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# A Comparison of Bullying in Four Rural Middle and High Schools

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*Bullying in rural school settings is clearly a problem and some of our students are suffering as a result. Bullying is defined in this study of 819 rural middle and high school students as when a student is exposed repeatedly to negative actions by one or more other students. Students responded to a questionnaire about how often and where bullying occurred and who students told. Analysis of the data reported frequencies, and the Pearson chi-square was used to test for significance ( $p < .05$ ) for gender and school level. Results indicated that while there are many similarities, there are some differences in bullying at these two levels that should be considered when reducing bullying. First, students should be encouraged to develop positive strategies to react to name calling and teasing particularly at the middle school level. Second, administrators and teachers must communicate better with students that they care about reducing bullying, especially at the high school level.*

“Matthew Lovett was known as an angry young man: He dressed all in black, drew violent pictures and walked around town with a baseball bat. Acquaintances said he kept a list of people who had teased him as far back as grade school. . . Lovett, 18, was arrested with two other teenagers on charges they plotted to kill three teens and open fire randomly on other people. . .” (Mulvihill, July 8, 2003, p. 3A).

“David Roby used his cell phone for what would be his last conversation with his 12-year old son. Before they hung up, he made sure Davey was getting ready for school and said he loved him. An hour later, the camouflage-clad fifth-grader was dying on a school bathroom floor of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the head. Seven of his father’s guns and hundreds of bullets were strewn around him. . . Davey’s classmates told police he was picked on by other pupils and had talked for months about killing students and teachers . . .” (Scolforo, June 15, 2003, p. 3A).

Certainly, bullying is not a factor in every case of school violence, but it is frequently mentioned as a possible contributor (Boatwright, Mathis & Smith-Rex, 2000; Flannery & Singer, 1999; Olweus, 1996; Rigby, 1996; Shakeshaft, et al., 1995). Various reports and studies have indicated that approximately 15% of students are either bullied or initiate bullying (Olweus, 1993). Price and Reuters (1999), CNN journalists, reported “four out of five middle school students say that they act like bullies at least once a month” based on a study conducted at the University of Illinois (p.1). “From sticks and stones will break my bones but words can never hurt me” to a shooting by fourteen-year-old Andy Williams in a high school in California, it is evident that as children grow and change victim likes. Thus, hitting, taunting, threatening, teasing, stealing, excluding, or spreading rumors are typical bully

they continue to suffer from the harmful and sometimes abusive effects of bullying (Garbarino & deLara, 2003, p.18). “Direct bullying seems to increase through the elementary years, peak in the middle school/junior high school years, and declines during the high school years” (Banks 1997, p.1).

Clearly bullying is a problem regardless of age of the student and the type of school the student attends. It has a negative effect on the bully, as well as the victim, and even impacts how children perform at school and how satisfied they are with their schools. In fact, the problem of bullying is so extensive it causes internal conflict for bystanders. Bullying is such a long-term cycle that it can even influence the adult life, which, in turn, perpetuates the cycle of abuse.

While an increasing number of studies regarding bullying and children of all ages have been conducted in the US, there are few studies that have focused specifically on middle and high school students who attend rural schools. Considering the importance of this issue, the purpose of this paper was to compare bullying behaviors of middle school and high school students in a rural area of the central United States.

## **What is bullying?**

Olweus (1996) defined bullying as when a student is exposed, repeatedly to negative actions by one or more other students, and Rigby (1996) stated that it occurs when a less powerful student is exposed repeatedly to negative psychological or physical actions by one or more other students who are more powerful. Bullying always represents an “asymmetric power relationship” (Olweus, 1997, p. 496) or a “systematic abuse of power” (Smith & Sharp, 1994, p. 2). Also, bully behavior is usually repetitive, that is, the unpleasant behavior is directed at the victim over a period of time (Smith & Brain, 2000). Generally, those who engage in bullying “vary in their degree of awareness of how bullying is perceived by the victim” (Olweus, 1997, p. 496), but most of them realize to some extent that their behavior is not something that the behaviors (Olweus, 1996; Rigby, 1996).

Because bullying appears to be social in nature,

Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkquist, Osterman and Kaukiainen (1996) investigated this phenomenon as a group process. Their findings indicated that most children in a class at school (6<sup>th</sup> grade in this study) have a definable participating role. Boys most often assumed the role as bully, reinforcer and assistant, while girls were most often defender and outsider.

#### *Who Are the Middle or High School Bullies?*

According to Olweus (1997) bullies are distinctively aggressive toward peers. They have positive feelings toward violence and little empathy with victims of bullying. While girls also exhibit bully behaviors, boys are much more apt to bully others (Ma, 2001). Boy bullies tend to be physically stronger than other boys in general. Unlike the commonly held view that bullies may appear tough and aggressive, but are really insecure, Olweus (1997) and Rigby and Slee (1995) indicated that bullies demonstrate little anxiety and insecurity and do not suffer from poor self esteem. However, Ma (2001) found that while a student with low self-esteem could be bullied, this student could bully others much more. Some studies have found bullies to be of average popularity (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Berts, & King., 1982) who are often supported and befriended by small groups of two or three peers and are rarely as unpopular as their victims (Olweus, 1997).

Olweus' (1997) findings reported that bullies need to have power and to dominate; they enjoy the control they have and like putting others in a subordinate position. Because of poor family conditions, many bullies seem to exhibit hostility toward the environment, and appear to enjoy the suffering of others (Roberts, 2000). Often, bullies make their victims provide them with money and other things of value. Too often, bully aggressive behavior is "rewarded in the form of prestige" (Olweus, 1997, p. 500). Certainly, because of these behavior patterns, bullies run the increased risk of later problems developing, such as criminality and drug/alcohol abuse (Loeber & Dishion, 1983).

#### *Who Are the Bully Victims in Middle and High Schools?*

Evidence suggests that bullying can occur at any school, although the degree of severity varies considerably. This is an important finding, because it allows schools to more readily admit the problem without being considered a poor school. This also encourages an "emerging national consciousness" (Smith & Brain, 2000, p. 2) which enlists parents, educators, and other stakeholders to become actively engaged in seeking ways to reduce the occurrences of bullying. Isernhagen and Harris (2003) in a study of 9th and 10th graders in Nebraska and Texas found that 80% of both boys and girls observed some type of bullying occur at least sometime in their schools. Generally, more boys than girls bully others (Batsche & Knoff, 1994); girls more frequently report being bullied than boys (Rigby, 1996); and more boys than girls are victims of bullying (Olweus, 1996). Bully victims can be found in many settings, in the home, in the school, and even in the work place (Smith & Brain,

2000).

Bully victims are generally unable to defend themselves and are more anxious and insecure than other students. Olweus (1997) described them as cautious, sensitive and quiet. Younger victims often react by crying; older victims withdraw. Frequently, bully victims suffer from low self-esteem, view themselves negatively and often consider themselves failures and unattractive. Typically, these children "do not have a single good friend in their class" (p. 499). Olweus divided bully victims into two groups: passive or submissive victims and provocative victims. Passive victims do not provoke their peers, do not like violence and are likely to be physically weaker than other boys (more research has been done with boys than girls). Ma (2001) reported that students with poor physical conditions are much more apt to be bullied than to be the bully, especially when they are younger. As students grow older, poor physical conditions appear to become less a reason for being bullied. Schwartz, Dodge, and Coie (1993) suggested that these characteristics actually play a role in their victimization. Certainly the fact that they are repeatedly harassed by other children must contribute to these feelings. The provocative victims are both anxious and aggressive in their patterns of reaction and some of these victims have been characterized as hyperactive, with behavior patterns that annoy or provoke other students in the class (Olweus, 1978).

#### *What Are Effects for Both Bully and the Victim?*

Often, there are long term effects for both the bully and the victim. Bully victims appear to have lowered self-esteem, increased absenteeism, and depression (Flannery & Singer, 1999; Olweus, 1996; Rigby, 1996), and they are more likely to become bullies themselves (Kumpulainen, Rasanen & Henttonen, 2000; Rigby, 1996). Additionally, the social and personal development of children can lead to social isolation and encourage dropping out of school (Craig & Peplar, 1996) and the capacity to learn can be diminished (Goleman, 1995).

Both male and female children identified as school bullies when compared with their less aggressive peers have a much higher chance of later committing delinquent acts, be involved in criminal convictions, and treat their own children and spouses with more aggression and greater severity (Craig, et al, 1998; Olweus, 1993). Even adults who admit to having bullied others at school frequently experience a greater degree of depression than is found among other adults ((Dietz, 1994).

Some correlation has been found between physical peer abuse rates and satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels with school at the elementary, middle, and high school level (Miller, Verhoek-Miller, Ceminsky & Nugent, 2000). Additionally, this same study found a statistical correlation between psychological abuse rates and satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels at the middle and high school level. Even ACT scores suffered among high school students who reported experiencing more physical bullying. Ma (2001) reported that more incidents of bullying behaviors were found in small schools than in large schools. Additionally,

this study found that discipline climate helped victims and discouraged bullies, parental involvement discouraged bullies more than it helped victims, and academic rigor discouraged bullies more than it helped victims.

Furthermore, a large group of children often ignored when considering the problem of bullying are the bystanders. Bystanders see what is happening yet they do not understand what is occurring well enough to deal with their own emotional reactions and possible viable actions (Hazler, 1996a). When attention is given to a bullying problem, the victim receives help, the bully, generally, receives punishment, but the bystanders are ignored. However, Hosch and Bothwell (1990) reported that victims and bystanders react similarly physiologically. Additionally, Gilligan (1991) and Safran and Safran (1985) reported that both victims and bystanders in contact with violence over a period of time begin to repress feelings of empathy for others that leads to a desensitizing to negative behaviors at school. Thus, even bystanders do not know what they should do, are fearful of becoming the brunt of a bully attack, and fear that they might do the wrong thing which could cause more problems (Hazler, 1996b).

#### *How Widespread is Bullying?*

Bullying is an international problem and has been studied in Scandinavia, England, Scotland, all the major western European countries, the USA, Canada, Japan, Australia, and new Zealand (Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas & Slee, 1999). Olweus (1993) reported that about 9% of Norwegian and Swedish children in grades 1 - 9 are bullied frequently at school. Canadian adults have commented that their most frequent types of abuse as children came from bullying at school (Ambert, 1994). In Australia, Rigby and Slee (1995) reported that as many as 19% of boys and nearly 14% of girls between the ages of 10 and 17 are bullied at least once a week. Maeda (2000) found that 60% of students in Japan experience bullying either as a bully, a victim, or a witness. A study in England reported that in any year 75% of pupils are bullied, with severe bullying experienced by about 7% (Glover, Bough, Johnson & Cartwright, 2000). Despite these numbers, for the most part bullying is unacknowledged, under-reported, and often minimized by adults because they are unaware of the extent of the problem and rarely discuss it with children (Olweus, 1993; Vail, 2000). While most parents feel that bullying is inappropriate, if it is their child being bullied, parents tend to want punitive action, while counselors believe that bullies are more apt to change these behaviors with more supportive help. Some parents appear to actually admire a bully, especially if it is their own son or daughter (Rigby, 1996).

#### **The Problem**

Clearly, bullying is a problem. Considering the importance of this issue, the purpose of this study was to compare bullying behaviors of middle school and high

school students in a rural area of the central United States.

Research questions explored following issues:

- How often does bullying occur at school?
- Where does bullying occur at school?
- What type of bullying occurs at school?
- How do students who are bullied feel?
- Who do students tell when bullying occurs?
- What are students' perceptions regarding faculty interest in bullying?

#### **Methodology**

This study sampled 394 middle school students (grades 6-8) from two middle schools and 419 students from two high schools (grades 9-12) for a total of 819 participants. Fifty-two percent of the students were male and 48% were female. Less than 8% indicated an ethnicity other than Caucasian; therefore there was no disaggregation of data based on ethnicity. The schools were located in a rural area of the central United States. The rural schools reported in this study had populations between 150 and 250 students.

Students responded to a 26-item questionnaire constructed by Harris and Petrie (2002) that was revised and pilot tested in the United States in 2001. This survey was originally based on an Australian questionnaire, the Peer Relations Questionnaire (Rigby & Slee, 1995). The revised survey explored issues of bullying in middle and high school that included how often and where it occurred and who students told when they saw bullying or experienced it themselves. Surveys were given to the students in a classroom setting under the direction of a home room teacher in the spring of 2002.

Surveys were analyzed using SPSS version 10.0. Analyses reported frequencies, and cross tabulations were run to compare responses by gender and school level. We used the Pearson chi-square to test for significance ( $p = .05$ ) for gender and school level.

#### **Findings**

We compared five categories related to incidences of and reactions to bullying. Students generally responded to items using "never," "sometimes," and "often," although, some questions, such as, "how safe do you feel at school" required other responses. Survey questions and responses are listed and analyzed in the following paragraphs.

#### *How often bullying happened at school*

The first question asked students how often bullying happened at their school. Nearly 22% of middle school students indicated that bullying happened "often" and nearly 70% indicated that it happened "sometimes." The responses among high school students for "often" were nearly 67% and were the same for middle schoolers, 70%, as happening "sometimes." Thus, 92% of students at the middle school and 88% at the high school reported that

Table 1.

*Where Did You Notice Bullying at Your School?*

Location	School Level	Never	Sometimes	Often
Classroom* **	middle school	113 (28.9%)	257 (65.7%)	21 (5.5%)
	high school	94 (22.5%)	276 (66.0%)	48 (11.5%)
Recess/Break* **	middle school	85 (26.3%)	173 (53.6%)	65 (20.1%)
	high school	197 (53.8%)	135 (36.9%)	34 (9.3%)
Lunchroom	middle school	90 (23.0%)	235 (60.1%)	66 (16.9%)
	high school	107 (25.8%)	261 (62.9%)	47 (11.3%)
Going to school	middle school	296 (76.7%)	74 (19.2%)	16 (4.1%)
	high school	327 (78.4%)	83 (19.9%)	7 (1.7%)
Home from school	middle school	244 (62.7%)	127 (32.6%)	18 (4.6%)
	high school	257 (61.8%)	142 (34.1%)	17 (4.1%)
Extracurricular	middle school	111 (28.5%)	235 (60.4%)	43 (11.1%)
	high school	107 (25.7%)	259 (62.1%)	51 (12.2%)
Initiations *	middle school	168 (44.2%)	191 (50.3%)	21 (5.5%)
	high school	219 (52.8%)	171 (41.2%)	25 (6.0%)

Note. (N = 394 middle school; 419 high school)  
 \* $p < .05$  by school type

\*\* $p < .05$  by gender  
 Columns will not always total 100% as all students did not respond to every question.

bullying happens at least “sometimes” on their campuses. Unlike Bank’s (1997) assertion that bullying is less in the high school, our results found that students in these schools indicated that it happened nearly as often in the high school as it did in the middle school. Data were not statistically significant when compared by school level or gender.

Students were then asked how often in the past year they had been bullied by another student. Seventeen percent (17%) of middle school students indicated that they had been bullied at least once a week, compared with only 12.7% of high school students. Thirty-three percent of middle school students reported that they had been bullied, but less than once a week, while only 25.3% of high school student responses were in this category. Findings here were significant indicating that more middle school students (50%) than high school students (37%) indicated that they had been bullied. Additionally, middle school girls (52%) were significantly more likely to have experienced some bullying than high school girls (34%). Typically, students reported seeing others bullied more often than they reported themselves being bullied which suggests that students are

not comfortable acknowledging bullying behaviors when they are directed at themselves (Harris & Petrie, 2002; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2001; Pelligrini & Bartini, 2000).

*Where bullying at school was noticed*

When we summed the “sometimes” and “often” responses, bullying was noticed most often in the following locations:

<u>Middle School</u>	<u>High School</u>
Lunch Room (77%)	Classroom (77.5%)
Recess/Break (73.7%)	Extracurricular (74.3%)
Extracurricular (71.5%)	Initiations (47.2%)
Classroom (71.1%)	Lunch Room (47.2%)
Initiations (55.8%)	Recess/Break (46.2%)
Way home (37.2%)	Way home (37.2%)
To school (23.3%)	To school (21.6%)

When disaggregated and analyzed with Pearson chi-square by gender and school type, high school boys

Table 2.

*If Bullied, How Were You Bullied?*

Location	School Type	Never	Sometimes	Often
Teased unpleasantly	middle school	186 (47.9%)	168 (43.3%)	34 (8.8%)
	high school	209 (50.5%)	172 (41.5%)	33 (8.0%)
Called hurtful names	middle school	169 (43.7%)	175 (45.2%)	43 (11.1%)
	high school	211 (51.0%)	166 (40.1%)	37 (8.9%)
Left out * **	middle school	207 (53.2%)	143 (36.8%)	39 (10.0%)
	high school	253 (61.3%)	134 (32.4%)	26 (6.3%)
Threatened w/ harm	middle school	296 (76.3%)	78 (20.1%)	14 (3.6%)
	high school	334 (80.7%)	63 (15.2%)	17 (4.1%)
Hit or kicked	middle school	257 (66.6%)	113 (29.3%)	16 (4.1%)
	high school	303 (73.4%)	98 (23.7%)	12 (2.9%)

Note: N = 394 middle school; 419 high school

\* $p < .05$  by school type

\*\* $p < .05$  by gender

observed bullying significantly more “often” than middle school students and middle school boys in particular when in the classroom. While at recess or on break, middle school students were significantly more likely to notice bullying than high school students. This was also significant when compared by gender. In fact, 82% of middle school girls and 64% of middle school boys observed bullying at least sometimes, while only 46% of high school boys and girls reported noticing bullying during a break time. Bullying at initiations of clubs and teams was also statistically significant and more likely to occur at least “sometimes” at the middle school level than in the high school (see Table 1).

*Kinds of bullying students experienced*

When the categories of “sometimes” and “often” were summed,

students experienced the following kinds of bullying:

Middle School

Called names (56.3%)

Teased (53.1%)

Left out (46.8%)

Hit or kicked (33.4%)

Threatened (23.7%)

High School

Teased (49.5%)

Called names (49%)

Left out (38.9%)

Hit or kicked (26.6%)

Threatened (19.3%)

Middle school students were more likely to report being left out of things on purpose than students in the high school and middle school girls were specifically more likely to experience this than high school girls ( $p = .027$ ) (see Table 2).

*How students feel who are bullied.*

In responding to the question “after being bullied, how have you generally felt about it,” 147 (38.7%) middle school students and 161 (39.5%) high school students indicated that it did not really bother them. However, 39 (10.3%) middle school students and 32 (7.8%) high school students reported that it made them feel “sad and miserable.” At the same time, 88 middle school students (23.2%) and 72 (17.6%) high school students said that it made them “mostly angry.” While, not statistically significant, middle and high school girls were more likely than boys to say that bullying made them feel “sad and miserable” (girls - 13.9%; boys - 4.4%).

The next question asked students how safe they felt at school. While the majority of students indicated that they usually felt safe at school, middle school students felt significantly less safe than high school students ( $p < .05$ ). This category was also significant by gender for both boys and girls. Only 4.4% of responding students reported staying home from school at least once because of bullying; although 14% indicated that they had considered doing this. Approximately 80% of both middle school students and high school students indicated that staying home from school had not ever been a consideration.

*Who students tell when they have been bullied.*

Middle school students, in general, were more likely to tell

a friend they had been bullied than high school students. Additionally, middle school girls were more likely to tell a friend than boys in the middle school and also more likely than girls and boys in the high school (see Table 3). Next, middle school students were most likely to tell their mothers they had been bullied. Additionally, significantly more girls than boys at either school level told their mothers about being bullied. At the same time, middle school boys were more likely than high school boys to tell their mothers about being bullied. Middle school students were more likely than

high school students to tell their father about being bullied and, when considering gender, middle school girls were more likely than high school girls to tell their father. Middle school students were also more likely than high school students to tell a counselor or teacher about being bullied; and, once again, middle school girls were more likely to tell a counselor or teacher about being bullied than high school girls.

Table 3.

*Who Students Tell When Bullied*

Who Students Tell	Middle School	High School
Friend * **	33.8%	24.8%
Mother * **	27.9%	16.2%
Father * **	15.7%	9.8%
Counselor/Teacher * **	12.4%	7.9%

Note: \* $p < .05$  by school type      \*\* $p < .05$  by gender

Next, we queried students about what happened after they had told someone about bullying at school. Over 5% of middle school students felt that bullying got worse after they told, while 8% of high school students felt this way. However, nearly 44% of middle school students and 47% of high school students indicated that the situation did not change after they told. Only a third of middle and high school students indicated that things got better after they told someone about being bullied.

High school students perceived that administrators were less interested in trying to stop bullying than middle school students ( $p < .05$ ). In fact, 63% of high school students indicated that administrators were either not interested or they did not know if they were interested. Forty-five percent of middle school students felt this way. When this question was analyzed by gender, it was significant for girls in high school when compared with girls in middle school and significant for boys in high school when compared with boys in middle school ( $p < .05$ ).

Nearly one third of middle school students and over half of high school students perceived that teachers were not interested or they were not sure if they were interested in trying to stop bullying. Once again, when gender was compared, high school girls and high school boys perceived their teachers as less interested in helping stop bullying than middle school girls and boys ( $p < .05$ ).

**Discussion**

Based on the 819 students who participated in this study, bullying was a problem at the middle school and high

school levels with nearly 9 out of 10 students noticing bullying happening at school at least “sometimes.” However, when comparing bullying at these two school levels, only 50% of middle school students and 37% of high school students reported being bullied themselves. Middle school students were most likely to report being bullied, especially middle school girls.

Over 70% of middle school students reported that bullying occurred at least “sometimes” in the lunch room, at recess/break, at extracurricular events, and in the classroom. Only the classroom and extracurricular events were reported as bullying locations by over 70% of high school students. High school boys were most likely to observe bullying often” in the classroom, while middle school boys and girls were most likely to report bullying at recess or break. Also, bullying was observed most often at middle school initiations. High school and middle school students reported being called names or being teased unpleasantly as the most likely ways to be bullied. Middle school students were more likely to report being left out of things on purpose; and middle school girls, even more so.

Middle school and high school students reported feeling somewhat the same about being bullied with nearly 40% of students reporting that bullying did not really bother them, between 17% and 23% indicating that bullying made them angry, and nearly 10% saying it made them feel sad and miserable. However, middle school boys and girls felt less safe at school, but staying home from school was rarely considered by either group.

Middle school students were much more likely than high school students to report being bullied by someone, most

likely a friend. However, there was general agreement between the two school levels that bullying situations rarely changed after they told. At the same time, middle school boys and girls perceived their administrators and teachers as more interested than high school students in trying to stop bullying.

### Implications

Bullying is a problem at both the middle school and high school; however, while there are many similarities, there are differences in bullying at the two levels of school that should be considered when school faculties are creating strategies to reduce bullying. For example, supervision should be increased in all areas of the school where bullying happens most often. Students should be encouraged to develop strategies to react in positive ways to name calling and being teased. Strategies should be considered, especially for middle school girls, in developing cooperative behaviors to reduce incidences of being left out on purpose. Middle school personnel should communicate with students and their families to increase students' feelings of safety at school. Building stronger relationships among teachers, counselors and students should help students be able to tell school faculty when bullying happens. When this is improved at the middle school level, hopefully, this will strengthen at the high school level. Finally, while all administrators and teachers must communicate better with students that they care about reducing bullying on campus, this must especially be emphasized at the high school level.

### Conclusions

Ma (2001) reported that more incidents of bullying behaviors were found in small schools than in large schools. Hoover, Oliver & Hazler (1992) noted that 14% of students in the rural Midwestern USA were moderately to severely traumatized by bullying at some point during their school careers. In this study of rural middle and high school students data indicated that bullying is a problem for rural schools and some of our students are suffering as a result of bullying acts.

Olweus & Alsaker (1991) stated that there is no doubt that bullying puts students at risk for failure in school and more importantly in life. So what action is needed in schools to protect students from bullying and failure in school? Berthod and Hoover (2000) stated that "given the present data, bullying needs to be placed into a developmental model for general antisocial behavior proposed by Patterson, DeBaryshe, and Ramsey (1989). In this model, the aggression is worsened by the lack of intervention at home and at school. Students in this study indicated that fewer than half of the teachers and administrators take action against bullies and if they do the bullying becomes worse.

Further, Berthod and Hoover (2000) emphasized that the antisocial tendencies of young people can be discouraged or even subtly encouraged at home. This pushes students toward associations with other youth who model noncompliant or aggressive behavior (Berthod & Hoover).

In fact, Berthod and Hoover stated that by middle school, it can be extremely difficult for students to conform to the social demands placed upon them at school. This may indicate that in order to reduce bullying at the middle and high school levels, earlier intervention is needed for aggressive behavior. Additionally, Ma (2001) emphasized that schools with a disciplined climate helped victims and discouraged bullies, parental involvement discouraged bullies more than it helped victims, and academic rigor discouraged bullies more than it helped victims. Based on this information and the data provided by Banks (1997) indicating that bullying seems to increase through the elementary years and peak in the middle school years, early intervention at the elementary level may be the key to reducing bullying in schools.

In summary, bullying is a very real part of the daily life of students in rural middle schools and high schools with 92% of the middle school students and 88% of the high school students reporting that bullying happens at least "sometimes" in their rural school. Data indicated that the rate of bullying in rural middle schools and high schools was very similar in some instances unlike the findings of Banks (1997) where bullying was found to peak in the middle school and decline at the high school level. However, in rural middle schools over 70% of the students indicated that bullying happened at least "sometimes" or "often" in four primary locations: the lunch room, recess/break, extracurricular activities and classroom. High school students identified only two locations, the classroom and extra curricular activities. This finding emphasizes the need for supervision to be increased in all areas of the school where bullying happens most often. Students should be encouraged to develop strategies to react in positive ways to name calling and being teased particularly at the middle school level.

Most disturbing was the finding that nearly one-third of middle school students and over half of high school students perceived that teachers were not interested or they were not sure they were interested in trying to stop bullying in rural schools. This perception by rural students can be changed by educators gaining awareness about the level of bullying that takes place in the school setting and by increasing the opportunities for students to participate in an on-going dialogue about bullying. Only then, will students feel safe enough to share with the adults that are responsible for creating a safe environment where all rural students can learn.

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## **2004 NREA Convention**

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Sheraton Keystone Crossing  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
October 19-22, 2004

**Theme: "Rural Schools: Crossroads to Our Future –  
Charting a New Direction!"**