Public School Principals' Experiences with Interpreting and Implementing

Connecticut's Anti-bullying Law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d): A Statewide Survey

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Abstract

The paper presents select results from a statewide survey intended to describe public school principals' experiences with implementing Connecticut's anti-bullying law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d). There were 192 survey respondents. Slightly more than half of respondents indicated that their districts had put into place all of the various policy elements as prescribed in the law, with nearly all of the respondents reporting that several elements were in place. Notably, there was unevenness related to participants' reports of full implementation of all of the provisions. In other words, no single element was reported by all participants (i.e., 100%) as being included in their district policies.

The Prevalence of Bullying and the Affects

Research on the nature and affects of bullying began initially outside of the United States. Despite the fact that the phenomenon of "schoolyard bullying" seems to have been a common and reported occurrence from the earliest days of American schooling, it has only been since the 1970's that bullying has been systematically studied. Dan Olweus, a Norwegian researcher, published a book in 1978, *Aggression in the Schools – Bullies and Whipping Boys*, that presented his research into the phenomena in Scandinavian schools. His work proved to be all too urgent and relevant after a 1982 report that three young adolescent students committed suicide as a direct result of having been bullied. From that time forward, large-scale research into the prevalence of bullying has taken place throughout the world (Minogue, 2002).

Serious and substantial research into bullying in the United States began in earnest after the Littleton, Colorado school shooting at Columbine High School in 1999. In 2001, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published the first major scientific study of school bullying in the United States, "Bullying Behaviors among US Youth" (Nansel et al., 2001). The authors surveyed 15,686 students in grades 6 – 10 in both public and parochial schools. Participants completed the World Health Organization's Health Behavior in School-aged Children survey. This was a collaborative effort, among 30 different countries, that followed pockets of research taking place primarily in Europe and Australia. The conclusions from this study confirmed that bullying is a serious and pervasive problem, not just in a single country or region, but also throughout the world. Nearly 30% of the students reported experiencing moderate or frequent involvement in bullying (13% as bullies, 10.6% as targets, and 6.3% as both). Of even greater concern was the fact that 30% of the students who had experienced some degree of bullying were

twice as likely to be at risk for other psychological and social problems, including smoking, drinking, social isolation, negative feelings about school, and poor academic performance.

While Nansel et al. (2001) is perhaps the most widely referenced investigation of bullying, other large studies have since been carried out in the United States. Finkelhor, Ormond, Turner, and Hamby (2005) conducted research designed to gain a better understanding of victimization. Data were gathered from a nationally representative sample of 2,030 children and youth age 2-17 years, living in the contiguous United States. Telephone interviews with youth and parents were conducted using the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire. The authors found that approximately one fifth of the children and youth ($n = 425$) experienced bullying (e.g., peer picked on, chased, or grabbed) and about one fourth ($n = 493$) experienced teasing or emotional bullying (e.g., child is made to feel bad or harassed by peer).

Harris Interactive and GLSEN (2005) used an online survey strategy to gather data from a nationally representative sample of 3,450 students aged 13-18 and 1,011 secondary school teachers. The focus of this investigation was to: "understand how students and teachers in junior high and high schools across the country perceive and experience the problem of bullying and harassment of all kinds in their schools" (p. i). An analysis of the data showed that 65% of the students surveyed reported having "been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted at school during the past year because of their appearance or their actual or perceived race/ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, or religion" (p. iii). Although respondents reported that most schools had some type of anti-harassment policy, only about half of these policies specified sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Students from schools with a policy that included sexual orientation or gender reported fewer problems with school safety in general.

Collectively, statistics from the growing body of research (e.g., Dinkes, Cataldi, Kena, & Baum, 2006; Finkelhor et al., 2005; Nansel et al., 2001) on bullying in the United States can be summarized as follows. Over 160,000 students miss school every day due to fear of victimization. Seven percent of 8th graders stay home at least once a month because of being victimized. About 14% of 8th - 12th graders and 22% of 4th - 8th graders report that those who use bullying behaviors "diminished their ability to learn". Of the youth who drop out of school, 10% do so because of having been targets of aggressive behavior. Most notable is the fact that 60% of those labeled bullies in grades 6 - 9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24.

Most importantly, findings from research (e.g., Blum, n.d.; Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002) focused on the social and emotional health of adolescents revealed that school climate contributes to the social and emotional success of students. When students feel they are part of their school, treated fairly by teachers, and physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe, they are significantly more likely to be emotionally healthy and more likely to experience school success.

State-level Anti-bullying Policies

At this writing, 30 of the 50 states have enacted some form of an anti-bullying law. All of them are post-Columbine laws. Georgia was the first to so legislate in 1999. Table 1 displays the states and years in which legislation was passed.

Table 1

States with Anti-bullying Law

Year of Passage	State
1999	Georgia
2001	Colorado, Louisiana, Oregon, West Virginia
2002	Connecticut, Mississippi, New Jersey, Oklahoma
2003	Arkansas, California, Rhode Island
2004	New Hampshire
2005	Arizona, Indiana, Maryland, Nevada, Texas, Virginia
2006	Idaho, Maine, South Carolina, Washington
2007	Alaska, Delaware, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Vermont

Connecticut's' Anti-bullying Law

In June 2002, the State of Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) passed Public Act 02-119, An Act Concerning Bullying Behavior in Schools and Concerning the Pledge of Allegiance. Section 1 mandated that each local and regional board of education (school district) develop a policy to address bullying in its schools. In addition to a definition of "bullying", the legislation required that each school district policy include certain provisions. Among them were mandates requiring that districts make it possible for students to anonymously report acts of bullying to teachers or administrators, requiring school administrators to investigate written and review anonymous reports of bullying, and stipulating that each school maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying and make lists available for public inspection.

During February 2006, the CGA passed Public Act 06-115, amending Connecticut's anti-bullying law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d). Section 1 redefined bullying and several optional and mandated provisions related to school district policies were added. These included requirements that students be notified annually of the process by which they may report bullying and the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying. Appendix A contains a copy of Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d.

Connecticut's school districts have responded to the law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d) and developed bullying policies. School administrators (e.g., principals and assistant principals) are expected to implement these policies at the building level. Although it has been over four years since the passage of Public Act 02-119, a state-level analysis of school district bullying policies has not taken place. We know little about the ways in which schools implement their policies (e.g., make provisions for anonymous reporting, investigate acts of bullying, intervene). Additionally, we neither know which curricula and programs are being used to address this issue nor do we know what information, training, or technical assistance principals need to reduce bullying and support safe learning in their schools.

Therefore, survey research was conducted to explore and describe public school principals' reports of: (a) their experiences with implementing the state's anti-bullying law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d), (b) related aspects of their school climate, (c) the anti-bullying curricula and programs in use in their schools, and (d) school personnel's need for related training and technical assistance. The law, as amended, provided the framework for the investigation.

The focus of this paper is on principals' reports of implementing the provisions of the law. The study was a collaborative effort between the Connecticut State Department of Education (CT-SDE) and the University of Hartford's Department of Educational Leadership.

Methodology

Given the purpose of the investigation, a survey research design was selected. Creswell (2005) stated that a survey research design is appropriate when a researcher is asking questions that simply seek to primarily describe what is going on, as was the case in this study.

Specifically, a large-scale cross-sectional design was used to collect data from the population of public school principals, statewide, at one point in time. The researchers developed a new instrument, the Bullying and School Climate Survey (survey), for the study, quantified the data, and then analyzed the data to describe trends about responses and to answer the research questions. The University's Human Subjects Committee approved the conduct of the study. Participation was voluntary.

Survey Development and Description

The survey development and design followed recommendations outlined by Creswell (2005) and Dillman (2000). First, the purpose of the survey research was specified, as described above. Second, different types of questions (i.e., close-ended and open-ended) were developed to align with the survey's purpose, using the anti-bullying law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d) as a framework. Third, attention was given to constructing the survey in a respondent-friendly manner. This included the formatting of paper pencil and online versions, the order of questions, and the appearance of the individual pages. The online version was created using the software Professional Quest©. Fourth, a small-scale pilot was conducted with five public school administrators who possessed expertise and knowledge about the law and related issues. All of the pilot participants choose to respond online. The instrument was also reviewed and approved by CT-SDE's legal department. Accordingly and based on all of the feedback, minor modifications were made to the survey.

The final instrument was organized into seven main sections that contained 50 questions. Of those, 10 provided for a "yes" or "no" response format; 17 had a list of items with a "check one" response format, 5 of which had a place to add information; 20 had a list of items with a

"check all that apply" response format and a place to add information; and 3 had an open-ended

response format. An optional eighth section contained 2 questions. A copy of the survey is in

Appendix B.

Data Collection

The CT-SDE mailed an invitation to participate in the study and a copy of the survey to

each public school principal in the state ($N = 1069$; includes elementary, middle, high, charter,

and magnet schools). Respondents were given the option of completing the online version of the

survey or completing and returning the paper-pencil version.

Within four weeks of the first mailing, 56 responses had been completed. At that time, a

follow-up email, thanking those that participated for responding and asking those that had not yet

responded to do so, was sent to principals through an electronic mailing list. Another 56 surveys

were returned. After two more weeks, a final reminder, thank you letter was mailed to all

principals and this yielded 80 additional responses. In total, 31 surveys were returned by mail

and 161 were completed online, yielding a response rate of 18% ($N = 192$).

Data Analysis

As stated above, the purpose of the study was to simply gather data to be able to explore

and describe public school principals' reports of how schools were implementing Connecticut's

anti-bullying law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d). The survey yielded nominal and qualitative

data. The data from the close-ended items were examined using descriptive statistics (i.e.,

frequencies and percentages) generated through SPSS 11.0 for Mac OS X. Procedures associated

with qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) were used to analyze the qualitative

responses. Responses were read several times to generate categories, themes, and patterns;

findings were modified, and refined with each reading. Finally, data displays were created and

occurrences of major themes were counted (quantizing; Miles & Huberman, 1994; McMillan &

Schumacher, 2006).

Participants and their Schools

There were 192 survey respondents, which included 146 principals, 37 assistant

principals, 4 deans of students, and 5 individuals who held other positions in their school or

district (e.g., social work, director of special education). Slightly more than 40% of the

participants indicated that they had been in their current administrative position for between 4

and 10 years. Table 2 contains information about study participants.

Table 2

Study Participants' Positions and Years in that Position (n = 192)

	n	%
Position Held		
Principal	146	76.0
Assistant Principal	37	19.3
Dean of Students	4	2.1
Other	5	2.6
Years in Current Position		
Less than 1 year	14	7.3
1 - 3 years	68	35.4
4 - 10 years	77	40.1
11 - 15 years	17	8.9
16+	16	8.3

Nearly 88% of participants categorized their school as a traditional school (i.e., versus,

for example, an interdistrict magnet or vocational/technical). There was considerable variability

in reported grade span configurations of respondents' schools with 28 different types reported

(e.g., PreK - K, PreK - 5, grades 2 - 4, grades 5 - 8). Nearly 22% (n = 42) of participants

indicated that their school included grades 9 - 12, followed by 13.5% (n = 26), grades 6 - 8; and

12% (n = 20), kindergarten through fifth grade. Participants' schools encompassed a range of

student enrollments (range < = 300 to > 2000), with nearly 76% (n = 145) clustering between

301 - 1,000 students.

The CT-SDE has divided the state's 166 local school districts into nine groups based on

socioeconomic status and indicators of need. These groups, known as district reference groups

(DRG), enable educators to fairly compare groups of districts with similar characteristics. Survey

respondents were from a cross section of the state's DRG and the distribution is somewhat

similar to the distribution of school districts across these groups. Table 3 depicts frequencies and

percentages for this distribution.

Table 3

Participants' Reports of School District Reference Group (DRG) Classification (n = 187)

DRG	n	%
A	8	4.2
B	42	22.1
C	18	9.5
D	30	15.8
E	24	12.6
F	21	11.1
G	15	7.9
H	14	7.4
I	18	9.5

Results

Select survey results, focusing on study participants' reports of their implementation of

some of the provisions of Connecticut's anti-bullying law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d), are

presented next. These results were derived from an analysis of the data collected through the self-administered survey.

District Bullying Policies

Respondents were asked to check, from a list that was provided, elements that had been incorporated into their written bullying policy and any accompanying regulations. The list of elements included several of the policy requirements under Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d and other items that districts have been known to include. Table 4 contains a full list of the items offered; those with an asterisk connect to provisions of the law. The table also includes frequencies and percentages for all responses to this question, in rank order.

Concerning elements that are required under the law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d), almost all of the respondents' (95.3%) reported that their district policy included a "definition of bullying". Slightly more than 85% indicated that "disciplinary and remedial consequences" were included, followed by "policy and procedure notification to students and parents or guardians", 84.4%; "reporting, including anonymous reporting", 80.2%; "investigation and review", 77.6%; and "intervention strategies", 55.2%.

Table 4

Participants' Reports of Elements Included in District Bullying Policy and Regulations (n = 192)

Elements	n	%
Definition of bullying*	183	95.3
Disciplinary and remedial consequences*	164	85.4
Policy and procedure notification to students and parents or guardians*	162	84.4
Reporting, including anonymous reporting*	154	80.2
Investigation and review*	149	77.6
Due process	133	69.3
Intervention strategies*	106	55.2
Public list of verified bullying acts*	105	54.7
Positive standards for behavior	103	53.6
Definition of safe schools	94	49.0
Prevention strategies	84	43.8
Appeals	76	39.6
Education, training, or professional development for faculty, staff, and students	73	38.0
Adult bullying behaviors	61	31.8
Retaliation	43	22.4
Other	8	4.2

Note: Question had a "Check ALL that apply" response format.
* Items are associated with policy elements under Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d

Student Notification Regarding Anonymous Reporting

Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d directs districts to notify students, at least annually, about the process for making anonymous reports of acts of bullying. Survey respondents were asked to indicate how often they did so. Of the subsample of participants responding to this survey item ($n = 187$), 91.9% ($n = 172$) reported that they notified students annually or more often. Those participants that reported "other" did not specify the precise frequency with which they notified students. Table 5 shows percentages and frequencies for all participant responses, in rank order.

Table 5

Participants' Reports of Frequency of Notifying Students about Anonymous Reporting (n = 187)

Frequency	n	%
Annually*	122	65.2
Upon arrival to the school (during student orientation)	25	13.4
Each semester	19	10.2
Other	15	8.0
Each quarter	6	3.2

Note: Question had a "Check ONE response" response format.
* Minimum requirement under Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d

The top three ways in which participants indicated that they told students that they could

make anonymous reports of acts of bullying included student handbooks, 66.7%; classroom

presentations, 54.7%; and assemblies, 45.3%. Frequencies and percentages for all responses are

displayed in Table 6, in descending order.

Table 6

Participants' Reports of How They Inform Students about Anonymous Reporting (n = 188)

Processes	n	%
Student handbook	128	66.7
Classroom presentation	105	54.7
Assembly	87	45.3
During homeroom	40	20.8
Student handouts	37	19.3
Other	28	14.6

Note: Question had a "Check ALL that apply" response format.

Investigating and Verifying Allegations of Bullying

Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d stipulates that school administrators must investigate

written and anonymous reports of bullying. When asked who was officially responsible for

receiving and investigating written reports of bullying in their schools, 56.3% of the respondents

indicated it was the principal and 29.2% indicated it was the assistant principal. Table 7 shows

frequencies and percentages for responses to this item, in order of selection.

Table 7

Participants' Reports of the Person Responsible for Receiving and Investigating Written Reports
(n = 192)

Person Responsible	n	%
Principal	108	56.3
Assistant principal	56	29.2
Other	9	4.7
School psychologist	7	3.6
School social worker	5	2.6
Guidance counselor	3	1.6
Title IX coordinator	3	1.6
School nurse	1	0.5
Teacher	0	0.0

In a related item, respondents were asked to indicate whether their school had a formally

articulated process for investigating allegations of bullying, 83.2% ($n = 159$) of the individuals

responding to this item ($n = 191$) reported that they did. Almost 11% ($n = 20$) indicated that they

did not and slightly more than 6% ($n = 12$) indicated they were not aware of one. Concerning the

procedures they used to investigate and determine outcomes of formal allegations of bullying,

99.5% reported that the "person reporting the incident" was interviewed. Similarly, almost all

participants indicated that interviews were also conducted with "witnesses" (98.4%), the "alleged

target" (97.9%), and the "alleged bully" (97.9%). Table 8 contains frequencies and percentages

for participant responses, in descending order.

Table 8

Participants' Reports of Investigation Procedures for Formal Allegations of Bullying (n = 192)

Procedures Used	n	%
Interview person reporting the incident	191	99.5
Interview witnesses (e.g., teachers, students, bus driver)	189	98.4
Interview alleged target	188	97.9
Interview alleged bully	188	97.9
Speak with alleged target's parent or guardian	185	96.4
Speak with alleged bully's parent or guardian	184	95.8
Review written report	167	87.0
Observe alleged bully	112	58.3
Observe alleged target	107	55.7
Other	15	7.8

Note: Question had a "Check ALL that apply" response format.

In verifying acts of bullying, of note is the fact that the definition of "bullying", which is contained in Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d, includes the phrase that the overt act must be repeated against the same student "over time". Study participants were asked to indicate whether the district definition of "repeated" included the "number of incidents", "duration", or both. Nearly 69% (*n* = 132) of respondents reported that their definition encompassed both the number and duration of incidents. Another 30.7% (*n* = 59) reported that the definition of repeated included only the number of incidents.

A related question requested that respondents write out their definition of "over time". Notably, the 174 responses were quite variable and few significant themes surfaced. Although 81 responses contained a phrase or words that suggested participants defined over time as acts of bullying that "occur over some timeframe" (day, week, month, year, calendar year, semester), no single timeframe emerged as significant. In fact, respondents often included more than one timeframe within their definition. Forty-six responses contained words suggesting that respondents defined over time as acts of bullying that "occur more than one time, irrespective of the timeframe". Twenty-nine of the responses included phrases that suggested participants

defined over time as acts of bullying that "establish a pattern". Table 9 contains some verbatim

examples of participants' responses (in their entirety) related to these themes.

Table 9

Major Themes Generated from Participants' Reports of Definition of "Over Time" (n = 174)

Theme	Verbatim Example Responses
Acts of bullying "occur over some timeframe" ($n = 81$)	"Anything over a three day time period" "Over a period of days, weeks, months" "Over the course of at least a school year"
Acts of bullying "occur more than one time, irrespective of the timeframe" ($n = 46$)	"Incidents that happen more than one time during a marking period" "2 or more incidents in a school year" "More than 2-3 times within a short period of time"
Acts of bullying "establish a pattern" ($n = 29$)	"Any repetition that constitutes a pattern" "Any repetition that indicates separate events" "Bully shows a distinct pattern or trend of behavior"

The definition of bullying under Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d requires schools to

address acts of bullying that occur on school grounds, at school-sponsored activities, or on a

school bus. Policies may also include provisions dealing with bullying outside of the school

setting, if it has a direct and negative impact on a student's academic performance or safety in

school. Concerning locations explicitly addressed under districts' bullying policies, 94.3% of

participants reported they included "school-sponsored activities", followed by "school grounds",

91.7%; and "school bus", 82.8%. Percentages and frequencies for respondents' responses are

depicted in Table 10, in descending order.

Table 10

Participants' Reports of Locations Addressed in Policy (n = 192)

Locations	n	%
School-sponsored activity*	181	94.3
School grounds*	176	91.7
School bus*	159	82.8
Off-campus – Internet (cyber-bullying)	72	37.5
Off-campus – Community (e.g., neighborhood, recreational facilities)	53	27.6
Other	12	6.3

Note: Question had a "Check ALL that apply" response format.
* Included in the Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d definition of bullying

Notification and Tracking Verified Acts of Bullying

Once acts of bullying are verified, Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d stipulates the

notification of parents or guardians of the bully and those of the target. Survey respondents were

asked to select, from the list provided, all persons notified. Nearly 98% (*n* = 188) of respondents

indicated they notified the parents or guardians of the bully and slightly more than 97% (*n* = 187)

reported notifying the parents or guardians of the target. Table 11 shows frequencies and

percentages for all responses, in rank order.

Table 11

Participants' Reports of Persons Notified about Verified Acts of Bullying (n = 192)

Persons Notified	n	%
Parents or guardians of bully*	188	97.9
Parents or guardians of target*	187	97.4
Teachers	165	85.9
Guidance staff	150	78.1
Superintendent or designee	114	59.4
Other	34	17.7

Note: Question had a "Check ALL that apply" response format.
* Required under Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d

Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d mandates that districts maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in their school and make the list available for public inspection. Nearly 86% (*n* = 165) of survey respondents reported that "yes" they did maintain a list and 14.1% (*n* = 27) indicated that they did not. Concerning having the list immediately available for public inspection, 76.3% (*n* = 122) reported that it was and 23.8% (*n* = 38) indicated that it was not.

Intervention Strategy for School Staff to Deal with Bullying

District policies must include, under the provisions of Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d, an intervention strategy for school staff to deal with bullying. Study participants were asked to select, from a list provided, all the interventions that were used to address verified acts of bullying behavior. "Counseling" (96.9%) and having a "conference" with the bully (96.9%) were the top two selections. Frequencies and percentages for responses to this item are displayed, in descending order, in Table 12.

Table 12

Participants' Reports of the Interventions used to Address Verified Acts of Bullying (n = 192)

Interventions	n	%
Counseling	186	96.9
Conference with bully	186	96.9
Increased supervision and monitoring of the student(s)	171	89.1
In-school suspension	159	82.8
Detention	156	81.3
Out-of-school suspension	153	79.7
Warning	150	78.1
Restorative justice (providing a remedy for the wrong done)	102	53.1
Peer mediation	85	44.3
Community service	57	29.7
Expulsion	55	28.6
Other	21	10.9

Note: Question had a "Check ALL that apply" response format.

Participants were also asked to select, from a list that was provided, all the interventions that were used in working with targeted students. Respondents' top three selections comprised "counseling" the targeted student (95.8%), encouraging the student to "seek help when targeted" (95.3%), and increasing "supervision and monitoring" of the targeted student (94.1%). Table 13 contains frequencies and percentages, in rank order, for all responses to this item.

Table 13

Participants' Reports of the Interventions used with Targeted Students (n = 192)

Interventions	n	%
Counseling	184	95.8
Encouragement of student to seek help when targeted	183	95.3
Increased supervision and monitoring of the student	177	94.1
Mediation/conflict resolution with an adult mediator	150	78.1
Peer mediation	69	35.9
Other	13	6.8

Note: Question had a "Check ALL that apply" response format.

Challenges with Implementing Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d

Participants were called upon to report the challenges they faced in implementing the provisions of the law. Almost 47% of participants selected "getting parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying" and nearly 46% also chose "time to conduct investigations" as challenges to implementing the law. Table 14 shows percentages and frequencies for participants' responses to this item, in order of selection.

Table 14

Participants' Reports of Challenges with Implementing the Law (n = 192)

Challenges	n	%
Getting parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying	90	46.9
Time to conduct investigations	87	45.3
Lack of support from the verified bullies parent or guardian	84	43.8
Investigating anonymous reports	79	41.1
Inadequate training of teachers and school staff in this area	74	38.5
Getting teachers and school staff to notify administration in a timely manner of bullying reports	62	32.3
A thorough understanding of the legislation	62	32.3
Limited intervention strategies	55	28.6
Lack of support from the target's parent or guardian	40	20.8
Other	12	6.3

Note: Question had a "Check ALL that apply" response format.

Discussion

It has been five years since the passage of Public Act 02-119 (2002). In terms of the public policy change process and the range of activities and different jurisdictions (state and local governments) that it encompasses, this is not a long time. The select results presented here suggest that most of the survey respondents' school districts have been busy implementing several provisions of the law. They have put into place various policy elements as prescribed and they should be commended in that regard.

Notably, however, there is unevenness related to participants' reports of full implementation of all of the provisions. In other words, none of the elements of the law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d), as discussed here, was reported by all participants (i.e., 100%) as being included in their district policies. On the one hand, data revealed, for example, that nearly all of the participants reported that their policy contained a definition of bullying and that they notified students, annually or more often, about the process for making anonymous reports of acts of bullying. On the other hand, data revealed that only slightly more than half of the participants

indicated that their districts had policies related to intervention strategies and public lists of verified bullying acts.

The apparent discrepancies in survey respondents' reports of which foci of the law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d) had been written into school district policies could certainly be an artifact of the survey design or the questions themselves. The inconsistencies might also be due to a lack of respondents' full knowledge of their district's bullying polices and regulations. Importantly, differences with regard to participants' reports of implementation could likely be related to noticeably loose language in the law and the challenges then inherent in interpreting the intent. The latter possible explanation seemed particularly apparent in participants' variable responses to the question that asked them to write out the definition of over time, a phrase that is included in the legislated definition of bullying. Not having a clear and standard definition for this particular phrase would certainly have an affect on districts' ability to verify, count, and report acts of bullying, provisions of the law.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As legislative bodies craft public policies, they make assumptions that do not always conform to the idiosyncratic nature of the implementers of those policies, in this case 169 independent public school districts. The challenge lies with striking a balance between laws that are prescriptive and those that are flexible enough to meet local needs. Connecticut's anti-bullying law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d) outlines broad parameters of expectations for school districts. At the same time, it allows for local control on how districts implement the law's provisions. This policy design is not atypical of those enacted by state legislatures as they guide local districts with addressing issues of critical importance to an entire state.

This paper presents a simplistic snapshot of how respondents' districts are wresting with full implementation of Connecticut's anti-bullying law (Conn. Gen. Statute § 10-222d). The policy implementation phase is a critically important time for reflection, analysis, and decision-making about issues that ultimately affect the policy's effectiveness. In the case of Connecticut's law, it would seem prudent for all partners in the policy process (state and local) to come together and identify the ways in which legislative intent, providing an emotionally safe and a healthy learning environment for all students, can be met. It appears that certain aspects of the definition of bullying will need further clarification. School districts would do well to analyze their policies to ensure that all provisions of the law have been included. Finally, all state and local partners (school districts, CT-SDE, and the CGA) will want to examine whether this law meets its original intent and if there are any unintended outcomes. Future research is certainly needed in that regard.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. A single method was used to collect data, a self-administered survey. The researchers developed the instrument; it had not been used before. Participation was voluntary and while 192 school administrators responded, their reports may not be representative of the entire population of public school principals in the state.

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Appendix A

Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 10-222d. Policy on bullying behavior. Each local and regional board of education shall develop a policy, for use on and after February 1, 2003, to address the existence of bullying in its schools. Such policy shall: (1) Enable students to anonymously report acts of bullying to teachers and school administrators and require students to be notified annually of the process by which they may make such reports, (2) enable the parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying, (3) require teachers and other school staff who witness acts of bullying or receive student reports of bullying to notify school administrators, (4) require school administrators to investigate any written reports filed pursuant to subdivision (2) of this section and to review any anonymous reports, (5) include an intervention strategy for school staff to deal with bullying, (6) provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying, (7) require the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed to be notified, (8) require each school to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection, and (9) direct the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline. The notification required pursuant to subdivision (7) of this section shall include a description of the response of school staff to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying. For purposes of this section, "bullying" means any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on school grounds, at a school-sponsored activity or on a school bus, which acts are repeated against the same student over time. Such policies may include provisions addressing bullying outside of the school setting if it has a direct and negative impact on a student's academic performance or safety in school.
(P.A. 02-119, S. 1; P.A. 06-115, S. 1.)

History: P.A. 02-119 effective July 1, 2002; P.A. 06-115 added annual notification requirement in Subdiv. (1), added Subdiv. (9) re interventions, redefined "bullying" to include harassment and behavior on a school bus and added language re policies to address bullying outside of the school setting, effective July 1, 2006.

Retrieved from: http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap170.htm#Sec10-222d.htm

Appendix B

BULLYING AND SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

Section I: Information about you and your school.

START HERE
1. **What is your position? (Check ONE response.)**
    ☐ Principal
    ☐ Assistant principal
    ☐ Dean of students
    ☐ Other (specify):
    _____

2. **How long have you been in your current position? (Check ONE response.)**
    ☐ Less than 1 year
    ☐ 1 - 3 years
    ☐ 4 - 10 years
    ☐ 11 - 15 years
    ☐ 16+ (specify): _____ years

3. **What type of school is your school? (Check ONE response.)**
    ☐ Traditional/regular education school
    ☐ Interdistrict magnet school
    ☐ Intradistrict magnet school
    ☐ Charter school
    ☐ Alternative school
    ☐ Vocational/technical school
    ☐ Special education school
    ☐ Other (specify):
    _____

4. **What grade level(s) does your school include? (Check ONE response.)**
    ☐ Pre K - 5
    ☐ K - 5
    ☐ Grades 1 - 5
    ☐ Grades 6 - 8
    ☐ Grades 9 - 12
    ☐ Other (specify):
    _____

5. **How many students are currently enrolled in your school? (Check ONE response.)**
    ☐ 1 – 300
    ☐ 301 – 500
    ☐ 501 – 700
    ☐ 701 – 1000
    ☐ 1001 – 1300
    ☐ 1301 – 1500
    ☐ 1501 – 1999
    ☐ 2000+

START HERE (Section I continued)

6. In what District Reference Group (DRG) is your school classified? (Check ONE response.)
- ☐ A
- ☐ B
- ☐ C
- ☐ D
- ☐ E
- ☐ F
- ☐ G
- ☐ H
- ☐ I

Section II: Information about interpreting and implementing Connecticut's anti-bullying law (CGS § 10-222d). These questions are focused on your bullying policy and regulations that support implementation of the policy.

START HERE

7. CGS 10-222(d) requires that certain components be included in Local Education Authority (LEA) Board policies; there may be additional elements that have been added to those required. What is explicitly included in your written bullying policy and any accompanying regulations? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Adult bullying behaviors
- ☐ Appeals
- ☐ Definition of bullying
- ☐ Definition of safe schools
- ☐ Disciplinary and remedial consequences
- ☐ Due process
- ☐ Education, training, or professional development for faculty, staff, and students
- ☐ Intervention strategies
- ☐ Investigation and review
- ☐ Policy and procedure notification to students and parents/guardians
- ☐ Positive standards for behavior
- ☐ Prevention strategies
- ☐ Public list of verified bullying acts
- ☐ Reporting, including anonymous reporting
- ☐ Retaliation
- ☐ Other: (specify):
  _____

8. Does your district provide training for implementing its bullying policy and regulations?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Skip to question #10.)

9. (IF YES) Who are the primary recipients of the training? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Central office personnel
- ☐ School administrators
- ☐ Classroom teachers
- ☐ Related services professionals (e.g., psychologist, guidance counselors, social workers)
- ☐ Non-professional support staff (e.g., cafeteria staff, custodians, student resource officers)
- ☐ Other (specify):
  _____

START HERE (Section II continued)

10. Where are copies of your district's bullying policy located? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ School board policies and regulations manuals
- ☐ Staff/faculty handbook
- ☐ Student handbook
- ☐ Parent handbook
- ☐ Posted in classrooms, hallways, or other visible places around the school
- ☐ School districts' website
- ☐ School's website
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

11. What methods are used to disseminate your district or school bullying policy? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Staff/faculty handbook
- ☐ Student handbook
- ☐ Parent handbook
- ☐ PTO/PTA meetings
- ☐ Student handouts
- ☐ Parent handouts
- ☐ Newsletters
- ☐ District Website
- ☐ School Website
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

12. How are <u>students</u> notified about the process by which they may make anonymous reports of acts of bullying? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Student handbook
- ☐ Student handouts
- ☐ Assembly
- ☐ Classroom presentation
- ☐ During homeroom
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

13. How often are your <u>students</u> notified about the process by which they may make anonymous reports of acts of bullying? (Check ONE response.)
- ☐ Annually
- ☐ Each semester
- ☐ Each quarter
- ☐ Upon arrival to the school (during student orientation)
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

START HERE (Section II continued)

14. **The 2006 bullying policy revisions included the following language: "Such policies may include provisions addressing bullying outside of the school setting if it has a direct and negative impact on a student's academic performance or safety in school." What locations are <u>explicitly</u> addressed under your district's bullying policy? (Check ALL that apply.)**
    - ☐ School grounds
    - ☐ School-sponsored activity
    - ☐ School bus
    - ☐ Off-campus – Internet (cyber-bullying)
    - ☐ Off-campus – Community (e.g., neighborhood, recreational facilities)
    - ☐ Other (specify):
    _____

15. **What challenges do you face implementing the provisions of Connecticut's anti-bullying legislation, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222d, as amended? (Check ALL that apply.)**
    - ☐ A thorough understanding of the legislation
    - ☐ Getting parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying
    - ☐ Getting teachers and school staff to notify administration in a timely manner of bullying reports
    - ☐ Inadequate training of teachers and school staff in this area
    - ☐ Investigating anonymous reports
    - ☐ Lack of support from the target's parent or guardian
    - ☐ Lack of support from the verified bullies parent or guardian
    - ☐ Limited intervention strategies
    - ☐ Time to conduct investigations
    - ☐ Other (specify):
    _____

Section III: Information about reports of bullying and responses to these reports.

START HERE

16. **Does your school have a formally articulated process for responding to <u>informal</u> or <u>anonymous</u> <u>student</u> reports of allegations of bullying? (Check ONE response.)**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Not aware of one

17. **Does your school have a formally articulated process for responding to <u>informal</u> or <u>anonymous</u> <u>family members</u> reports of allegations of bullying? (Check ONE response.)**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Not aware of one

START HERE (Section III continued)

18. Who is <u>officially</u> responsible for receiving and investigating written reports of suspected bullying in your school? (Check ONE response.)
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Assistant principal
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Guidance counselor
- ☐ School social worker
- ☐ School psychologist
- ☐ Title IX coordinator
- ☐ School nurse
- ☐ Other (specify):

_____

19. Does your school have a <u>formally articulated</u> process for <u>investigating</u> allegations of bullying? (Check ONE response.)
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not aware of one

20. What procedures are used to investigate and determine outcome of <u>formal allegations</u> of bullying in your school? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Review written report
- ☐ Interview person reporting the incident
- ☐ Interview alleged target
- ☐ Interview witnesses (e.g., teachers, students, bus driver)
- ☐ Interview alleged bully
- ☐ Speak with alleged bully's parent or guardian
- ☐ Speak with alleged target's parent or guardian
- ☐ Observe alleged bully
- ☐ Observe alleged target
- ☐ Other (specify):

_____

21. What procedures are used to investigate and determine outcome of <u>anonymous</u> and <u>informal allegations</u> of bullying in your school? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Review written report
- ☐ Interview person reporting the incident
- ☐ Interview alleged target
- ☐ Interview witnesses (e.g., teachers, students, bus driver)
- ☐ Interview alleged bully
- ☐ Speak with alleged bully's parent or guardian
- ☐ Speak with alleged target's parent or guardian
- ☐ Observe alleged bully
- ☐ Observe alleged target
- ☐ Other (specify):

_____

22. Under the state law, bullying behavior must be "repeated against the same student over time." How do you define "repeated"? (Check ONE response.)
- ☐ Number of incidents
- ☐ Duration
- ☐ Both

START HERE (Section III continued)

23. What is your definition of "over time"? (Write response.)

24. What types of conduct do you consider to be bullying behavior? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Extortion
- ☐ Intellectual intimidation
- ☐ Intimidation
- ☐ Physical aggression
- ☐ Racial and ethnic harassment
- ☐ Relational aggression
- ☐ Sexual harassment
- ☐ Social alienation (e.g., exclusion, shunning, snubbing)
- ☐ Teasing
- ☐ Threatening gestures
- ☐ Verbal taunts (e.g., name calling, put-downs)
- ☐ Verbal threats
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

25. What interventions are used in your school to address verified acts of bullying behavior? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Community service
- ☐ Conference with bully
- ☐ Counseling
- ☐ Detention
- ☐ Expulsion
- ☐ Increased supervision and monitoring of the student(s)
- ☐ In-school suspension
- ☐ Out-of-school suspension
- ☐ Peer mediation
- ☐ Restorative justice (providing a remedy for the wrong done)
- ☐ Warning
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

26. What interventions are used in your school for working with targeted students? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Counseling
- ☐ Increased supervision and monitoring of the student
- ☐ Encouragement of student to seek help when targeted
- ☐ Mediation/conflict resolution with an adult mediator
- ☐ Peer mediation
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

START HERE (Section III continued)

27. Who is notified when acts of bullying have been verified in your school? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Parents or guardians of bully
- ☐ Parents or guardians of target
- ☐ Superintendent or designee
- ☐ Teachers
- ☐ Guidance staff
- ☐ Other (specify):

_____

Section IV: Information about bullying data collection.

START HERE

28. Do you maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying <u>in</u> <u>your</u> <u>school</u> <u>building</u>?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to question #30)

29. (IF YES) Is this list of verified acts of bullying in your school <u>immediately</u> available for public inspection at the time when a parent verbally requests it?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

30. How many verified acts of bullying were recorded on your school list for the 2005-2006 school year? (Check ONE response.)
- ☐ None
- ☐ 1 – 2
- ☐ 3 – 5
- ☐ 6 – 8
- ☐ 9 – 11
- ☐ 12+ (specify): _____ verified acts of bullying

31. How many verified acts of bullying are recorded on your school list to date for the 2006-2007 school year? (Check ONE response.)
- ☐ None
- ☐ 1 – 2
- ☐ 3 – 5
- ☐ 6 – 8
- ☐ 9 – 11
- ☐ 12+ (specify): _____ verified acts of bullying

32. Do you review your data of verified incidents of bullying in your school for trends?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to question #34)

33. (IF YES) How do you analyze the data? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Individual vs. group targets
- ☐ Individual vs. group bullies
- ☐ Location (e.g., playground, classrooms, hallways, rest rooms, cafeterias, busses)
- ☐ Time (e.g., before or after school, during classes, between classes, during lunch or at recess)
- ☐ Nature (e.g., impulsive, defiance or opposition, threat, victimization, racial)
- ☐ Type (e.g., physical, verbal, non-verbal, social)
- ☐ Other (specify):

_____

START HERE (Section IV continued)

34. Have you administered student, parent, staff, or community surveys <u>to assess the awareness and scope of bullying</u> at your school?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to question #36)

35. (IF YES) From whom did you gather data? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Classroom teachers
- ☐ Related services professionals (e.g., psychologist, guidance counselors, social workers)
- ☐ Non-professional support staff (e.g., bus drivers, cafeteria staff)
- ☐ School administrators
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Community members
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

Section V: Information about your school climate.

START HERE

36. Have you administered student, parent, staff, or community surveys <u>to assess the climate at your school?</u>
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to question #38)

37. (IF YES) From whom did you gather data? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Classroom teachers
- ☐ Related services professionals (e.g., psychologist, guidance counselors, social workers)
- ☐ Non-professional support staff (e.g., bus drivers, cafeteria staff)
- ☐ School administrators
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Community members
- ☐ Other (specify):

  _____

38. Do you currently have a school climate improvement plan?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to question #40)

39. (IF YES) Is your school climate improvement plan included in your <u>overall</u> school improvement plan?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

40. Is school climate <u>explicitly</u> part of your school's mission statement?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

41. Is school climate part of your district or school's bullying policy?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

START HERE (Section V continued)

42. How would you rate your school in terms of being physically safe and providing a healthy learning environment for <u>all</u> students and adults? (Check ONE response.)
☐ Excellent
☐ Very good
☐ Good
☐ Poor
☐ Very poor

43. How would you rate your school in terms of being <u>emotionally/socially</u> safe and providing a healthy learning environment for <u>all</u> students and adults? (Check ONE response.)
☐ Excellent
☐ Very good
☐ Good
☐ Poor
☐ Very poor

44. How would you rate your school in terms of being <u>intellectually</u> safe and providing a healthy learning environment for <u>all</u> students and adults? (Check ONE response.)
☐ Excellent
☐ Very good
☐ Good
☐ Poor
☐ Very poor

Section VI: Information about research-based programs.

START HERE

45. Is your school using any of the following research-based programs, identified by the federal Department of Education as "Exemplary" or "Promising"? (Check ALL that apply.)

☐ Aggression Replacement Training
☐ Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders: Thinking and Acting to Prevent Violence
☐ Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices
☐ All Stars (Core Program)
☐ Caring School Community Program
☐ CASASTART
☐ Community of Caring
☐ Creating Lasting Family Connections
☐ Facing History and Ourselves
☐ I Can Problem Solve
☐ Let Each One Teach One Mentor Program
☐ Life Skills Training
☐ Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT)
☐ Lions-Quest Skills for Adolescence
☐ Lions-Quest Working Toward Peace
☐ Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education
☐ Open Circle Curriculum
☐ Peace Builders
☐ Peers Making Peace
☐ Positive Action
☐ Preparing for the Drug-Free Years
☐ Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)
☐ Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways (RIPP)
☐ Say It Straight Training
☐ SCARE Program
☐ Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum
☐ Skills, Opportunity, and Recognition (SOAR)
☐ Social Decision Making and Problem Solving
☐ Students Managing Anger and Resolution Together (SMART) Team
☐ Teenage Health Teaching Modules
☐ The Peacemakers Program: Violence Prevention for Students in Grades 4 – 8
☐ The Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10 – 14
☐ The Think Time Strategies
☐ None of the above
☐ Other (specify):
  _____

46. Briefly, describe other school efforts focused on preventing and reducing bullying to support safe learning in schools.

START HERE (Section VI continued)

47. Who are the primary recipients of your anti-bullying program(s)? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Individual students
- ☐ Groups of students
- ☐ Individual classes
- ☐ Individual grade levels
- ☐ Whole school
- ☐ Classroom teachers
- ☐ School administrators
- ☐ Related services professionals (e.g., psychologist, guidance counselors, social workers)
- ☐ Non-professional support staff (e.g., bus drivers, cafeteria staff)
- ☐ Parents or guardians
- ☐ Families
- ☐ Members of surrounding community
- ☐ Other (specify):
  _____

48. Who is involved in delivering the program(s) in your school? (Check ALL that apply.)
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Classroom teachers
- ☐ School administrators
- ☐ Related services professionals (e.g., psychologist, guidance counselors, social workers)
- ☐ Non-professional support staff (e.g., bus drivers, cafeteria staff)
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Personnel from Community Service agencies (including police)
- ☐ Professional consultants
- ☐ Proprietary curriculum consultants
- ☐ CT SDE personnel
- ☐ Non-profit organizations (e.g., anti-deformation league)
- ☐ Community volunteers
- ☐ Other (specify):
  _____

VII: Information about anti-bullying and school climate needs.

START HERE

49. In the future, what would be most helpful with regard to preventing and reducing bullying and supporting safe learning in your school?

☐ Copies of sample policies (specify): _____

☐ Professional development (specify): _____

☐ Curricular materials (specify): _____

☐ Technical assistance (specify): _____

☐ Other (specify): _____

50. How can the State Department of Education support you in terms of managing school climate and anti-bullying efforts at your school? Please be as specific as possible.

DO NOT place your name or the name of your school on the body of this survey. **Thank you for participating!** **If you complete the paper-pencil copy, please return it in the enclosed addressed envelope by** **July 9, 2007.**

OPTIONAL

☐ I would be interested in receiving technical assistance concerning preventing and reducing bullying and supporting safe learning in my school, if it were made available to me.

☐ I would be interested in working with a select group of schools and districts to review and create model bullying policies and procedures.

Name: _____

School/District: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Thank you for participating!
If you have any questions about this survey, you may contact: