Bullying & Cyberbulling

Using the articles below, write a multiparagraph essay in which you take a position on **should schools be involved in trying to stop bullying and cyberbullying?**
Make sure to watch your time carefully so you can:

- Plan your essay.
- Write your essay.
- Revise and edit your essay.

Be sure to:

- Introduce claim.
- Use evidence from several of the sources.

The grading rubric is on the last page.

Bullying and Harassment

"I'm being bullied at school and on the bus, and I'm afraid of telling somebody because they might hear about it and do something bad to me," a girl from Texas wrote in a letter to the Obama administration's top education official, Arne Duncan. It's not the kind of letter you would think the secretary of education would get, but Mr. Duncan said he gets them all the time.

"I don't really like telling on somebody, but I've told the principal and [he] didn't do anything about it. I've considered suicide but that won't help anything; that will only hurt my family. Please give me advice about what to do."

Such things are happening in schools across the country, Duncan said during a Sept. 21 summit on bullying prevention.

Following the suicide of 14-year-old Jamey Rodemeyer of Amherst, N.Y., Duncan and other education experts said schools must confront the bullying problem head on, or they may risk more young lives.

"You have to take these tough issues on openly and honestly," Duncan said in a brief interview with the Buffalo News during the conference. "It's painful. It's difficult work. It's tough stuff. But ultimately it saves lives."

What's more, the Education Department (ED) can help school districts do just that.

"We work very directly with districts that want our help," Duncan said. "We've had some pretty significant success with working with districts, working on preventing this and dealing with the aftermath of these devastating tragedies. If that is something the [Williamsville] district is interested in, we would love to be helpful."

Duncan told a crowd of several hundred at the summit that the Obama administration had made bullying a priority. In addition to setting up an informational website, www.stopbullying.gov, the administration is also working on developing a definition of bullying to help schools confront the problem.

"Changing the culture and changing the climate is very important" to preventing bullying, said Jamie M. Ostrov, an associate professor of psychology at the University at Buffalo who is serving the panel that's coming up with that uniform definition.

Survey

In an Associated Press/MTV poll, 56 percent of respondents, who were between 14 and 24 years old, said they had "experienced abuse" through digital media.

That's up from 50 percent in a similar 2009 survey.

Some of the most common forms of harassment include posting something online that's not true, writing things online that are "mean" and sharing texts or other messages that were meant to stay private, according to the results.

And while the ability to stay anonymous online is often cited as a reason why digital bullying can get so bad, survey respondents said that, more often than not, that's not the case.

"Most say the perpetrators of the bad behavior are people they know very well," the survey reads.

If there's a bright spot, it's that more respondents this year said they recognize online bullying as a problem than did two years ago and more said they'd intervene if they saw it happening.

Fifty-six percent said they would likely intervene if they saw someone being harassed online, compared with 47 percent in 2009.

The survey is part of MTV's "A Thin Line," campaign, a multiyear effort to stamp out digital abuse.

"The campaign is built on the understanding that there's a 'thin line' between what may begin as a harmless joke and something that could end up having a serious impact on you or someone else," MTV writes on the campaign's website. "We know no generation has ever had to deal with this, so we want to partner with you to help figure it out."

The survey results were based on interviews of 1,355 teens and young adults conducted between August 18-31.

Cyberbullying

Phoebe Prince is loved by her peers. At least, now she is. Hundreds of people have lent their voices to support her on Facebook. Taylor Gosselin wrote, "Your story touched my heart." Dori Fitzgerald Acevedo added, "I am so glad we are not letting this get swept under the carpet."

"This" is what some might call bullicide—suicide by bullying.

Before Phoebe Prince hanged herself, she was a new student at South Hadley High School in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Phoebe was a newly arrived Irish immigrant, but that doesn't seem to be what ignited the ire of her peers—or her own self-doubt. Instead, Phoebe reportedly dared to date boys whom others thought should be off limits to her.

Girls at Phoebe's school reportedly…harassed her in person and on Facebook. Public documents indicate that at least one student gloated after Phoebe took her own life, "I don't care that she's dead."

Phoebe's tormentors have since been dubbed the "Mean Girls," after the clique in the 2004 Tina Fey-scripted movie of the same name. And for the Mean Girls of South Hadley, the consequences of their purported actions have been severe. They are now maligned across the Internet, from postings on Facebook to the comment areas of news websites worldwide.

The Mean Girls, along with two male students, also face an array of criminal charges for allegedly bullying Phoebe Prince. Since then, it's become clear that Phoebe's reasons for taking her own life were complicated. She had struggled with depression and had even attempted suicide once before. But the bullying she endured definitely had an impact on her.

New Term, Old Concept

Cyberbullying. The word didn't even exist a decade ago, yet the problem is pervasive in children's lives today.

Simply put, cyberbullying is the repeated use of technology to harass, humiliate or threaten. When fingers take to the keyboard, or thumbs type into a cell phone and craft messages of hate or malice about a specific person, cyberbullying is emerging. And unlike most types of traditional bullying, it comes with a wide audience.

"You can pass around a note to classmates making fun of a peer, and it stays in the room," said Sheri Bauman, a 30-year education veteran who now works as director of the school counseling

master's degree program at the University of Arizona. "But when you post that same note online, thousands can see it. The whole world becomes witness and is invited to participate."

Anywhere from one-third to one-half of youths have been targeted by cyberbullies. And those experiences produce damaging consequences—everything from a decline in academic performance to thoughts about suicide.

"Our study of upwards of 2,000 middle school students revealed that cyberbullying victims were nearly twice as likely to attempt suicide compared to students not targeted with online abuse," said Sameer Hinduja, the study co-author, who is also an associate professor at Florida Atlantic University and a founder of the Cyberbullying Research Center. "Cyberbullying clearly heightens instability and hopelessness in adolescents' minds."

Findings like these, and actual deaths like Phoebe's, lend a sense of urgency to anti-cyberbullying efforts. Legally speaking, those efforts can be tricky for school administrators. The judiciary has long struggled to balance freedom of speech against the darker side of digital communication.

More and more though, courts and law enforcement are sending the message that cyberbullying will not be tolerated. For instance, in March 2010, California's Second Appellate District concluded that online threats against a student were not protected speech and allowed a civil lawsuit against the alleged perpetrators, their parents and school officials to proceed.

The notion that schools must respond to behavior that takes place off-campus and online may seem like a tall order. But schools are coming to understand that bullies don't just attack in the cafeteria or on the playground. "Wherever kids go with their computers or phones, which is nearly everywhere, the bullies come with them," explained Bauman.

A 2010 study by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation found that technology access among children has skyrocketed since 1999. Today, 93 percent of children ages 8 to 18 have computers at home, 66 percent have personal cell phones (on which they are more likely to text than talk), and 76 percent own another multimedia device, such as an iPod.

These tools give them access to a dizzying array of social media. Some of them, such as Twitter and Facebook, are well known among parents and teachers. But others, such as Formspring, fly well below the radar of most adults. Yet it's sites like Formspring that can create the biggest headaches. Formspring offers its users total anonymity. That makes it at once a huge draw for curious teenagers and a nearly perfect medium for cyberbullies.

Relieving the Drama

The boundary between off-campus behavior and school life evaporated for Highline Academy, a K-8 charter in Denver, last spring when a conflict fueled by Facebook posts ultimately led to a physical altercation in the middle school. *(Editor's Note: The author sits on Highline's board of directors.)*

"When I looked at the pages, I was shocked by how freely and harshly the kids were talking to and about one another," said principal Gregg Gonzales.

In the wake of the incident, Highline officials spoke with students in morning meetings and issued a special packet of information to parents and guardians about cyberbullying and Internet safety. Still, a new Facebook page soon appeared, with a growing stream of posts about a student directly involved in the altercation.

"As a community, we needed to step back from the incident and relieve some of the drama," Gonzales said. He asked every parent in the middle school to support a 48-hour moratorium on Facebook activity at home. He also asked parents to discuss the use of the social networking site with their children.

Gonzales and his colleagues also placed personal phone calls to parents of students who had engaged in the online conversations. "It may be outside our jurisdiction to dictate what students do on their own time, but it was important to let parents know we'd discovered their child had engaged in cyberbullying or inappropriate conversations about the incident," Gonzales said.

As it turned out, his initial shock about students' online behavior was shared. "Numerous parents came back to us and said, 'I had no idea'—no idea what their child was doing online, or even that they had a Facebook page."

Such responses are typical. A 2009 study from Common Sense Media found that parents nationally underestimate children's use of social networking sites and often are unaware of *how* they are used. Thirty-seven percent of students, for example, admitted they'd made fun of a peer online, but only 18 percent of parents thought their child would engage in such conduct.

"The episode taught us—teachers, parents and students—that practicing respect, one of our core values, means practicing it wherever we are, at school or online," Gonzales said.

Getting in Front of the Problems

The Seattle Public School District took a proactive stance last year when it launched a pilot curriculum to prevent cyberbullying in its junior high and middle schools.

Mike Donlin, the senior program consultant who led the curriculum's development, says the district chose to create its own resources rather than use off-the-shelf products. This ensured that the resources would be easy to use and easy to integrate into existing curricula. "There also was the issue of cost," he said. "We believed we could create something great with far less expense."

Unlike many programs that address cyberbullying piecemeal—focusing only on Internet safety skills, for example—the Seattle curriculum attacked the entire problem. It did this by using the four most promising prevention practices. They are:

- Debunking misperceptions about digital behavior;
- Building empathy and understanding;
- Teaching online safety skills;
- Equipping young people with strategies to reject digital abuse in their lives.

The Seattle curriculum also recognizes the importance of parental engagement by offering take-home letters and activities.

Academically, the curriculum focuses on writing. This not only boosts student skills in a tested area, it also allows the program to discard common, ineffective practices. Instead of asking students to sign a pre-crafted pledge, for example, the curriculum prompts children to write personal contracts for themselves about their online behavior.

The curriculum also educates teachers about cyberbullying and introduces a language they can share with their students. "We couch lessons in a way that resonates for teachers, too," said Donlin. "So, we use the Golden Rule."

Still, some information requires repeated explanation. Some might wonder, for example, why the curriculum prompts students to try to see things from the *bully*'s perspective. "A single student can be a victim, a bystander and a bully in different moments," Donlin explained. "Maybe a child was bullied at school this morning, but gets online later and bullies back. Their roles shift. Technology gives them tremendous freedom and power to reach out and touch in nearly every moment, for good or evil."

Learning how to resist the urge to "bully back" is important for many students, as is un-learning some common myths about being online. Kids often think they can be anonymous on the Internet, or that what they do there is fleeting. Both ideas are mistaken. The Library of Congress, for example, is archiving all Twitter messages sent from March 2006 forward. Even the "mean tweets" will be immortalized for future generations. "Everything students do online reflects on them, permanently," says Donlin.

For teachers, a common stumbling block revolves around First Amendment protections and discomfort about corralling students' speech. Donlin believes that should not be a problem in most cases. "We have Second Amendment rights to possess weapons, but that doesn't mean we allow children to bring guns to school," he observed. "When it comes to cyberbullying, we're still talking about school safety."

The new curriculum hasn't been a total remedy for Seattle's schools. In January, one middle school suspended two dozen students who "friended" or became "fans" of a Facebook page maligning another child. It was a reminder that, despite the best efforts, a school's struggle against cyberbullying never ends. "Phoebe Prince was lost earlier this year," Donlin said. "There were others before her. …Their names and stories faded. My fear is that we'll forget the lesson learned—again. We have to teach this *now*."

Disciplining Bullies

Not As Easy (or Effective) As It Sounds

Advocates have spent years trying to get schools to take bullying and cyberbullying seriously. It's no wonder then that so many express support for increasingly harsh consequences being handed out across the country.

When a prosecutor charged nine students with criminal offenses related to bullying Phoebe Prince, Elizabeth Englander, director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, called it a "watershed" moment. Across the country, in Seattle, after more than 20 students were suspended for taunting a classmate online, Mike Donlin, a senior consultant in the district, called it "a clear message—hard and fast." Many states and districts mandate required punishments like suspension or expulsion, and some are now considering heftier use of criminal penalties as well.

Sheri Bauman, the director of the school counseling master's degree program at the University of Arizona, encourages everyone to take a deep breath.

"Pushing children out of school isn't going to help," she said. "Bullying, online and in person, is rarely solved with punishment. Children who are punished typically persist; they just change their methods."

Bauman, who has studied cyberbullying and its traditional counterpart in the United States, Australia, Canada, Germany and Norway, points to different models of justices. She prefers the "Method of Shared Concern," which involves all parties—the bully, the victim and the bystanders—in examining and addressing conflicts. However, this needs to be done by educators who have been properly trained or it can make the situation worse (*see Recommended Resources*).

"We need to expand our toolbox," Bauman said. "Punishments may make us feel better or safer, but other options can have real results."

Are You a Cyberbully?

Often, people who are victims are also bullies. Before you feel too bad for yourself, take the quiz below to find if you, too, are part of the cyberbullying problem! Rate yourself on the following point scale according to if, and how many times, you have done the below activities. Give yourself 0 points if you've never done it, 1 point if you have done it 1 or 2 times, 2 points if you have done it 3-5 times, 3 points if you have done it more than 5 times.

Have you ever...

_____Signed on with someone else's screen name to gather info?

_____Sent an e-mail or online greeting card from someone's account?

_____Impersonated someone over IM or online?

_____Teased or frightened someone over IM?

_____Not told someone who you really are online, telling them to "guess"?

_____Forwarded a private IM conversation or e-mail without the permission of the other person?

_____Changed your profile or away message designed to embarrass or frighten someone?

_____Posted pictures or information about someone on a Web site without their consent?

_____Created an Internet poll, either over IM or on a Web site, about someone without their consent?

_____Used information found online to follow, tease, embarrass or harass someone in person?

_____Sent rude or scary things to someone, even if you were just joking?

_____Used bad language online?

_____Signed someone else up for something online without their permission?

_____Used an IM or e-mail address that looked like someone else's?

_____Used someone else's password for any reason without their permission?

_____Hacked into someone else's computer or sent a virus or Trojan horse to them?

_____Insulted someone in an interactive game room?

____Posted rude things or lies about someone online?

____Voted at an online bashing poll or posted to a guestbook saying rude or mean things?

Now calculate your total score:

0 – 5 Points: Cyber Saint

Congratulations! You're a cyber saint! Your online behavior is exemplary! Keep up the good work!

6-10 Points: Cyber Risky

Well, you're not perfect, but few people are. Chances are you haven't done anything terrible and were just having fun, but try not to repeat your behaviors, since they are all offenses. Keep in mind the pain that your fun might be causing others!

11-18 Points: Cyber Sinner

Your online behavior needs to be improved! You have done way too many cyber no-no's! Keep in mind that these practices are dangerous, wrong, and punishable and try to be clean up that cyber record!
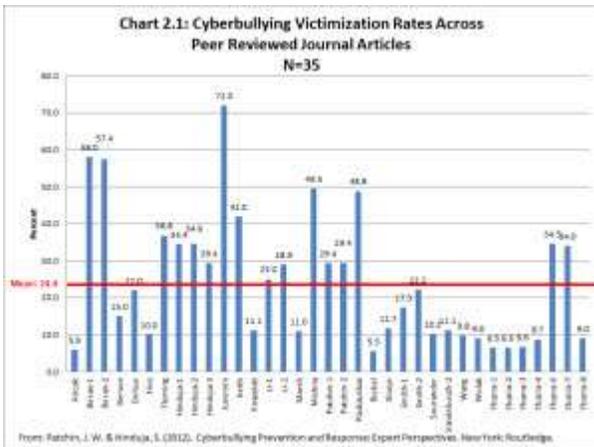
More than 18: Cyber Bully

Put on the brakes and turn that PC/MAC/text-messaging device around! You are headed in a very bad direction. You qualify, without doubt, as a cyberbully. You need to sign off and think about where that little mouse of yours has been clicking before serious trouble results for you and/or your victim(s), if it hasn't happened already!

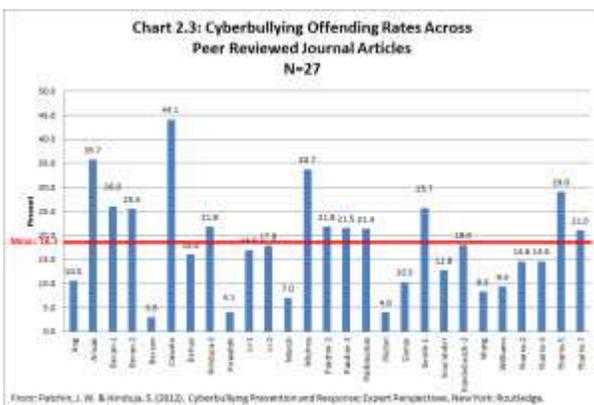# How Many Teens are Actually Involved in Cyberbullying?

Estimates of the number of teens who have experienced cyberbullying are all over the map. I can point you to a paper published in a peer-reviewed academic journal that says that 72% of students have been cyberbullied while another published study puts the number at 5.5%. The numbers are similarly varied when it comes to the number of students who have cyberbullied others. So how many teens have been involved? Last summer we reviewed all of the published papers on cyberbullying to try to get a handle on this question. These results were published in our book Cyberbullying Prevention and Response: Expert Perspectives, which included contributions from a number of knowledgeable sources from around the United States (see a list of authors here).

As of the summer of 2011, there had been at least forty-two articles on the topic of cyberbullying published in peer-reviewed journals across a wide variety of academic disciplines. Although there are additional articles being published quite regularly and it is likely that we have missed some published works, this review represents the most comprehensive summary of available research findings at the time of its writing.

Among the thirty-five papers published in peer-reviewed journals prior to the summer of 2011 that included cyberbullying victimization rates, figures ranged from 5.5% to 72% with an average of 24.4% (see Chart 2.1). Most of studies (n=22) estimate that anywhere from 6% to 30% of teens have experienced some form of cyberbullying. These findings are consistent with our own research over the last ten years. As illustrated in this chart, the percent of youth who responded to our surveys who have experienced cyberbullying at some point in their lifetime ranged from 18.8% to 40.6% in our studies, with an average of 27.3%. Our most recent study based on data collected in the spring of 2010 found that about 21% of youth had been the target of cyberbullying. To be clear, this generally means that one out of every five kids you know has been cyberbullied.

Chart 2.1: Cyberbullying Victimization Rates Across Peer Reviewed Journal Articles N=35

From: Patchin, J. W. & Hinduja, S. (2012). Cyberbullying Prevention and Response: Expert Perspectives. New York: Routledge.

Relatedly, the number of youth who admit to cyberbullying others at some point in their lives is a bit lower, though quite comparable. Among twenty-seven papers published in peer-reviewed journals that included cyberbullying offending rates (see Chart 2.3), 3% to 44.1% of teens reported cyberbullying others (average of 18%). Across all of our studies (see this chart), the rates ranged from about 11% to as high as 20% in our most recent study. The average percent of youth who reported cyberbullying others in our studies was 16.8%. This once again means that, generally speaking, slightly less than one out of every five adolescents you know has at some point cyberbullied someone else. These rates are also consistent with the weight of the available research conducted by others.

Chart 2.3: Cyberbullying Offending Rates Across Peer Reviewed Journal Articles N=27

From: Patchin, J. W. & Hinduja, S. (2012). Cyberbullying Prevention and Response: Expert Perspectives. New York: Routledge.

Much of the variation in the figures reported across these studies can be explained by the methodology utilized. For example, some researchers define cyberbullying very broadly (any online harm), whereas others define it more narrowly (repeated harassment using cell phones). Moreover, some studies sample middle school students and others target high school-aged youth. Some studies ask students to report any experience they have had during their

lifetime while others focus on cyberbullying experienced in the previous 30 days. Some use online samples while others survey students at school or in their homes. The variations are endless! As you might expect, those studies that sampled older students who were online using a broad definition of cyberbullying were more likely to report higher prevalence rates. Some of the lower rates were found from phone surveys where respondents might not be fully forthcoming with their experiences since mom or dad or someone else may have been listening in on the conversation. There are strengths and weaknesses in every research methodology and we just need to be mindful of what those are.

Despite the range of figures reported in the research, the actual number of youth who experience cyberbullying (either as an aggressor or target) is probably lower than some would have you believe. Some media reports would like us to think that we are in the midst of a "cyberbullying epidemic" or that cyberbullying is "increasing dramatically!" From my perspective if just one teen experiences cyberbullying it is too many, and Sameer and I work to reduce the number, no matter how large it is. But it is misleading to characterize cyberbullying as an epidemic that is out of control. Research doesn't support that conclusion. To be fair, research does demonstrates that teens are reluctant to tell adults about their experiences with cyberbullying, so the numbers reported in the above studies could be a bit low. That said, anonymous and confidential research is usually much more reliable than other methods of determining adolescent experiences with problematic or deviant behavior.

As researchers we have to look at all of the available evidence (both quantitative and qualitative, formal and informal) to determine a reasonable estimate of the number of youth who experience cyberbullying. From that perspective I think it is likely that at least 20-25% of school-aged youth have experienced cyberbullying at some point recently (within a few months). And while we don't see any compelling evidence that this number has increased significantly over the last 10 years, we will continue to follow trends to see if that changes. Of course more research is necessary and we will evaluate and analyze any new figures that come out in the coming years so that we can refine our understanding and assess any changes that might be occurring over time.

For more information, please see:

Patchin, J. W. & Hinduja, S. (2012). Cyberbullying: An Update and Synthesis of the Research. In J. W. Patchin and S. Hinduja (Eds.), Cyberbullying Prevention and Response: Expert Perspectives (Chapter 2, pp. 13-35). New York: Routledge.

Argumentative Essay Writing Rubric

Statement of Purpose and Focus and Organization 40%	**0**	**1**
Claim is clearly stated, focused, and strongly maintained and appropriate for the purpose, audience, and task.		
Alternate or opposing claims are clearly addressed. (7th grade only)		
A variety of transitions are used to clarify the relationship between and among ideas.		
Introduction and conclusion are effective for audience and purpose. There are at least 5 paragraphs.		

Evidence and Elaboration 40%	**0**	**1**
Claims are supported with relevant evidence from credible sources and clear reasoning.		
Use of evidence from sources is smoothly integrated, cited, comprehensive, and concrete.		
A variety of effective elaborative techniques are used.		
Use of precise academic and domain-specific vocabulary is clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose.		

Editing and Conventions 20%	**0**	**1**
Some errors in usage and sentence formation may be present, but no systematic pattern of errors is displayed.		
Use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling is adequate.		