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# Identifying Tier-Two at risk students in New Jersey Public Schools

Danisha Moodie

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**IDENTIFYING TIER-TWO AT RISK STUDENTS IN NEW JERSEY PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS**

by  
Danisha Moodie

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Psychology  
College of Science and Mathematics  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in School Psychology  
at  
Rowan University  
May 12, 2014

Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.

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## **Dedication**

*I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my boyfriend, Nana Kyeremateng. Thank you  
for all of your love and support during this difficult season.*

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Dihoff and Dr. Allen's much needed assistance, guidance and support throughout this research study. I would also like to thank my mentor Dr. Christopher Donoghue, thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to do my best.

## **Abstract**

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IDENTIFYING TIER-TWO AT RISK STUDENTS IN NEW JERSEY PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS  
2013/2014

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Master of Arts in School Psychology

Actions to improve student's socio-emotional success in public education by attempting to identify, and eliminate bullying behaviors within educational institution are a key focus for many educators. Harassment, intimidation and bullying behaviors (HIB) are recognized as a solemn issue across the nation. According to the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act*, public schools are required to report (HIB) incidents to the New Jersey Department of Education.

Moreover, coupled with the mandated guidelines of this new legislature many public schools within in New Jersey have also adopted positive behavior interventions. New Jersey Moodie identifying at-risk students who may require greater level of interventions. The purposeNewof this study is to analyze the characteristics of the (HIB) incident reports in order toilluminate trends within the data. The trends located within this data may highlight characteristics at risk students may share in peer aggression and prelude to how to properly identify Tier-II at risk students. In this study 566 school districts belonging to twenty-one counties of New Jersey were analyzed.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Focus of Study**

The focus of this study was on properly identifying tier- two students who are identified as at-risk students. The principle investigator wanted to determine a way to classify these students and characterize the similar trends these students may share.

#### **Purpose of study**

The purpose of this study was to identify, evaluate and categorize the similarities between the tier – two at- risk students by analyzing the current trends in the 2011-2012 HIB incident reports. This study was conducted using an archival-based research design.

#### **Operational definitions**

Specificity is critical when conducting research. Indistinct, unclear or vague definitions of concepts create obstacles to the advancement of knowledge and science (Berg, 2006). Therefore, an essential aspect of this study is to first operationally define relevant concepts that was used through out this research project. Operational definitions concretize the intended meaning of a concept in relation to a particular study (Frankfort-Nachmias& Nachmais, 2000; Leedy& Ormrod 2004). The following concepts used through out process of this research project will be operationally defined to avoid ambiguity:

Bullying - In this study, bullying is defined as physical and verbal peer aggression, which is a systematic on going set of behaviors instigated by an individual or group of individuals who are attempting to gain power, prestige or goods (Swearer et al., 2003).

HIB - Is defined as harassment intimidation or bullying.

PBIS- This acronym stands for positive behavioral interventions and supports. The PBIS method is a proactive application, which uses a three-tier model to illustrate an integrated and individualized school wide approach for providing behavioral interventions (Sugai, 2006). (PBIS) is an evidence-based school-wide approach for promoting socially acceptable behaviors among students as well as creating a safe and effective learning environment.

School climate – For the purposes of this research, school climate is defined as the ‘quality and character of school life’ (Twemlow & Sacco et al., 2010).

Tier 1 intervention- The tier-one behavior interventions establishes and provides methods to teach all students how to display expected and positive school behaviors by proactively correcting and acknowledging students for complying with the expected behaviors (Lindsey and White, 2008). An example of a tier–one intervention would be a school that establishes a student code of conduct.

Tier 2 Interventions - Are usually individualized to target students who are displaying at-risk bullying behavioral challenges and problems. The tier-two students have been identified as at risk for bullying behaviors and they may not be responsive to the tier- one intervention (Lindsey and White, 2008).

Tier 3 Interventions- The tertiary approach or tier-three model are individually designed for students who have exhibited intensive bullying behaviors (Lindsey and White, 2008). Generally, these students may not be responsive to the first and second tiers of intervention.

SES- The socioeconomic status can be defined as median family income during this study; the districts median family income reported by the United States Census Bureau.

Median Family Income- Median family income was configured upon the reported annual income along with following requirement: Two (2) or more individuals living within the household must be related by blood, marriage or adoption.

### **Organization of the study:**

The remainder of the study will be organized in the following chapters: Chapter two will review the current literature on tier-two students and peer aggression characterized as bullying in New Jersey public schools. Chapter three will address the nature and design of the study. Chapter four will present the data analysis or research findings of the study, and chapter five will offer the conclusion, future suggestions and limitations of the study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **History of Anti Bullying Law**

In the wake of national media coverage surrounding multiple student suicides as a result of bullying, the New Jersey Legislature approved the “Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act” with nearly unanimous support in both houses. On November 22, 2010 Governor Chris Christie signed the legislation as *P.L. 2010, Chapter 122 (P.L. 2010, c.122)*. The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights provides a detailed outline of procedures and guidelines for reporting incidents of bullying. All school employees and contracted service providers (i.e. teachers, substitutes, staff, child study team and administrators) are required to report bullying incidents. This law strengthened the state’s already existing anti-bullying legislation, and the new provisions have taken into full effect in the 2011-2012 academic school year.

According to this protocol every public school within the state of New Jersey are mandated to adhere to the HIB requirements while referring to the New Jersey Administrative Code, regarding the code of student conduct. New Jersey Public Schools are instructed to contain a statutory definition of HIB. There is a description of the type of behaviors expected from each student listed in the institutions student code of conduct.

Therefore, the description of the types behaviors categorized under each institutions student code of conduct may slightly differ according to the public school and the district's Department of Education. The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights policy also includes the appropriate consequences or remedial action to the person(s) who commits the bully behaviors. The P.L.2010, CHAPTER 122-8 of the Anti- Bullying legislature subsection (b) through (c) and Chapter 122-9 subsection c states: (b) the results of the investigation shall be reported to the superintendent of schools district within two school days of the completion of the investigation. Furthermore, in accordance with regulations promulgated by the State Board of Education pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act" P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.). The superintendent may decide to provide intervention services, establish training programs to reduce harassment, intimidation or bullying and enhance school climate, impose discipline, order counseling as a result of the findings of the investigation, or recommend other appropriate action(s).

Subsection (c) states the results of each investigation shall be reported to the board of education no later than the date of the board of education next meeting following the completion of the investigation. After the finalization of the investigation it is expected for the superintendent to report further recommendations, information on any services provided, training established and disciplinary action.

## **What is bullying and why is it a problem**

Bullying is defined as physical and verbal aggression, which is a systematic on going set of behaviors instigated by an individual or group of individuals who are attempting to gain power, prestige or goods (Swearer et al., 2003). (Vernberg and Briggs, 2010), in their discussion of evidence-based approaches to preventing and treating bullying and victimization, discuss the pejorative effects of severe and continuous incidents of bullying, including impairments in self-concept, emotions, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance. Bullying is now accepted as a significant issue in schools across the country. Specifically, bullying and victimization negatively affects both the perpetrator and the victim (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel, 2010). Research (Fonagy, Twemlow, Vernberg, Sacco, and Little, 2005) shows the negative effects of bullying and victimization on academic performance, school attendance, social relationships with peers, and mental health (including attempted, the ideation of, and committed suicide) are not only present for the short-term, but also continue years after the bullying has ended. Furthermore, empirical evidence (Olweus, 2003) suggests bullying and victimization leads to significant amount of emotional and behavioral difficulties, which is connected to social conduct difficulties in children and adolescents, and young adults.

The behaviors of bullying are fabricated into a social context within our society. Bullying behaviors are intertwined in ongoing social interactions between two or more groups of people who are engaged in an ongoing relationship. Failing to recognize that bullying not only involves a personal conflict but is also a social dynamic can limit our comprehensive understanding of this form of peer aggression (Grendon, 2011). Therefore when we try to understand the intermediate relationships of bullying within a school setting it is vital to consider the schools community and context in studying bullying.

### **Different types of bullying**

Indeed bullying is set apart from various forms of aggression such as teasing, joking and characteristics of general meanness. (Eliot, 2009) found, that bullying is a product of parental attachment and aggressive attitudes towards peers. In Eliot's discussion, the empirical research suggests within the dynamic of bullying, there is an ongoing relationship that involves repeated forms of aggressive behaviors. Usually, a power imbalance exists between the bully and the victim. The imbalance of power may be a fact of reality or can be completely dependent upon the individual's perception. This imbalance may exist physically, socially or mentally.

### **Bullying and school climate**

Intimately connected with the social issue of bullying is the issue of school climate, which can be defined as the 'quality and character of school life' (Twemlow & Sacco et al., 2010).

School climate is an important variable in behavioral assessment, prevention, and treatment of bullying and victimization. Research (Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, & Shih, 2010; Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010) has shown that aspects of school climate- structure and support- are key variables for the perception of a “safe school”.

Furthermore, regular enforcement of school rules and the presence of school staff who are perceived to be available and nurturing increased perceptions of school safety and the greater likelihood of students asking for assistance when faced by incidents of bullying and victimization (Twemlow & Sacco, 2010).

### **Methods adopted to reduce bullying**

As a result of this national movement many schools in New Jersey have adopted positive behavior interventions and support attempting to improve their overall school climate. (PBIS) is an evidence-based school-wide approach for promoting socially acceptable behaviors among students as well as creating safe and effective learning environment (White & Lindsey, 2008). Schools implementing PBIS support programs have reported reductions in discipline referrals; decreased amounts of administrative time devoted to addressing problem behaviors and improved positive school climates ( Carr et al., 2002; Horner et al., 2004; Irvin et al., 2006; Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai & Vincent, 2004; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Luiselli, Putnam & Sunderland, 2002; Scott, 2001; Scott & Barrett, 2004; Sugai et al., 1999; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, Horner & Walker, 2000; Sugai et al., 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2002). These findings, strongly suggest PBIS is a very effective method for behavioral intervention.



## **PBIS methods**

The PBIS is a proactive application, which uses a three-tier model to illustrate an integrated and individualized school wide approach for providing behavioral interventions (Sugai, 2006). Moreover, the PBIS approach focuses on redesigning the schools environment to meet the schools current needs and challenges depicted by their students. The three tiers to this model range from general school wide to individual approaches. The formulation of the pyramid provides a simple way of emphasizing the levels of intervention students may need (Adleman, 2011). Even though there have been many different versions of the three tier pyramid, the Appendix B illustrates the basic diagram of the PBIS method (Lindsey and White, 2008). The 5%, 15%, and 80% figures represent an estimate of how many students might require an intervention (Adleman, 2011).

An example of a tier-one intervention would be a school that establishes a student code of conduct. The tier-one behavior interventions establishes and provides methods to teach all students how to display expected and positive school behaviors, by proactively correcting students and acknowledge students for complying with the expected behaviors. Thus, this primary level of intervention aims to reduce the number of new bullying incidents and has proven to be effective for a majority of students. PBIS suggests 80-90% of students in schools are responsive to the tier-one intervention (Sugai, 2006).

The second model, tier two interventions are usually individualized to target students who are displaying at- risk bullying behavioral challenges.

The tier-two students who have been identified as at-risk for exemplifying adverse signs of peer aggression and these school children may not be responsive to the tier- one level interventions (Lindsey and White, 2008). These students may have been identified to exhibit bullying behaviors in specific school settings. The secondary approach is usually focused on specific areas such as the settings where more cases and incidents of bullying are reported. An example of these problem settings where bullying occurs may be the classroom, playground, bus stop, or the cafeteria. An example of a tier – two behavioral intervention includes specially designed small group counseling interventions which are usually instructed by school psychologist, social workers, school counselors, behavior specialist or designated teachers (Crone, Hawken, Horner, 2003). These interventions are usually designed to bring rapid improvement for the students who are identified as at risk to bully behaviors. PBIS approximates that, 10-15% of students will need tier two level interventions in order to be behaviorally successful at school (White & Lindsey, 2008).

The tier-three model or the tertiary approach is individually designed for students who have exhibited intensive forms of peer aggression in the form of bullying. In tier-three interventions, usually the school’s behavioral team(s) assesses these students to understand their perspective, identify specific problem behaviors and identify how to introduce socially acceptable behaviors. The encouraged socially accepted behaviors are usually outlined in the institutions mandated student code of conduct.

Furthermore, tier-three interventions usually include ‘wrap around planning’ (White & Lindsey, 2008). Wrap around is an individualized planned process based on the students strengths, challenges, their needs at school, home and within their community (White & Lindsey, 2008). Individualized intervention plans are tailored to meet the specific needs of students who repeatedly express chronic bullying behaviors (Scott & Eber, 2003). PBIS estimates 1-5% of students will require tertiary interventions and support in order to be successful academically and socio-emotionally at school (White & Lindsey, 2008). Students at this level typically receive the most attention and schools may tend to focus the most on these students, as their behavioral interventions are more time consuming. All three of these models work collectively together to improve the school’s climate by providing a continuum of school wide instructional and behavioral support (Scott & Eber, 2003; White & Lindsey, 2008).

### **Tier-II students**

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the tier-two intervention ‘at risk’ students as well as describe the various tier-two behaviors and lack of interventions for students categorized at this level. The students at this level may be at risk due to low academic achievement, poor social skills, learning difficulties and possibly challenging family situations (Lewis & Sugai et al., 1999). Usually these students require more attention than the primary interventions that are provided to the general population of students but they do not require the intense amount of support associated with the tertiary level (Lewis & Sugai et al., 1999).

Moreover, these students contain various similarities of all three tiers combined. Because of this complexity, these students are often ‘sandwiched’ in the middle. Therefore, many schools psychologist have found it very challenging to properly identify with the multidimensional needs these students (Lewis& Sugai et al., 1999). As a result of this challenge, there is very little support created for these students and the support that is available to these students are over generalized (Lewis& Sugai et al., 1999).

Usually, Tier- two interventions offer at-risk students additional opportunities to increase their level of awareness about the student code of conduct or expected behaviors that may ultimately lead to educational success (Lee, Sugai & Horner, 1999). The main concepts of tier-two interventions includes a highlighted focus of (1) continuous availability; (2) minimal effort required from staff (3) voluntary student participation; and 4) ongoing data collection and evaluation that guides future implementation (White &Lindsey, 2008). School psychologists frequently provide or coordinate tier-two implementations.

Presently, school psychologist may identify students as at-risk students by analyzing the trends in the number of discipline referrals by their teachers, in-school suspension, out school suspensions, detentions, attendance, tardiest absences, classroom disturbances and academic achievement (White &Lindsey, 2008). The means by which these students are identified may vary by geographic location, district and public school (White &Lindsey, 2008).

Those found with students with a greater number of incidents may be targeted to receive additional support. Moreover, the criterion varies by school as to what constitutes as an above average number of infractions. This measurement may vary by geographic location, district, and type of school as well. Secondary interventions must reflect the complexity and frequency of the students' exhibited problem behaviors needs and challenges (Sugai, et al., 2000). The student's progress is monitored over a period time in order to determine the severity of the negative behavior. Additionally, the student is monitored to see if the recognized problem behavior(s) have showed a significant decline or a greater level of intervention should be considered (White & Lindsey et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, a shortcoming experienced with this measure is the lack of evidence of support for students whose behavior is not responding at all to entire PBIS approach. For example, if the students problem behavior is stagnated and there is no noted change in the students behavior. Generally, this student may be selected to stay in the tier-two level or they may be considered for a tier-3 level intervention. Likewise, the student may not be responding to this measure because they have been mis- identified and the student may not be receiving the appropriate support. A common method of evaluating progress is through rating scales that require teachers or a teacher's aid to record their opinion of a specific problem behavior exhibited during the class period (White & Lindsey et al., 2008).

### **Current issues with tier two students**

In addition, as a result of the enactment of the “Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act” national movement many New Jersey schools have directed their attention to enforcing proactive methods of intervention when reprimanding the confirmed bully. From looking at the PBIS conceptualization model many schools are solely focusing on the tier-one level which is preventative and tier- three enforcing consequences to the perpetrator. Usually, these perspectives are punitive, as the bases of the solutions are disciplinary but there is a lack of focus on the at risk student. I believe it is vital to shift our lens of focus from the tertiary level to the secondary level in order to understand the paradigm of the student who possesses the ability to become the tier–three level students.

Even though there is a difference between bullying behaviors (physical, verbal, social and cyber) there are some similarities present between the two groups. Although, each child is different, those who do participate in bullying share some commonalities (Fritz, 2008). The similar characteristics include impulsiveness, hot headiness, lack of empathy, easily frustrated, difficulty accepting authority and positive views associated with violence (Fritz, 2008). Jansen et al., 2011, found that early socio-emotional factors such as domestic violence and problems with the neighbors have been associated with children’s risk for potentially becoming involved in bullying (Jansen, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The support and needs of the of the tier–two student are ‘diverse’ making this group difficult to identify with and often their needs are misconstrued. The characteristics and experiences of the tier–two students are largely invisible. Usually, we tend to think of the perpetrator as student who has already committed the act of aggression, as there is no way to profile a bully. However, when viewing this phenomenon through the lenses of the at-risk students we see a complexity of un-met needs, which may lead to a plethora of behavioral problems. This issue becomes even more complex when we view the issues of tier–two students and bullying through the lens of social class, socioeconomic status and geographic location.

Unfortunately, the majority of these students ‘fall through the cracks’ are their needs are left behind and forgotten especially, when there is a development of behavioral support. This paper focuses on tier –two students and the characteristics these students may share. However, it should be clear that not all tier–two students share the same characteristics, experiences, academic and behavioral needs. This paper focuses on what at risk students all have in common. Furthermore, until we properly identify these students then we can address their academic, behavioral, psychological needs through assessment.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Once the Institutional Review Board of Rowan University approved this study, the primary investigator carried out the research using archival data. The goal of this investigation was to analyze the current trends in the New Jersey's (HIB) incident reports for the 2011-2012 academic school year. This research study used public archival data; therefore, the population was selected previously based on the criteria, procedures and guidelines of the Anti-Bullying Bill of rights legislature. Every public school within the state of New Jersey are mandated to report every single incident of Harassment Intimidation or Bullying to their districts department of education within 10 days. Each infraction was assigned a random identification number. The identification number is assigned to ensure the student(s) identity(s) will remain anonymous on the report.

### **Population**

The large group of interest or population consisted of school age children attending public schools within the state of New Jersey. The population included students from the age of 7-18. Even though the participants reside in the state of New Jersey, geographic location was not a limiting factor. Students enrolled in charter, all boys, all girls, school for communication disorders, deaf and blind, annex and private institutions were not included in this study. Geographic location was somewhat a confounded factor, seeing how only schools within the state of were assessed.



Accordingly, all rural, suburban, and inner city schools were assessed as well. The goal of this research was to identify the common characteristics of the bullying behaviors allegedly committed by at risk students.

Therefore, the population consisted of New Jersey students enrolled in a New Jersey approved public school. The target population consists of students who have been identified as at risk elementary, middle and high school students. These local participants have become the accessible population from which the sample was selected. The participants were selected by a method of stratified random sampling. To obtain this sample the principle investigator identified the strata to be included in the sample.

### **Procedure**

The samples consisted of twelve thousand and twenty (n= 12,024) HIB reports belonging to five hundred and sixty-six school districts. The identification numbers linked to the HIB incident reports were extracted from the New Jersey Department of Education Research Database. The HIB identification numbers were classified according to district and county. The HIB reports were then clustered in three groups: Means of HIB, Motivating Factors/ Characteristics, Location and Frequency of Incidents. The subgroups included under Means of HIB include (i.e. ID#, Gestures, Written Acts, Verbal Acts, Physical Acts, Electronic Communication and grade level. The subgroups under Motivating Factors/ Characteristics include: (i.e. Race, Color, Religion, Ancestry, National Origin, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, Mental/Physical or Sensory Disability, and Other).

The HIB reports, which were classified under the cluster of location, was organized into eleven subgroups which includes: (i.e. School entrance, Off of School Grounds, Off of the School Site, Exterior of the Building, Bus, Other School Grounds, Other Inside the School, The Corridor, Classroom, and Cafeteria). The last cluster included in this sample was the Frequency of Incidents, this cluster was organized into three subgroups: (i.e. first of single incident, Second or Third incident, Greater than Three incidents). Additionally, the socioeconomic status of each county was also taken into consideration as well. In conclusion, the participants within this study have been selected by via stratified random sampling and cluster sampling. The individual's within the population have already been clustered into pre existing groups. Hence, the researcher had the opportunity to randomly select groups instead of selecting individuals.

### **Data analysis**

The first stage of data analysis was to assort the HIB incident reports into clusters according to geographical locations. Data was also gathered on each county and school district's socioeconomic status. After the data was collected, cleaned and coded percentages were derived for each cluster and subgroup. The data was interpreted by using SPSS software and Microsoft Excel.

Furthermore, the goal of this research was to analyze and identify the current trends in the New Jersey's *Harassment Intimidation or Bullying* (HIB) incident reports for the 2011-2012 academic school year. The current trends identified in the HIB incident reports may allude to a way identify the common characteristics of the bullying behaviors allegedly committed by Tier-II at risk students.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

This study examined the characteristics and behavioral trends identified in the Harassment Intimidation and Bullying Reports in New Jersey's public schools for the 2011-2012 academic semesters. The relationship between HIB incident reports and socioeconomic status was examined as well. The data gathered from this study is intended to help identify Tier-II students.

#### **Hypothesis One**

Hypothesis one stated to identify and examine any trends within the 2011-2012 HIB incident reports to help identify similar trends in Tier- II students. The HIB reports which were classified under the cluster of location was organized into eleven subgroups which includes: School entrance, Off of School Grounds, Off of the School Site, Exterior of the Building, Bus, Other School Grounds, Other Inside the School, The Corridor, Classroom, and Cafeteria. The majority of HIB incident reports occurred within the classrooms at thirty-two percent (n =32%), eleven percent (n=11%) occurred in the cafeteria, ten percent (n=10%) occurred in the corridor, twelve percent (n=12%) occurred on the bus, nine percent (n=9%) occurred on the building exterior grounds, three percent (n=3%) occurred outside the school, as well as at offsite programs, ten percent occurred (n=10%) on off school grounds and nine percent (n=9%) occurred inside the school building. Figure 1 scatter chart depicts the relationship between frequency of incident and location of HIB. The location is depicted on the x -axis and the frequency of HIB is depicted on the y-axis.

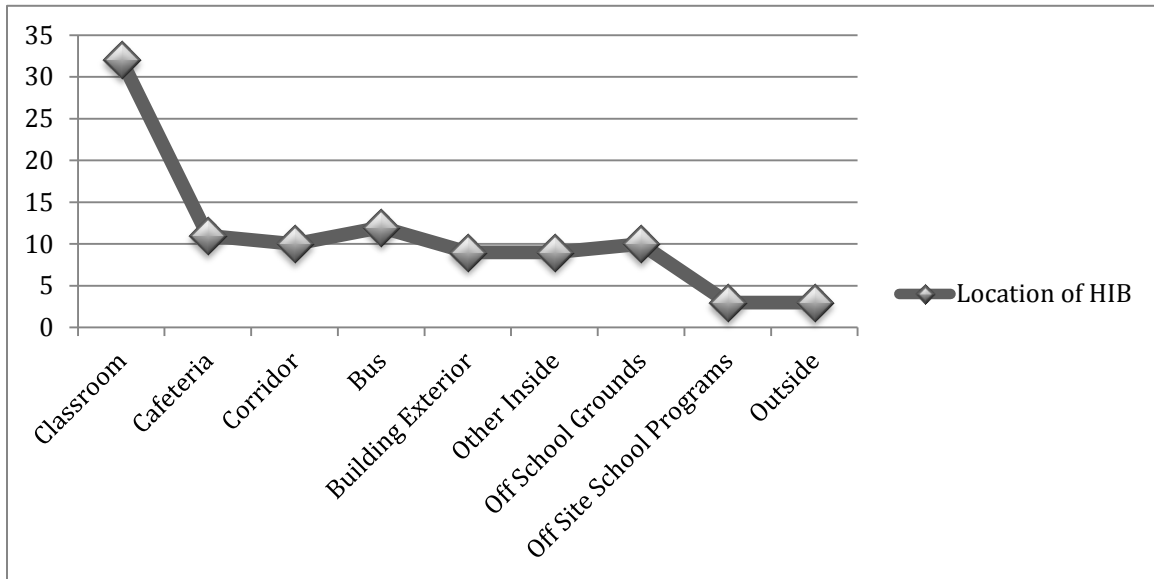


Figure 1 Mean percentage frequency of HIB by location.

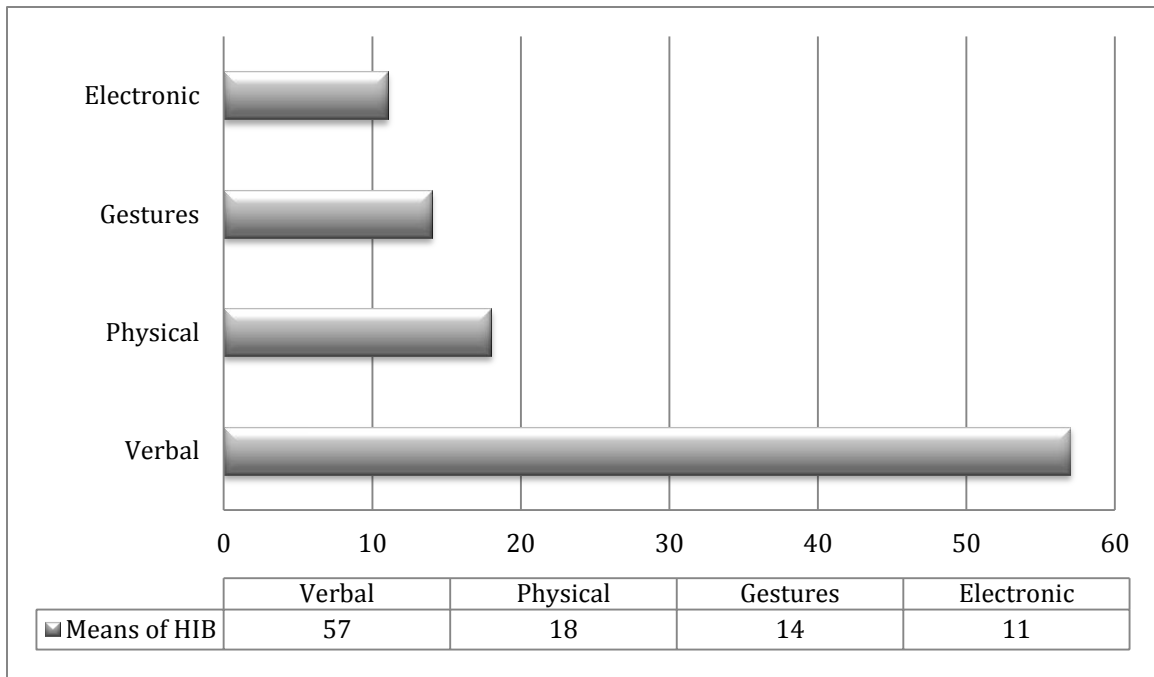


Figure 2 Mean percentage of HIB incidents under the cluster of “Means of HIB.”

Figure 2 bar graph indicates the mean percentages for the Means of HIB. Under the category of Means of HIB the majority of the incidents were verbal at fifty seven percent (n=57%), fourteen percent (n=14%) of the incidents were gestures, eleven percent of the incidents were through the forms of electronic communication (n=11%), eighteen percent (n= 18%) of the incidents reported were physical.

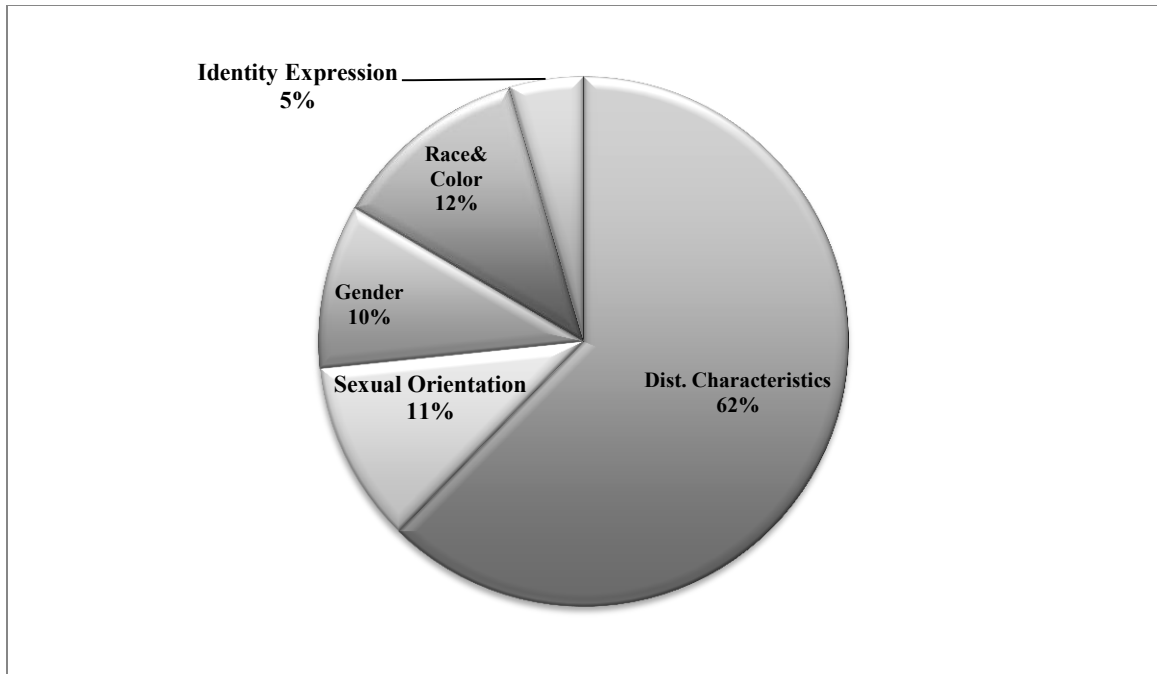


Figure 3 Average of HIB incidents under the category of “Motivating Factors.”

Figure 3 Pie Chart indicates the mean percentages for the Motivating Factors for HIB (i.e. Race and Color, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation and distinguishing characteristic) 62 % of the incidents in the cluster were correlated to the individuals distinguishing characteristics. Eleven percent (n=11%) of incidents were related to the victims sexual orientation, ten percent (n= 10%), Twelve percent (n=12%) of incidents were related to the victims race and/ or color, Four and a half percent (n=4.5%) were correlated to the victim’s gender identity and expression.

## Other Descriptive Data

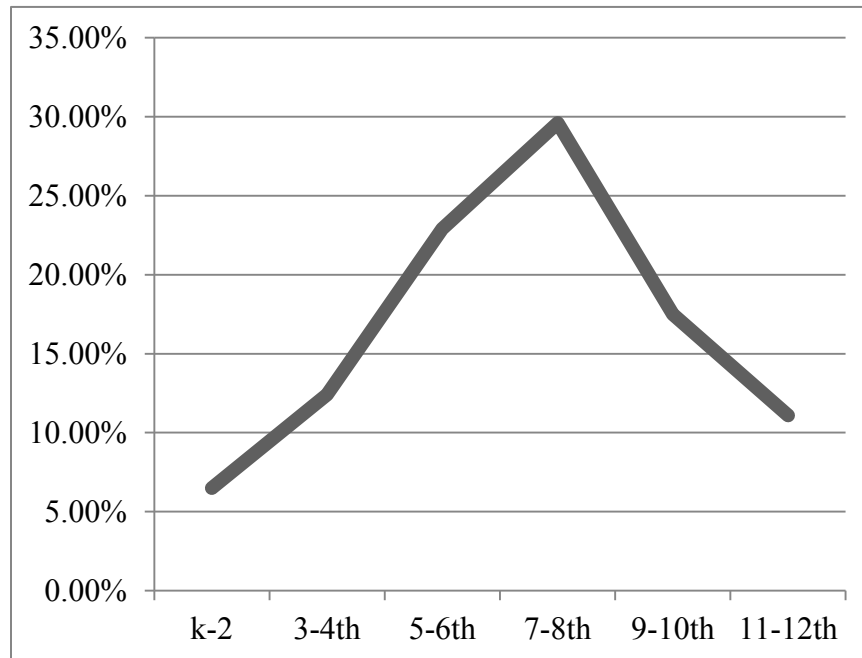


Figure 4 Correlation of HIB incidents reported by grade level.

Figure 4 indicates the total HIB incidents reported by grade level. The data collected from the 2010-2011 HIB incident reports suggested twenty three percent (n=23%) of the total HIB incidents reported consisted of students who are enrolled in the fifth and sixth grade, thirty percent (n=30%) of HIB incidents reported were derived from students who are enrolled in the seventh and eighth grade. Eighteen percent (n=18%) of the reports consisted of students who are enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> grade. Eleven percent (n=11%) of the total HIB incidents reported in the 2011-2012 academic year consisted of students who belong to the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. Twelve percent (n=12%) of this total



consisted of students who are enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade. Seven percent (n=7%) of the incidents reported consisted of students enrolled in kindergarten to second grade.

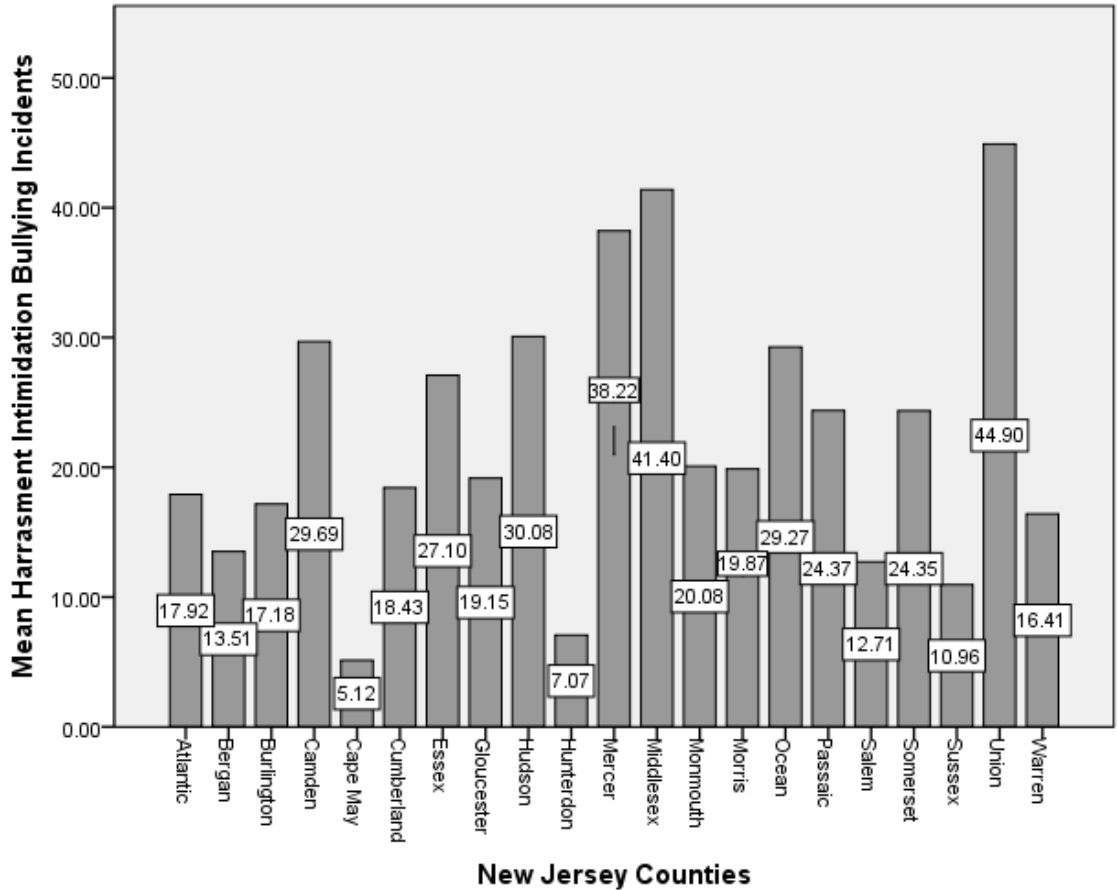


Figure 5 Mean HIB Incidents reported by County.

Figure 5 represents the mean HIB incident reports correlated by New Jersey County. The mean number of HIB incident reports by county. Atlantic county reported an average of (n=17.92) HIB incident reports. Bergen County reported an average of HIB reports (n=13.51).

Burlington County reported a mean of (n=17.18). HIB reports. Camden County reported a mean of (n=29.69) HIB reports. Cape May County reported a mean of (n=5.12) HIB reports. Cumberland County reported a mean of (n=18.43). Essex County reported a mean of (n=27.10). Gloucester County reported a mean of (n=19.1). Hudson County reported a mean of (n=30.08). Hunterdon County reported a mean percentage of (n=7.07). Mercer County reported a mean percentage of (n=38.22). Middlesex County reported a mean of (n=41.40). Monmouth County reported a mean of (n=20.08). Morris County reported a mean of (n=19.87) HIB incident reports. Ocean County reported a mean of (n=29.27) HIB incident reports. Passaic County reported a mean of (n=24.37) HIB incident reports. Salem County reported a mean of (n=19.87) HIB incident reports. Somerset County reported a mean of (n=24.35) HIB incident reports. Sussex County reported a mean of (n=10.96). Union County reported a mean of (n=44.90) HIB incident reports. Warren County reported a mean of (n=16.41) HIB incident reports.

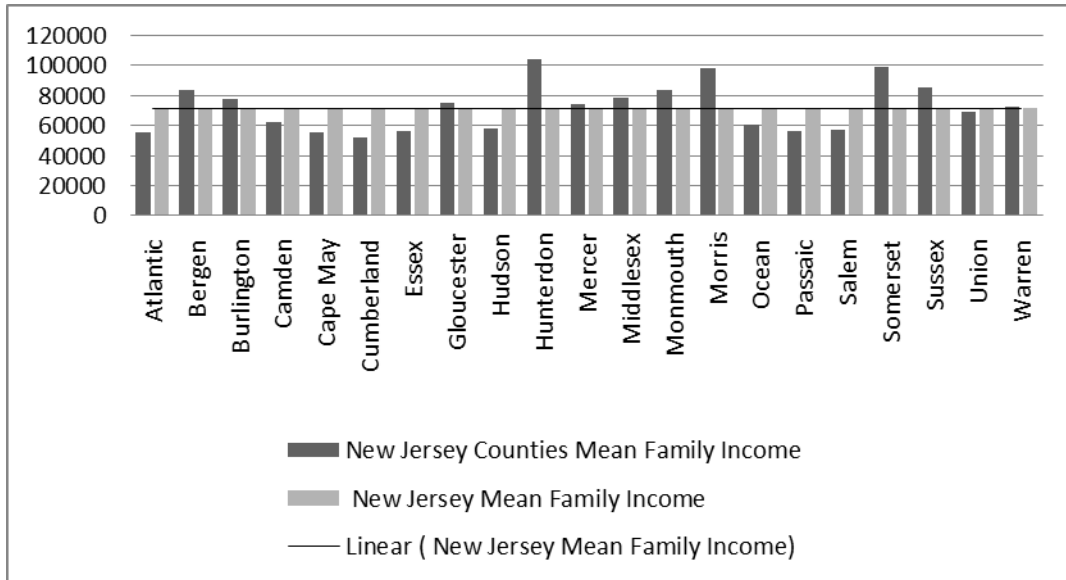


Figure 6 Annual Mean Family Income reported for NJ County.

Figure 6 represents the New Jersey Counties Mean Family Income and the Reported New Jersey Mean Family Income. The annual mean family income reported for the 2011-2012 year was \$ 71,637.00. The annual mean family income reported for Atlantic County is \$ 55,222. The annual mean family income reported for Bergen County was \$83443. The annual mean family income reported for Burlington County was\$77,798. The annual mean family income reported for Camden County \$ 61,824. The annual mean family income reported for Cape May County was \$55,315. The annual mean family income reported for Cumberland County was \$52,004.

The annual mean family income reported for Essex County was \$55,876. The annual mean family income reported for Gloucester County was \$74,830. The annual mean family income reported for Hudson County was \$57,660. The annual mean family income reported for Hunterdon County was \$103,879. The annual mean family income reported for Mercer County was \$73,883. The annual mean family income reported for Middlesex County was \$78,622. The annual mean family income reported for Monmouth County was \$83,842. The annual mean family income reported by Morris County was \$98,148. The annual mean family income reported for Ocean County was \$60,712. The annual mean family income reported for Passaic County was \$56,299. The annual mean family income reported for Salem County was \$57,174. The annual mean family income reported for Somerset County was \$98,842. The annual mean family income reported for Sussex County was \$84,860. The annual mean family income reported for Union County was \$68,688. The annual mean family income reported for Warren County was \$72,615.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Summary and Integration of Results**

The purpose of this study was to characterize trends within the Harassment Intimidation and Bullying incident reports for the 2011-2012 school year, with the aims to help identify shared common behaviors of tier two 'at risk' students who may be prone to developing adverse bullying behaviors. The students at this level may be at risk due to low academic achievement, poor social skills, learning difficulties and possibly challenging family situations (Lewis & Sugai et al., 1999). Usually these students require more attention than the primary interventions but that are provided to the general population of students but they do not require the intense amount of support associated with the tertiary level (Lewis & Sugai et al., 1999). These students are 'sandwiched' in the middle. Moreover, sometimes these students contain various similarities of all three tiers combined. Therefore, many schools' psychologists have found it very challenging to properly identify with these students (Lewis & Sugai et al., 1999). As a result of this challenge, there is very little support created for these students and the support that is available to these students are over generalized (Lewis & Sugai et al., 1999). Therefore, this study seeks to illuminate shared characteristics of Tier- II students by categorizing trends located within the HIB incident reports.

It was hypothesized that the data from the HIB incident reports may allude to key characteristics and trends shared by Tier-II students. To evaluate this hypothesis, HIB incident reports were extracted from the New Jersey Department of Education Research Database. Results were obtained by accessing HIB aggregated data for each county within the state of New Jersey. The HIB reports were then clustered in three groups: Means of HIB, Motivating Factors/ Characteristics, Location and Frequency of Incidents. The subgroups included under Means of HIB include (i.e. ID#, Gestures, Written Acts, Verbal Acts, Physical Acts, Electronic Communication and grade level. The subgroups under Motivating Factors/ Characteristics include: (i.e. Race, Color, Ancestry, National Origin, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Other). The HIB reports which were classified under the cluster of location was organized into eleven subgroups which includes: School entrance, Off of School Grounds, Off of the School Site, Exterior of the Building, Bus, Other School Grounds, Other Inside the School, The Corridor, Classroom, and Cafeteria. The last cluster included in this sample was the Frequency of Incidents, this cluster was organized into three subgroups: (i.e. first of single incident, Second or Third incident, Greater than Three incidents).

### **Explanation of findings**

The results indicated the majority of HIB occurs within the classroom at 32%. The results showed a higher than expected scenario score.

These findings show that it is erroneous to believe the classroom may serve as a safe heaven for our students and thus dispels the myth that bullying behaviors occur more frequently in remote areas where there may be little to none adult supervision. Students spend approximately 80% of their school day within the traditional classroom setting. However, the data suggests the amount of bullying that occurs within the classroom may not be conducive towards helping our students focus and retain classroom concepts. The significant percentage of HIB behaviors occurring within the classroom may cause students to obtain a negative perception about the overall classroom climate and this negative perception may cause students, especially tier- II students to struggle with their academic achievement and socio-emotional competence. These results are substantial when considering tier-II students, students who fall within the second category of the standard PBIS model (i.e. see appendix A for conceptual model of PBIS) because these students are already at risk. The students at this level may be at risk due to low academic achievement, poor social skills, learning difficulties and possibly challenging family situations (Lewis & Sugai et al., 1999).

Under the category of means of HIB, the majority of incidents were verbal at 57%, negatively bullied their peers by intimidating their peers based on a distinguishing characteristic 23% of the students who committed acts of HIB were enrolled in grades 5-7 and 30% of students who committed bullying behaviors were enrolled in grades 7&8.

Students enrolled in grades 5-8 account for approximately 30% of all the students who are enrolled in school however the students belonging to these grade levels were responsible for over 50% of the HIB incidents committed. Under the category of SES, the principle investigator found no statistical significant correlation between HIB incidents reported and counties socioeconomic status. Therefore, the data suggests students are more likely to lean towards the at- risk spectrum and students who are already at the at- risk level these students may be more so likely to become tertiary level students or bullies. During the middle school level students are experiencing an enormous amount of biological and psychological instability and societal pressure.

#### **Areas of limitation and future directions**

The principle investigator ran into numerous significant limitations through out the course of this research study. The HIB reports are intended to be anonymous. Therefore the following categories are protected under the Anti- Bullying Legislature: race, color, religion, age, ancestry/ethnic/national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental, physical or sensory and any other distinguishing character that may give way to the identity of the child who was the perpetrator in the incident. Thus, the data was not too flexible or favorable to categorize the data of bullying behaviors committed by the tier – II student.

Unfortunately, the restriction of the data did not allow the researcher to attain significant results to aid in the identification and classification of Tier – II students.



There was no available way to characterize Tier-II students by demographic information (i.e. gender, ethnic background, religious status). The only demographic information, which contributed to the classification of Tier-II students, was the student's grade level which thus for told the students age group. The data only allowed to Principal Investigator to categorize and group behavioral trends of Tier-II students according to means of HIB location and grade level. Identifying the grade level and SES where students may be more prone towards becoming at-risk students was significant according to the researchers' opinion.

The second implication was the discrepancy of the number of students who were reported to the NJ Dept. ED in 2011-2012. Of the 13,101 students who committed acts only 12,024 of the incidents were approved by the districts DOE and completed within the correct 10-day timeline. This is a factor to consider in which may have lead to human error and statistical error when reporting results. Furthermore, the investigator also noticed 30% of public schools within the state of NJ reported zero HIB incident reports for the entire academic school year. The attainment of this score was skeptical to the researcher because it highly unlikely for this significant number of institutions to experience no HIB from their students for an entire school year. Moreover, there was also a significant number of high enrollment districts (i.e. high enrollment was classified were districts within an enrollment size greater than 4,000) reported extremely low HIB incidents.

Once again the principal investigator found these results of 'nearly' perfect HIB scores to be skeptical. Therefore, the researcher is aware that the discrepancy in the data may also be due to human error and the inaccuracy and validity of the institutions ability to follow the protocol outlined in the Anti Bullying Legislation.

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## Appendix A

### Sample Harassment Intimidation Bullying Incident Reporting Form

Reporting person (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Targeted student: \_\_\_\_\_

Your email address (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Your phone number (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school adult you've already contacted (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of bullies (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

On what dates did the incident(s) happen (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

Where did the incident happen? Circle all that apply.

Classroom    Hallway    Restroom    Playground    Locker room  
Lunchroom    Sport field    Parking lot    School bus    Internet    Cell  
phone    During a school activity    Off school property    On the way  
to/from school  
Other (Please describe.)

Please check the box that best describes what the bully did. Please choose all that apply.

- Hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, hair pulling or throwing something at the student
- Getting another person to hit or harm the student
- Teasing, name calling, making critical remarks or threatening in person, by phone, by e-mail, etc.
- Putting the student down and making the student a target of jokes
- Making rude and/or threatening gestures
- Excluding or rejecting the student
- Making the student fearful, demanding money or exploiting

- Spreading harmful rumors or gossip
- Cyber bullying (bullying by calling, texting, emailing, web posting, etc.)
- Other

**If you select other, please describe:**

---

---

**Why do you think the harassment, intimidation or bullying occurred?**

---

**Were there any witnesses? es No If yes, please provide their names:**

---

---

**Did a physical injury result from this incident? If yes, please describe.**

---

---

**Was the target absent from school as a result of the incident? Yes No  
If yes, please describe**

---

---

**Is there any additional information?**

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---

---

**Thank you for reporting!**

-----**For Office Use**-----  
**Received by:**

---

**Date received:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Action taken:**

---

---

Parent/guardian contacted:

Circle one: **Resolved**      **Unresolved**

Referred to: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B: PBIS Model**

