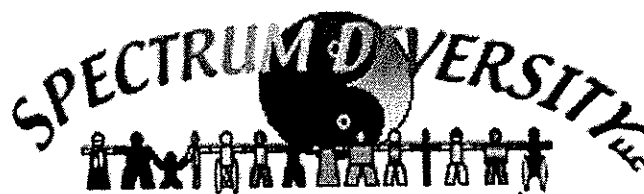


Secaucus Public Schools Report on the 2014 School Climate & Bullying Prevention Student Survey



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No part of this report constitutes legal advice or counsel.

The findings are based on the data provided by students, interpreted according to social scientific standards, and in the context of research-based knowledge about effective strategies for bullying prevention and circumstances promoting positive school climates.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Secaucus Public Schools Report on the 2014 School Climate & Bullying Prevention Student Survey

Overall and Major Findings:

- Overall, 2014 findings are very positive and show little change when compared to 2012 and 2013 findings. Changes that did occur were generally small in magnitude, and most were in a desirable direction. No serious climate issues were discovered, although areas in which improvement is possible were identified.
- The issues that students are most concerned about, across all grade levels, are rumors, social exclusion, mean name-calling, and some students getting away with being mean to others. Cyber bullying is not a widespread concern among elementary students, but students in seventh grade and above are concerned about hurtful online posting and other issues of cyber behavior. Improvements have been seen in each of these issues, particularly in certain grades, and the district is encouraged to continue positive efforts to address these issues.
- Decreases in student use of certain types of derogatory language have been seen in specific grades, e.g, the use of intelligence-based insults, derogatory comments about others' appearances, and the use of the phrase "so gay." Continued efforts to encourage respectful language and understanding of differences should result in further improvement.
- Areas in which there is room for improvement include: peer support/social integration among students; peer norms for responding to bullying; students' perceptions of the likelihood that adults will intervene when they are close enough to notice that bullying is occurring; students' perceptions of adults' ability to respond effectively to stop bullying; student willingness to tell adults if they need help with an issue such as bullying.
- Students that are in the cohort that was in seventh grade in 2012, and ninth grade in 2014, have, each year, consistently reported lower levels of self-esteem than students in any other cohort.
- Elementary students perceive that teachers favor remedial over disciplinary responses to student behavior, which is a positive finding.
- In general, students in grades five through eight reported more frequent experiences with hurtful behavior than did students in grades three and four, or students in grades nine through twelve. As is true in many school districts, in Secaucus Public Schools, these findings indicate that bullying behavior peaks in late elementary school and middle school.

Details

Note: The full report details many positive findings. This summary focuses on the findings that indicate areas to be addressed during the upcoming anti-bullying programming year, and includes positive findings only when they reflect changes in 2014 compared to 2013 or 2012.

Social Networking and Online Behavior

- Three quarters of seventh graders (78%) have social networking pages, and this increases only slightly to 80%-92% in grades eight through twelve. This is a typical finding, indicating that most students who are going to establish social

networking pages have already done so by seventh grade; students need cyber safety education that includes safe social networking instruction prior to seventh grade.

- The percentage of students who communicate with others online on a daily or almost daily basis increases dramatically between sixth and seventh grades, from 16%-28% in grades 3-6, to 59%-62% in grades 7-8. Among third graders, 42% are already communicating with others online at least occasionally, and by seventh grade, 95% are communicating online at least occasionally. These are typical findings reflecting the need for students to receive cyber safety education beginning prior to third grade, and suggesting that sixth and seventh grades are critical grades in which to reinforce safety lessons pertaining to safe and respectful communication online.
- Compared to 2013, in 2014 seventh and eighth graders were more likely to communicate with strangers online; in 2013, 37% of seventh graders and 36% of eighth graders said they *never* communicated with strangers; this decreased to 25% in each grade in 2014.

Emotional Well-Being in School

- It was found in 2013 that eighth graders were more likely than students in other grades to feel sad in school. In 2014, there is no evidence that either the cohort that was in ninth grade in 2013-2014, or the cohort that was in eighth grade in 2013-2014, is more likely to feel sad than any other cohort. If the 2013 findings reflected a trend toward greater prevalence of sadness in the 2012-2013 eighth grade cohort, or factors promoting these feelings in the eighth grade environment, this issue has apparently been successfully addressed. However, in 2013, it was also found that students in seventh through ninth grades were twice as likely as students in all other grades to say that they are worried about school (23%-25% vs. 2%-12%); in 2014, ninth graders—the same cohort that was in eighth grade in 2013—are still substantially more likely than students in other grades to say they were worried about school (34% vs. 6%-20%). Therefore, there might still be some lingering issues to be addressed in this cohort of students.
- In each grade, very low percentages of students said they are afraid they will get into trouble in school (2%-12% in most grades) or afraid that their teacher will be mad at them (2%-10%), sad (1%-10%), scared they will be hurt (3%-8%), or alone (2%-5%); these are very positive findings.
- The cohort that was in seventh grade in 2012 has, each year, consistently reported the lowest levels of self-esteem. In 2012, as seventh graders, 62% of this cohort said they felt good or very good about themselves, compared to 64%-94% of all other cohorts. In 2013, as eighth graders, 53% reported that they felt good or very good about themselves, compared to 69%-77% of students in all other cohorts. In 2014, as ninth graders, 60% of this cohort said that they felt good or very good about themselves, compared to 65%-75% of all other cohorts. This cohort of students, who will be in tenth grade in 2014-2015, might benefit from targeted attention in this area.

Peer and Adult Support

- In 2012, peer support was identified as an area for attention in Secaucus Public Schools, and findings in 2013 indicated improvement in some grades. The 2014 findings indicate that this improvement was continued or maintained in some

grades, but lost in others. Net improvements since 2012 are seen in fourth (23% to 18%), fifth (29% to 19%), and tenth (24% to 19%) grades although the magnitudes of these improvements do not meet the threshold criterion of 15%. Improvements between 2012 and 2013 in sixth (23% to 16%), seventh (14% to 9%), and eleventh (27% to 19%) were reversed in 2014 (23%, 26%, 25%).

Continued efforts to increase the social density of friendship networks among students, and to encourage the inclusion of students who are easily left out, are recommended, so that the pattern of improvement seen in 2013 can be regained.

- The 2013 student survey found that, compared to 2012, decreased percentages of students had a trusted adult in school. It was suggested that this might reflect student concerns regarding the ABR, and that careful implementation might alleviate these concerns. In 2014, findings indicate that, in most grades, student trust in adults has been restored to 2012 levels. This is a positive finding, although it still leaves room for improvement; 71%-92% of students in each grade report that they do know of an adult in school that they could go to if they had a problem. A realistic goal would be 85% of each grade.

Student Perceptions of General School Climate

- Most students report that they experience a generally positive peer climate, and 10% or less of students in each grade 3-8 reporting that many or most of their peers are mean, with the exception of seventh grade (14%).
- When students were asked to indicate what the problems are in their school, findings indicate small improvements in specific grades with regard to specific issues. For example,
 - The percentages of students in grades 3-6 who said that physical aggression (fighting, hitting, etc.) is a problem at school decreased between 2013 and 2014 in all four grades by 4% to 14% in each grade, with the largest improvement seen in fourth grade (38% to 24%).
 - The percentage of fourth graders who said that mean name-calling is a problem also decreased, from 66% in 2012, to 55% in 2013, to 44% in 2014, a substantial 22% drop over the course of two years.
 - The percentage of students in grades five and six who said that mean text messaging is a problem has also decreased, from 20% and 35%, respectively, in 2012, to 12% and 22% in 2014.
 - Student concern about social exclusion decreased in certain grades between 2013 and 2014, most notably in seventh (44% to 33%), eighth (47% to 33%), and eleventh (38% to 15%) grades.
 - Student concern about pressure to look a certain way to fit in decreased in certain grades between 2013 and 2014, most notably eighth grade (42% to 17%), ninth grade (32% to 20%), and eleventh grade (21% to 8%).
 - There is a cohort pattern evident in the findings pertaining to appearance pressure. The students who were ninth graders in 2012 have consistently, each year, expressed less widespread concern about appearance pressure than other cohorts. The school safety team might also consider utilizing members of this cohort, which will be in twelfth grade in 2014-2015, as mentors to teach younger students the value of respecting diverse body types and grooming styles, and other suggestions are given in the body of the report.

- Issues of increasing concern to students include:
 - Concern about rumors increased between 2012, 2013, and 2014 from 60% to 71% in fifth grade, and from 72% to 81% in sixth grade. Concern about rumors decreased among third (37% to 28%) and fourth graders (59% to 46%) between 2013 and 2014, however. Efforts to address this specific issue in all elementary grades, with particular focus on the older elementary grades, are recommended.
 - An increase in student concern about some students who are mean but get away with it was seen specifically in grades five and six; concerns increased among fifth graders from 43% in 2012, to 51% in 2013, and 60% in 2014, and among sixth graders from 47% in 2012, to 55% in 2013, and 64% in 2014. These are increases of 17% in two years, which is a clear and strong pattern, indicating that efforts to address student concerns that some students are getting away with mean behavior in these two grades are necessary.
 - An increase in concern about teachers not being fair was also found in fifth and sixth grade; in 2014, fifth and sixth grade students were 9%-10% more likely than in 2013 to say that teachers not being fair is a problem in their school.
- The grades in which student concern about each issue peaks are as follows:
 - **Social Exclusion:** Grades 3-9
 - **Rumors:** Grades 5-8
 - **Name-calling:** Grades 5-8
 - **Some students get away with being mean:** Grades 5-7
 - **Pressure to look a certain way to fit in:** Grades 5-6
 - **Teachers insulting students:** Grade 6
 - **Physical Aggression:** Grades 5-7
 - **Hurtful online posting:** Grades 7-8 (not assessed in grades 3-6)
- The issues that are of greatest concern to students in each grade are as follows:
 - **Third grade:** Social exclusion (67%), followed by mean name-calling (38%) and some students getting away with being mean (37%)
 - **Fourth grade:** Social exclusion (60%), followed by rumors (46%), mean name-calling (44%), and some students getting away with being mean (42%)
 - **Fifth grade:** Social exclusion (71%), rumors (71%), mean name-calling (67%), and some students getting away with being mean (60%)
 - **Sixth grade:** Rumors (81%), mean name-calling (75%), social exclusion (68%), and some students getting away with being mean (64%)
 - **Seventh grade:** Rumors (50%), and some students getting away with being mean (41%), followed by mean name-calling (34%), social exclusion (33%), physical aggression (30%) and hurtful online posting (29%)
 - **Eighth grade:** Rumors (62%), mean name-calling (40%), some students getting away with being mean (34%), social exclusion (33%), and hurtful online posting (32%)
 - **Ninth grade:** Rumors (33%), some students getting away with being mean (33%) and social exclusion (30%)
 - **Tenth grade:** Rumors (38%), and some students getting away with being mean (34%), followed by social exclusion (25%)
 - **Eleventh grade:** Rumors (32%)
 - **Twelfth grade:** Rumors (34%)

- In each grade in 2014, as in 2012 and 2013, the majority of students perceive that the rules against bullying are generally clear, and that they are generally fairly applied. There is, however, room for improvement, as more than 20% of students in some grades feel that the rules are not fairly enforced.
- When students in grades 3-8 were asked, “in your school, when students say hurtful things to each other, what do other students usually do?” findings indicate that students’ perceptions of peer social norms for responding to bullying is area in which improvement is possible. Although more than half of students in each grade report that their peers tell the offender to stop, substantial percentages also report that their peers are likely to join in the bullying by saying mean things themselves, or by laughing. This pattern is more pronounced in the older elementary school and middle school grades than in the younger elementary grades. Some improvement did occur in 2013-2014; the percentage of students who said that their peers would tell an adult increased from 19% to 34% among seventh graders, and from 9% to 28% among eighth graders. Additional effort is recommended with regard to this aspect of school climate, and suggestions are provided in the body of the report.
- Changes in the percentages of students who report hearing peers make derogatory comments are very small and specific to certain types of comments in certain grades, but most changes are in the desirable direction, indicating a general trend toward decreasing use of derogatory comments among students. For example,
 - The percentage of students who said that they never hear derogatory comments about another student’s race or ethnicity increased in third, fourth, and sixth grades, from 69%-82% in these three grades in 2012 and 2013, to 84%-91% in 2014.
 - Among sixth graders, the percentage of students who said that they never hear the phrase “so gay” increased from 41% in 2012 to 49% in 2013 and 52% in 2014, and conversely, the percentage who said that they hear this phrase often, daily, or multiple times a day decreased from 41% in 2012 to 29% in 2013 and 2014.
 - The percentages of students who said that they hear their peers make insulting comments about others’ appearances often, daily, or multiple times a day decreased from 2013 to 2014 among eighth graders (49% to 33%), ninth graders (48% to 37%), eleventh graders (31% to 14%), and twelfth graders (30% to 10%).
 - There was a substantial decrease between 2013 and 2014 in the percentage of students in grades eight (70% to 54%) and twelve (61% to 36%) who heard the phrase “so gay” often, daily, or multiple times a day; this follows decreases between 2012 and 2013 in grades ten (66% to 42%) and eleven (82% to 37%) which were maintained in 2014, and reverses a trend in the opposite direction in grade eight (47% to 70%).
 - Similar decreases have been seen in grades ten through twelve in the frequency with which students report hearing intelligence-based comments frequently; between 2012 and 2014, the percentage who say they hear these comments frequently decreased from 77% to 54% in tenth grade, 84% to 45% in eleventh grade, and 67%¹ to 37% in twelfth grade.

¹ Twelfth graders were not included in the survey in 2012, so this figure is from 2013.

- As in 2012 and 2013, the most frequently heard type of derogatory comments among elementary students are intelligence-based insults such as “stupid,” or “retard,” appearance-based insults, and the phrase “so gay;”
 - Intelligence-based insults were heard on a daily (daily, or multiple times a day) basis by 2% of third graders, increasing with increasing grade level to 22% among sixth graders.
 - Four percent (4%) of third graders, increasing to 16% of sixth graders, reported hearing derogatory comments about someone’s appearance on a daily basis.
 - 2% of fourth graders, increasing to 17% of sixth graders, reported hearing the derogatory phrase “so gay” on a daily basis.
- These types of derogatory comments are most prevalent in middle school, and then begin to decrease with increasing grade level in high school.
 - 62%-63% of seventh through ninth graders reported that they hear intelligence-based insults frequently, compared to 54% of tenth graders, 45% of eleventh graders, and 37% of twelfth graders.
 - The percentage who frequently hear “so gay” decreases from 51%-56% among seventh through ninth graders to 36% among twelfth graders.
 - Derogatory comments about appearance decrease from 39% among seventh graders to 10% among twelfth graders.
 - Derogatory comments about race/ethnicity decrease from a peak of 27% among eighth graders to 10% among twelfth graders.
 - Efforts to decrease the use of derogatory language among older high school students have apparently been successful; these efforts can be continued and enhanced in grades 7-9, and students from grades 10-12 might be used as mentors or role models for the younger grades.

Students’ Perceptions of Adults at School

- In the 2013 report, it was noted that, compared to 2012, students in seventh through ninth grades reported a slightly higher prevalence of inappropriate adult comments. In 2014, this trend has reversed, indicating that if this was the beginning of a trend in an undesirable direction, it has been successfully reversed. In each grade, 6%-13% of students say that they frequently hear adults make derogatory comments about students’ appearances, 3%-15% (with the highest percentages in tenth and eleventh grades), say that they frequently hear adults make racist comments, 2%-12% say they frequently hear adults make anti-gay comments, 12%-20% say they frequently hear adults say things that are disrespectful of students, and 7%-17% say they frequently hear adults reveal private information about another student. Whether or not adults actually make such comments with the frequency reported by students, students’ perceptions that adults make such comments is an important aspect of school climate as experienced by students.
- In grades three through five, 89%-90% of students say that all or most of their teachers care about them. This drops to 79%-82% in grades six through eight, and 61%-64% in grades nine through eleven, but increases to 86% among twelfth graders. Overall these findings are positive and indicate that the majority of students in all grades do feel that their teachers care about them.
- In each grade, 78%-96% of students say that all or most of their teachers care about or take bullying seriously, and only 0%-7% say that their teachers generally don’t care about bullying.

- As was found in 2012 and 2013, in 2014 students in grades 3-6 are very unlikely to say that teachers ignore bullying (4%-10%), and they are more likely to say that teachers tell the bully to stop and/or explain why the behavior is wrong than they are to punish the behavior; these are positive findings indicating that students perceive that teachers do respond to bullying when they notice it, and that they favor remedial over disciplinary responses.
- The majority of students report that teachers often or very often intervene when they are close enough to notice bullying. In each grade, from fourth to twelfth, 55%-67% of students say that adults often or very often intervene. However, this is not a large majority and, as was reported in 2013, findings in 2012 in the elementary and middle school grade, had been even more favorable. This finding should be shared with school staff who work with elementary and middle school students, so that ideas can be shared regarding possible reasons students might be perceiving a decrease in the consistency of adult intervention, as well as ideas for restoring student perceptions in the reliability of adult intervention.
- In grades eight, eleven, and twelve, students' perceptions of adults' ability to stop bullying improved between 2013 and 2014; in each grade, students were 11%-16% more likely in 2014 than in 2013 to say that teachers are often or always able to stop bullying. There is still room for improvement in this area; in grades 6-12, 42%-59% of students in each grade do *not* think that adults are usually able to stop bullying. Adults working with students at all grade levels need techniques for effective intervention, including effective, pro-active, follow-up.

Students' Experiences of Being Harassed or Bothered at School

- In 2013, eighth graders were more likely than students in other grades to report having been bothered by other students verbally, socially, and electronically. During the 2013-2014 school year, these students were in ninth grade. In 2014, as ninth graders, they do not report having been bothered by peers with any greater frequency than students in any other grade. If there was something in 2013 that caused an unusually high rate of bullying or bothering among eighth graders that year, the situation has apparently been addressed.
- In general, students in grades five through eight reported more frequent experiences with hurtful behavior than did students in grades three and four, or students in grades nine through twelve. As is true in many school districts, in Secaucus Public Schools, these findings indicate that bullying behavior peaks in late elementary school and middle school.
- The following chart shows the percentages of students in each grade who report experiencing each type of bothering or bullying often, weekly, daily, or multiple times a day:

Table III-G-11: Percentages of Students Self-Reporting that They Have Experienced Each Type of Hurtful Behavior from Peers Frequently
(Frequently = Often, Weekly, Daily, or Multi-Daily)

	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Physical attack					5%	2%	0%	5%	3%	2%
Property theft/damage	6%	4%	6%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	2%	2%
Physical aggression	6%	5%	9%	9%	11%	10%	9%	6%	7%	2%
Social exclusion	11%	10%	13%	14%	12%	13%	5%	4%	5%	4%
Rumor/Secret	8%	12%	14%	16%	11%	11%	5%	7%	6%	4%
Verbal	5%	11%	25%	19%	18%	15%	16%	10%	5%	4%

- The following chart shows the percentages of students in each grade who report being bothered or bullied for each characteristic-based reason often, weekly, daily, or multiple times a day:

Table IIIH-9: Percentages of Students Self-Reporting that They Have Experienced Hurtful Behavior Based on Personal Characteristics Frequently
(Frequently = Often, Weekly, Daily, or Multi-Daily)

	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Disability					4%	5%	2%	2%	6%	2%
Economic status					5%	7%	5%	4%	2%	4%
Religion					4%	5%	6%	7%	2%	2%
Intelligence-based	3%	6%	16%	12%						
"Gay" as insult		3%	5%	5%	10%	10%	8%	2%	7%	2%
Race/ethnicity	4%	3%	4%	2%	7%	9%	5%	5%	7%	2%
Gender	4%	4%	6%	6%	1%	3%	2%	4%	2%	2%
Appearance	7%	7%	12%	12%	10%	14%	8%	13%	6%	0%

Students' Experiences of Adult Disrespect

- As in 2012 and 2013, in 2014 very few students report that adults in school frequently say verbally hurtful things to them; 2%-6% of students in each grade report that adults insult them often, weekly, daily, or more than once a day, and 1%-10% report that they have been frequently embarrassed by adults, with the highest percentages (10%) in sixth and seventh grades.

Telling An Adult, Knowing Targeted Students, and Feelings of Safety

- The older students grow, the less likely they are to tell adults about problems they might be facing in school. The percentage of students who say that, if they were bullied, they would tell an adult most of the time or always ranges from 33% of third graders, to 31% of fourth graders, 20%-22% of fifth and sixth graders, 13%-19% of seventh through ninth graders, and 8%-9% of tenth through twelfth graders. The percentage of students who say that they would never, rarely, or usually not tell an adult ranges from 36% to 62% in each grade. These findings are not substantially different from findings in other districts but there is still, however, room for improvement.
- From 31% to 80% of students in each grade reported that they know someone who had been bullied, with students in grades seven and eight being more likely to say they knew someone who was bullied (72%-80%) than either younger (38%-60% in grades three through six) or older (31%-65% in grades nine through twelve) students.
- Very small percentages of students in most grades report that they do not feel very safe, or that they do not feel safe at all (0%-6%). This is a positive finding, and indicates that the vast majority of students in Secaucus schools feel secure in their school, as they did in 2012 and 2013. There is very little room for improvement in this aspect of school climate.
- In 2014, 32% of seventh graders, 34% of eighth graders, 39% of ninth graders, 35% of tenth graders, 3% of eleventh graders, and 8% of twelfth graders said they had avoided an area of the school at least once. This includes 11% of seventh graders, 5% of eighth graders, 18% of ninth graders, 9% of tenth graders, 2% of eleventh graders, and 2% of twelfth graders, who said that they had avoided an area of the school four or more times. Students' comments, collected in the Confidential Appendix, provide some information about which areas of the school students are avoiding. Particular attention should be paid to

the locations that are avoided by ninth graders; if 18% of ninth graders are, in fact, avoiding areas of the school on a regular basis, then these areas of the school need additional monitoring.

Perceptions of Changes in Teachers' Attitudes and Social Climate

- From 25% to 54% of students in each grade noticed that, over the course of the 2013-2014 school year, teachers were "trying harder" to address bullying, 18%-38% noticed that teachers were taking bullying more seriously, 19%-30% noticed that teachers were talking about bullying more, and 11%-31% noticed that teachers were watching more closely. Younger students were more likely to notice changes, but even in grades ten through twelve, 63%-70% of students had noticed at least one of the changes.
- Students were asked if they had noticed any decrease in bullying since the previous year. Most students in all grades (71%-87%) reported noticing at least some decrease in bullying, including 57% of fourth graders, 47% of fifth graders, 25%-38% in grades six through nine, 24% of tenth graders, 41% of eleventh graders, and 33% of twelfth graders who had noticed "much less bullying."