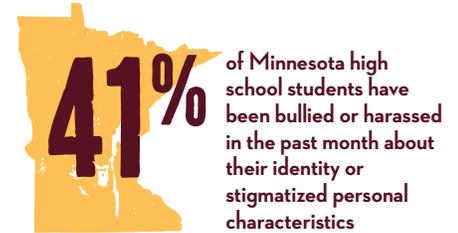


# Breaking through on identity-based bullying and aggression

## MAKING YOUR SCHOOL AN INCLUSIVE SPACE THAT PROTECTS AGAINST HARMFUL AGGRESSION

Minnesota schools are special places where students can engage, learn, grow, and bring their full selves to their work. Whether in person or online, you are committed to creating a place where students can come ready to learn and apply themselves so they can excel in school and in life.

However, the reality is that Minnesota students are reporting being bullied at school in high numbers. School leaders can take action to ensure school is a safe place for students to show up and learn.



“PEOPLE WANT TO SAY YOU’RE BEING RACIST WHEN YOU CALL SOMEONE THE N-WORD OR SOMETHING, BUT THERE ARE SO MANY MORE SUBTLE WAYS TO BE RACIST, AND MORE HURTFUL, EVEN, THAN JUST STRAIGHT-UP SAYING SOMETHING RACIST.”

— STUDENT, AGE 15

### WHAT IS IDENTITY-BASED AGGRESSION?

While there are still experiences of traditional bullying, like physical altercations and name calling, many students experience aggression tied to their identity. Aggression based on identities like gender, race or ethnicity, sexuality, and body size has been shown to have a disproportionately harmful effect on students.

Aggression that focuses on a student’s identity attacks the core of who they are, the unique background and experiences that shape who they are as they move through the world, now and as an adult. These aggressions are cumulative and constant reminders of persecution and injustices that have been historically experienced by people who share their gender, race, sexual orientation, and body size.

There are actions you can take to make sure identity-based aggression does not hold students back or create a climate where they feel afraid to be present and ready to participate in class.

**3.5x**

Students of color are bullied or harassed about race, ethnicity, country of origin 3.5 times more than white students.

**8x**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning students are bullied or harassed about their sexual orientation 8 times more than straight students.

**6.5x**

Transgender and gender diverse students are bullied or harassed about their gender 6.5 times more than cisgender students.

**2x**

Overweight or obese students are bullied or harassed about their weight or size 2 times more than students at a healthy weight or underweight.

MICROAGGRESSIONS ARE A COMMON TYPE OF ATTACK RELATED TO IDENTITY. THESE SUBTLE INSULTS OR ACTIONS ADD UP AND TELL A STUDENT THAT THEY DON’T BELONG.

### HARMFUL IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Students who experience this type of hostility have a variety of adverse physical, emotional, and behavioral health outcomes. Research has shown that experiencing identity-based aggression is linked with general health symptoms like headaches and stomach aches, substance use problems, and poorer mental health. These experiences also affect school engagement and performance.

“I DIDN’T THINK IT WAS THAT BIG A PROBLEM UP UNTIL I FELT LIKE I NEEDED TO LEAVE THAT SCHOOL, WHICH I DID. BUT IT WAS DEFINITELY AFFECTING A LOT OF MY LIFE. IT WAS AFFECTING MY GRADES, IT WAS AFFECTING HOW I PLAYED SPORTS, IT WAS AFFECTING MY FAMILY.”

— STUDENT, AGE 14



“ I THINK WHAT CAN BE MOST EFFECTIVE IS TEACHERS OR ANY EDUCATORS IN THE BUILDING WHO ADDRESS IT IN THE INSTANT IT HAPPENS, SO THAT IT SHOWS FIDELITY AND A COMMITMENT ACROSS ALL SPACES, THAT EDUCATORS ARE NOT GOING TO ALLOW OR LOOK THE OTHER WAY WHEN STUDENTS ARE EXPERIENCING A NEGATIVE INTERACTION FROM A PEER IN A BULLYING WAY.  
— ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL

## WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A LEADER

As leaders in education, you can set the course for your school to be a place where all students are included and have the environment they need to excel.

### PROVIDE TRAINING TO TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF

to recognize and respond swiftly and appropriately when they observe or are alerted to an aggression, responding to the student who is being targeted and affirming their identity and safety. Consider providing training so staff can use restorative justice techniques or provide regular access to restorative justice experts for teachers and staff.



The “[Speak Up at School Guide](#)” provides concrete recommendations for responding to incidents as they arise, and the Minnesota Department of Education has this [resource guide](#) for school staff responding to racism, violence, and trauma.

### A CONTINUUM OF RESPONSES AND SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE.

Make sure your staff knows they have a continuum of responses to step in and support students who are targeted. Their responses can help the growth of all students involved, including those who witness or overhear aggressions, with interventions that develop deeper empathy and different actions from students that have perpetrated the harm as well.

[Education MN](#) has more resources to learn about identity-based aggression, how students experience it, and how other teachers and schools are responding.



### FOCUS ON EXPANDING CULTURALLY AFFIRMING EDUCATION AND SOCIAL GROUPS

to elevate and celebrate racial and ethnic identities, gender identity, sexual orientation, and body size.

You can do this by creating space for clubs, events and lessons that increase the presence and prominence of diversity in the school. Increased representation across the school supports a climate that is welcoming of all students.



### ALLOCATE RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS, SOCIAL WORKERS, SCHOOL NURSES,

and other staff who have training to respond to social-emotional needs. They can support students when situations arise and help them process experiences of aggression when they occur. Consider adding an equity-focused staff member to increase support for marginalized students.



Place attention on the issue of identity-based aggression. Show that your school understands its cumulative impact and will promote a healthier school climate for all students and staff.

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research uses data from the Minnesota Student Survey, the School Health Profiles Survey, focus groups with diverse youth boards, and interviews with Minnesota students, parents, and school personnel. To learn more about identity-based aggression and how you can support your school staff and students, visit [Healthy Environments and Vulnerable Youth](#) for more information on our methods, findings, and recommendations.

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