



NEWS

Bullying survey results 'staggering'[Print Page](#)By **Stephen Peterson**

Published: Thursday, June 23, 2011 11:10 AM EDT

School committee members were surprised results of a survey on bullying show aggression among local students is more widespread than many figured.

"I just found the numbers staggering," school committee member Martha Slattery said. "It won't be accepted. It won't be tolerated."

The results from a task force on bullying were presented Monday night before the school committee, which while expressing concerns, supported the school district's movement toward alleviating the problems.

Committee member Katie Adair called 57 percent of middle school students reporting physical aggression "pretty high."

That is not the percentage who were involved in a fight, said Judith Sims-Knight, professor at UMASS Dartmouth, adding the pupils could have been pushed, shoved, threatened or had something taken away from them.

"The number that troubled me is 12 percent of middle school students are targeted almost every day" with nonphysical aggression, school board Chairman Bruce Gardner said.

Some 47 percent of middle school students and 45 percent of high school students reported being targeted more than once.

At the middle school, 48 percent reported at least one incident of physical aggression, and 63 percent reported they experienced at least one incident of nonphysical aggression.

At the high school, 56 percent said they were the victims of at least one incident of physical aggression, and 77 percent reported nonphysical aggression.

"The numbers are high but we are not talking about bullying but aggression" in most instances, Sims-Knight told board members.

Bullying was defined as repetitive aggression over a period of time.

"A few or more times a month" of incidents of aggression is more problematic, agreed Ray Knight, chairman of the psychology department at Brandeis University and who also presented the findings.

At the middle school, 19 percent reported more than one cyberspace incident involving cellphones/text messaging and social networking while that shot up to 32 percent at the high school.

"Where is this taking place?" is an important question, retiring Superintendent Christopher Martes noted.

Forty percent of middle school targeted students reported incidents outside school, and that rose to 45 percent for high schoolers.

Developing healthy attitudes against aggression in school will help outside school, it was pointed out.

Most aggressors were known to the targeted students, and the incidents usually took place with two to five other students present. About half those bystanders at each school level did nothing, Sims-

Knight said.

Aggressors indicated their actions were "a joke, were angry, wanted revenge, or because of peer pressure," Sims-Knight said.

While the results show the local school system has work to do, it is in better shape than national averages.

"The numbers are not as high as compared to national" statistics, Sims-Knight said.

New Superintendent Debra Spinelli said she was not surprised by the results.

"This is a very complex problem and the solution is complex," Spinelli said.

The school district last year found itself involved in a controversial bullying incident that partly led to the task force. However, new state regulations required school districts this school year to implement bullying prevention measures.

"We are working on prevention," Spinelli said. "I do believe we will be a model for others who want to replicate" programs.

"The new law mandates the reporting of everything observed, heard about, every rumor is investigated," she added.

Gardner said "the good news is we are proactive. We'll be on the cutting edge of changing it."

Slattery said she feels the programs need to start at the kindergarten level and parents need to have a stake in the issue.

Children need to be taught "it is okay to tell, stand up for people's rights," Slattery said. "It starts at such an early age it is frightening."

Foxboro police last June charged a 14-year-old girl from another community with criminal harassment of an Ahern Middle School student after obtaining subpoenaed cellphone records. The local eighth-grader was hospitalized for emotional stress in the spring of last school year after reportedly being bullied for months both in and out of school.

But school officials have concluded, in a related investigation, that no in-school bullying of the Foxboro girl could be verified.

Copyright © 2011 - Foxboro Reporter

[\[x\] Close Window](#)