students who want adults to take action is high for some behaviors and low for others. This shows that many students in these schools understand the difference between severe and less severe behaviors. If these responses are closely aligned with staff assessments of the potential harm of different behaviors, we can present discipline interventions to youth and families as a reflection of young peoples' values and their assessment of the potential harm of different behaviors.

2. **High differentiation, not aligned with adults**
   In this case, students answers are still differentiated, but they do not agree with adult opinions on the potential harm of behaviors. A sizable minority (or even a majority) of students may underestimate the impact of certain actions. For example, student ratings on what adults should do about indirect use of biased or hate speech (saying, "that's so gay" or "that's retarded" to describe a test, a coat or a TV show) may show that only 50-60 percent of students see this as a behavior that should be changed. In that case, rules and disciplinary interventions should be determined by adult assessment of the seriousness of a behavior and with relevant law and policy. In addition, we should build appreciation of diversity and

educate youth about the potential harm of behaviors through discussion, guest speakers, videos and other strategies.

3. **Low differentiation, high intervention**
In this case, students' answers are undifferentiated, which means that students make little distinction between severe and minor negative behaviors. Additionally, students ask for adult action for all or nearly all of the items on the list, even actions unlikely to do much harm like "choosing not to be someone's friend" or "cutting in line." In this situation, students are telling us that they do not differentiate between minor and serious peer actions, and they may be telling us that they expect adults to solve all their problems. This pattern of results indicates that we should implement curricula that help youth identify and solve small problems themselves, such as Myrna Shure's *I Can Problem Solve* and *Second Step*.

4. **Low differentiation, low intervention**
In this case, student answers are undifferentiated and a low percentage of students say adults at school should take action about all or nearly all negative peer behaviors. In this case, we should examine students' responses to the question about the fairness of discipline interventions and students' reports of what happened when they told adults about negative peer-to-peer behavior. It may be that students want these behaviors to stop but do not trust adults to intervene fairly or effectively. If text responses confirm this hypothesis, it is important to examine staff discipline interventions in depth. On the other hand, if students see discipline as fair and report that things get better when they go to adults, there may be a need for anti-bias, diversity and empathy training.

If students do these things, do you think other students should tell adults?

This question, and the concept of asking about students' thoughts of what peers should do, comes from an influential article: "*Rethinking the Bystander Role in Violence Prevention[1].*" The authors propose following the lead of students and community adults in defining which potentially harmful actions youth should tell adults about. Your school's data will most likely show a wide range of answers to this question. These answers let us build widespread agreement that youth should tell adults about the behaviors at the top of the list. When actions that have moderate to high potential for harm are rated low on the "tell adults" list, this is an indicator of the need for education about the harm of these behaviors and about the importance of telling adults about them.

As with students' responses to the previous question, if students do not differentiate between the importance of telling adults about serious and minor behaviors, we may need to implement education interventions. If a large majority of students say that youth should tell adults about everything, we can discuss problems students should first try to resolve themselves. If low percentages of youth say that students should tell adults about even very serious actions, we should examine our data from the other survey questions to determine whether staff action or inaction is leading to distrust of the helpfulness of telling adults. We should ask whether adults are discouraging youth from telling us about their concerns.

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[1] Stueve, A., Dash, K., O'Donnell, L., Tehranifar, P., Wilson, R., Slaby, R., et al. (2006).
Rethinking the bystander role in school violence prevention. Health Promotion Practice, 7(1), 117-124.

In the past month, how often have students at your school hurt you emotionally or excluded you? In the past month, how often have students at your school threatened to hurt you or hurt you physically?

Answers to these two questions can be compared to those from the national Youth Voice Project. In that study of more than 13,000 students around the United States, **26 percent** of students said other students at school hurt them emotionally or excluded them twice a month or more in the past month. **11 percent** said other students at school threatened to hurt them or hurt them physically twice a month or more in the past month. You can also use the questions to compare rates of mistreatment in different subgroups and in repeat surveys to compare rates of mistreatment from year to year.

What have you done to help someone who was mistreated or who was alone? What happened when you did that? What did other students do that helped you when you were teased, hit, threatened, or excluded? What happened when they did that?

We can use text summaries of effective actions by mistreated youth and by witnesses to peer mistreatment to encourage other young people to imitate these actions. We can successfully disseminate national or regional responses to these questions, but it is more powerful for youth to hear what other students at their school have done that has worked for themselves or for others. After removing any identifying information, anonymous responses can be posted in the hallway and read at assemblies and in PA announcements. These statements can also guide the script of theater presentations. They can be the prelude to "stand up if you have used this positive action…." activities.

In addition to data from your school, Youth Voice Project data is available at http://www.youthvoiceproject.com. Mistreated students said that they were more likely to make things better for themselves when they sought help and support than when they told aggressive youth to stop or told them how they felt. Mistreated students in grade six and up reported that telling themselves that the mean behavior was not their fault helped things get better, as did finding humor in the mistreatment. In text comments, a number of these students said that the function of the humor was to reduce their sadness, though, and not to stop the other person from continuing his or her mean actions. Youth Voice Project students reported mixed results from other commonly-advised actions like walking away or pretending that the mean actions didn't bother them. We conclude that the most effective self strategies were those that accessed support and protection from peers and adults, and those that helped youth not think like victims. Not acting like a victim (telling mistreating youth to stop, pretending not to be bothered, walking away) and telling mistreating youth how they feel were rated as less effective strategies.

Adults can use these responses as a reality check, to help us advise youth to use strategies that actually work. We found in the Youth Voice Project that youth often used strategies that they reported as least helpful. We assume that these are the strategies adults advised students to use. Students are likely to do what adults tell them, even if those behaviors do not work for them. If they repeat these ineffective strategies, they risk lapsing into helplessness and depression or rage. When, instead, we encourage youth to observe and learn from the actual outcomes of their behavior, we empower them. Young people who learn from observation change their behavior over time to become more effective. They are able to learn from their mistakes, and from their successes.

In the Youth Voice Project, mistreated youth reported that peer actions that provide safety in numbers (peers walked with me and spent time with me at school) were likely to make things better for them. They also reported that peer actions that give emotional and cognitive support and a sense of belonging (talked to me, listened to me, encouraged me and called me at home to encourage me) were likely to make things better. Bystanders confronting aggressive youth was described as less likely to lead to positive outcomes. The same was true when peer bystanders asked mistreating students to stop in a kind way. Youth described this widely-recommended intervention (bystanders telling mistreating youth to stop, either in anger or in a friendly manner) as less helpful and more risky than acts of alliance and emotional support. This knowledge helps us shape the advice we give youth who witness mistreatment.

What did adults at school do that helped you when you were teased, hit, threatened, or excluded? What happened when they did that?

These text responses can be fed back to adults to help adults see the importance of acts of support, supervision, and encouragement. In responding to this question, young people have the opportunity to shape adults' actions.

When other students teased, hit, threatened, or excluded you, did you tell an adult at school? When you told an adult at school, what happened?

This series of questions helps us judge school staff's responsiveness to reports of peer mistreatment. We learn to what extent mistreated students are telling adults and what happens when they do tell adults. Youth perceptions of fairness or unfairness of discipline interventions influence their willingness to report negative actions. These perceptions influence the way young people interpret disciplinary action. Gathering youth perceptions of the fairness and effectiveness of disciplinary interventions helps schools to evaluate their efforts in using consequences to deter mean peer behavior. The Youth Voice Project found dramatic differences between schools based on young peoples' answers to this question. Clearly students' perceptions of a school's disciplinary interventions is important to their feeling of safety. The Wingspread Declaration summarized these themes in this way: *"Based on current research evidence, the most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school include…applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are **collectively agreed upon** and fairly enforced."*(emphasis added)

We were surprised in the Youth Voice Project to see a great deal of difference between schools in students' reports about the outcome of telling adults about mean peer behavior. Overall, we found that younger students were more likely to report that things got better when they told adults than older students. Yet even within any age range, we found wide variation between schools. How does your school compare to other schools in your grade range? What results would you like to see? As I see it, things *should* get better after youth tell an adult at school at least 60 percent of the time, and possibly more often in elementary school, where adults have more control of outcomes than they do in middle and high school. Schools can keep asking this survey question from year to year to track successes and trends. If a school is large enough to allow for meaningful disaggregation of this data, responsiveness can be compared between subgroups. In addition to assessing responsiveness with anonymous surveys, I recommend a brief follow-up questionnaire be

sent to the family of each student who has reported significant negative peer behavior. This questionnaire should be sent several weeks after the report, and can ask the same question: "After you told adults at school about _____, did things get better, was there no change, or did things get worse?" We can allow space for text entry and ask which actions made things better and what students and families would recommend next time. This questionnaire allows us to let parents know that we care about what they think. It also allows us to double-check survey ratings and deal more effectively with ongoing problem behaviors.

Conclusion

School surveys can provide us with much valuable data. They can help us discover and continue effective interventions, both formal and informal. They can help us clarify the need for altered or new interventions and to build buy-in for our efforts. They can help us set and measure progress toward authentic and significant goals for school improvement. They allow young people to contribute their ideas and experiences to define positive peer norms and positive actions to be taken by both students and educators. I look forward to your ideas, your reactions and your questions. You can reach me at stan@stopbullyingnow.com.