

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

Parents Pan School Performance on Bullying Prevention

For children to do their best in school, they need a safe environment. As children begin another school year across the United States, it is not clear if parents believe their children's schools are safe.

Parents seem quite concerned about safety issues that often show up in the school setting. For example, earlier this year, bullying was rated by adults in the United States as the 4th biggest health problem for children ([July 2009](#)). About three-quarters of all states currently have laws about bullying prevention. Many of the laws expect that schools will be the main place to educate kids about bullying and how to prevent it.

Bullying is just one of several school safety issues that are the focus of the latest CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health.

Primary vs. Secondary School Grades on Safety

Overall, 33% of parents give their children's secondary schools an "A" grade for providing a safe place for students, while 59% of parents give primary schools an "A" (Table 1).

Parents give primary schools the highest proportion of "A's" for keeping parents informed in school-wide emergencies (64%) and keeping students safe in a school-wide emergency (62%). In contrast, only 46% of parents give secondary schools an "A" for keeping parents informed and 36% of parents give secondary schools an "A" for keeping students safe (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of Parents Giving "A's" for Issues of School Safety, by School Level

Safety Issue	A's for Primary Schools	A's for Secondary Schools
Keeping parents informed in school-wide emergencies	64%	46%
Keeping students safe in school-wide emergencies	62%	36%
Building security	49%	33%
Prevention of bullying/school violence	38%	26%
Safe place for students overall	59%	33%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Report Highlights

- Only 1 in 3 parents give secondary schools an "A" for providing a safe place for students overall; in contrast, 3 in 5 parents give primary schools an "A".
- Only 1 in 4 parents give secondary schools an "A" for prevention of bullying and school violence; just 2 in 5 parents give primary schools an "A".
- Parents of children in private schools give substantially higher marks for school safety issues than parents of children in public or charter schools.

High marks are less common for building security. Only one-third of parents give their children's secondary school an "A" grade on building security, while about one-half of parents give primary schools an "A" (Table 1).

Complete report cards for parents' ratings of these school safety measures can be found in Tables 4-6 on page 3.

Bullying Prevention and School Violence

Prevention of bullying and school violence is an area where parents give schools considerably lower marks. About one-quarter of parents give secondary schools an "A" for prevention of bullying and school violence, while 38% of parents give primary schools an "A".

One in five parents give their children's secondary school a borderline or failing grade (a "D" or "F") for prevention of bullying and school violence, while one in ten of parents give their children's primary school a borderline or failing grade (Table 7, page 3).

Parents' ratings of their children's schools regarding bullying prevention did not differ by whether they lived in states with bullying prevention laws.

Public vs. Private School Grades on Safety

Parents of children in private schools (about 10% of children overall) give those schools substantially higher marks for safety issues than parents of children in public or charter schools.

Overall, 82% of parents give their children's private primary school an "A" for providing a safe place for students, while only 56% of parents give public primary schools an "A" (Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of Parents Giving "A's" for Issues of School Safety in Primary Schools, by School Type

Safety Issue	A's for Public & Charter Schools	A's for Private Schools
Keeping parents informed in school-wide emergencies	62%	81%
Keeping students safe in school-wide emergencies	60%	79%
Building security	46%	74%
Prevention of bullying/ school violence	35%	64%
Safe place for students overall	56%	82%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

On prevention of bullying and school violence, parents give private primary schools nearly twice the proportion of "A's" that parents give public primary schools (Table 2).

Unlike parents of children in public schools, parents of children in private schools give more consistent grades for primary versus secondary schools regarding school safety.

Parents give private secondary schools more than twice as high a proportion of "A's" as public secondary schools for issues of school safety. Of note, 83% of private school parents give their child's secondary school an "A" for the school being a safe place overall, while only 28% of parents of public school children give "A's" (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of Parents Giving "A's" for Issues of School Safety in Secondary Schools, by School Type

Safety Issue	A's for Public & Charter Schools	A's for Private Schools
Keeping parents informed in school-wide emergencies	43%	81%
Keeping students safe in school-wide emergencies	33%	72%
Building security	31%	63%
Prevention of bullying/ school violence	23%	65%
Safe place for students overall	28%	83%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Implications


From previous findings of the CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health (July 2009), it is clear that the American public is concerned about the problem of bullying for children. What is now also clear from these latest Poll results is that parents believe their children's schools could do much better when it comes to the prevention of bullying and other violence between students. In particular, parents of secondary school students feel that their schools are not meeting their expectations; only one-quarter give secondary schools an "A" grade when it comes to prevention of bullying and school violence.

In contrast, parents appear more pleased with schools' preparedness and efforts regarding information and safety in case of school-wide emergencies. This may be a result of nationwide responses to well-publicized school violence tragedies in recent years that have led to extensive anticipatory planning by schools and localities.

By comparison, bullying is a more silent problem, but more widespread. Bullying can have very serious health effects, including physical symptoms related to injuries and emotional symptoms such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts and actions. Many states have passed bullying prevention laws to focus schools' attention and efforts on this problem, but findings from this Poll indicate that such laws have yet to influence parents' impressions of schools' performance in this arena. Parents of children in private school give higher ratings for bullying prevention than parents of children in public and charter schools, but even one-third of private-school parents believe their children's schools could do better.

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc. for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in May 2009 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older (n=1,087) from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 59% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4 to 6 percentage points for the main analysis. For results based on subgroups, the margin of error is higher.



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Table 4. Report Card for Keeping Parents Informed in School-Wide Emergencies, by School Level

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	64%	46%
B	25%	25%
C	7%	15%
D	2%	6%
F	2%	8%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Table 5. Report Card for Keeping Students Safe in School-Wide Emergencies, by School Level

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	62%	36%
B	29%	41%
C	7%	17%
D	1%	4%
F	<1%	2%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Table 6. Report Card for School Building Security, by School Level

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	49%	33%
B	34%	35%
C	12%	21%
D	2%	5%
F	3%	6%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Table 7. Report Card for Prevention of Bullying and School Violence, by School Level

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	38%	26%
B	35%	28%
C	16%	25%
D	6%	12%
F	5%	9%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Table 8. Report Card for Providing a Safe Place Overall, by School Level

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	59%	33%
B	31%	37%
C	6%	22%
D	2%	4%
F	2%	4%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009