

# SCHOOLS

## Officials examine students' responses on bullying survey

■ *Fewer students report bullying others and being bullied.*

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Although bullying incidents in the Worthington school district appear to be decreasing, a survey revealed student perspectives of bullying and school environment may sometimes differ from the perspectives of administrators.

More than 4,000 students from the Worthington City School District took the Primary Prevention Awareness, Attitude and Use Survey in 2006. The survey is given every three years to students, who self-report information on substance abuse, bullying and risk behaviors.

Director of Secondary Ed-

ucation Jim McElligott reported on the survey results at the Aug. 27 school board meeting.

McElligott said last month that discipline incidents involving bullying had declined in the past few years. The school board updated its bullying policy to comply with the new state regulations at the end of May.

Student perspectives on bullying behavior on the 2006 survey, however, revealed 12 percent of sixth-through eighth-graders said they had "pushed others around to make them afraid," which was a higher percentage than the 7.8 percent of students who reported the same behavior in 2003.

On the high school level, 7 percent of ninth- through 12th-graders had "pushed others around" in 2006, compared to 8.3 percent in 2003.

Those numbers were

sharply down, though, from the 2000 survey numbers, which reported 32.5 percent of students in grades seven and eight "had pushed others around," and 29.2 percent of students in grades 9-12 had physically bullied other students.

McElligott said 79.5 percent of sixth- through eighth-graders and 91 percent of ninth- through 12th-graders said they had never been physically bullied, according to the 2006 survey. The 2003 data was 82 percent and 88 percent, respectively.

Board member Marc Schare said he was concerned about the students who felt like victims.

On the 2006 survey, 81 percent of middle school students and 87 percent of high school students had never feared for their physical safety at school.

Worthington's 2003 data

was 82.2 percent for grades 6-8 and 83.6 percent for grades 9-12.

"If 150 kids feared for their physical safety multiple times, that is way too high," Schare said. "We can provide our kids with multiple learning opportunities, but if that many kids are afraid of what will happen at 3 p.m., than how good can our program be?"

The current survey also revealed 11.5 percent of sixth-through eighth-graders and 10 percent of ninth- through 12th-graders reported they had been "verbally bullied" two or three times. The data for 2003 was 11.8 percent for sixth- through eighth-graders and 12 percent for grades 9-12.

Board President Bob Horton said he was worried about the school environment questions.

Forty percent of 12th-

graders "disagreed," 8 percent "strongly disagreed" and 52 percent "strongly agreed" with the statement, "Students in this school treat teachers with respect."

For 11th-graders, 30 percent "disagreed," 6 percent "strongly disagreed" and 64 percent "strongly agreed." In 10th grade, 7 percent "strongly disagreed" that teachers were treated with respect, 42 percent "disagreed" and 51 percent "strongly agreed."

Ninth-graders reported 10 percent "strongly disagreed" with the statement, 37 percent "disagreed" and 53 percent "strongly agreed."

The number of students agreeing with the statement, "Teachers treat students with respect," were much higher, with 83 percent of 12th-graders, 82 percent of 11th-graders, 85 percent of 10th-graders and 81 percent

of ninth-graders reported they "strongly agreed."

"Doesn't it seem like a high number of student disrespect is going on in the schools?" Horton asked.

McElligott said student respect is hard to measure.

"Many kids differ in what they think that means, and it is not very clear to some," he said. "What we hear from teachers is that some students are more ego-centered and self-absorbed than in the past, which they believe is because something in our society is lacking and it comes out in school in interactions with teachers. Teachers also tell me it takes time, but that the respect comes as teachers treat students with respect."

McElligott said administrators are continuing to work on building positive school culture and school environments where students will feel safe.