

Summary of Maine Youth Voices Survey, June 2011

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Through a grant from the Maine Parent Federation, students at fourteen schools in Maine were surveyed in spring 2011 using an online survey. We attempted to get as close to full student participation at each school as possible. 3,733 students completed our survey. Individual schools will not be identified in this report. The schools are distributed throughout the state and mix high- and low- income communities. Schools represented include K-12, K-8 and 6-8 grade schools. Eleven High Schools volunteered to participate in this project, but did not follow through this spring, likely because of the time demands of other surveys and required testing. The Maine Youth Voices survey is modeled on the national Youth Voice Project research being carried out by Stan Davis and Charisse Nixon, PhD (Penn State Erie). This summary will list the questions used and interpret the pattern of responses for each question.

Demographics

The following tables illustrate the demographics reported by the students who took this survey:

Grade:

	Percentage	Response count
4	1%	20
5	5%	168
6	28%	984
7	33%	1133
8	31%	1063
9	1%	33
10	1%	29
11	1%	20
12	1%	23

Gender:

	Percentage	Response count
Male	45%	1561
Female	48%	1675
Prefer not to answer	7%	249

We added “prefer not to answer” as an answer option to allow youth who may not define themselves within traditional gender boundaries an option. It is not certain which other youth may have chosen this answer option.

Special Education status:

	Percentage	Response count
Yes	13%	443
No	87%	3010

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Race	Percentage	Response count
African-American	2%	60
Asian-American	3%	88
Hispanic	1%	38
White	77%	2684
Native American	2%	57
Mixed race	5%	166
Prefer not to answer	11%	375
All students of color	12%	409

NOTE: The small numbers of students reporting themselves as African-American, Hispanic, and Native American in this survey population mean that survey results comparing youth from different racial and ethnic backgrounds should be considered preliminary. We recommend a larger survey, including some of Maine’s communities that include more youth of color, to further test what we found in regard to racial differences in mistreatment.

Our first set of questions measure school climate and connectedness, These are protective factors working against negative effects which may come from student mistreatment by peers.

Do you believe the discipline system (rules and punishments) at our school is fair?

Answers to this question indicate student buy-in with regard to discipline procedures and youth perception of staff consistency in discipline. We suggest setting a goal of at least 80 percent of students answering either “agree” or “strongly agree.” The answers to this question can be analyzed by demographics to get a sense for how different groups experience the school discipline system. We can increase the number of students who see discipline as fair by involving students in deciding about rules and expectations and by building consistency of staff action when rules are broken. We can involve students in advance in identifying which consequences are likely to be helpful when different specific rules are broken. We can work toward predictability of consequences based on behavior, so students know that the outcome of their behavior will depend on what they did, rather than on who they are. Results are listed below and in graphs A, B, C, and D (see appendix)

Maine overall	77% (Range of Maine schools surveyed: 65%-82%)
Grade 5	81%
Grade 6	81%
Grade 7	80%
Grade 8	70%
Male	75%
Female	80%
Gender: prefer not to answer	64%
Help from special education	74%
No help from special education	77%
African-American	53%
Asian-American	81%
Hispanic	53%
White	78%
Native American	70%
Mixed race	65%

Discussion: Overall results are close to the 80% target figure. It is notable that African American and Hispanic youth report much lower perceptions of fairness in discipline than do White youth.

How many adults at our school do you have a positive relationship with? That means they welcome you to school and you would go to them if you had a problem.

A large body of research shows that youth who have positive connections with adults outside the family are more resilient – that is, they are less likely to be traumatized by negative events. In addition, developing research on the effects of social isolation or ostracism suggests that social isolation at school is uniquely damaging and that connections with both peers and adults are a key element in preventing harm. In the Youth Voice Project, Dr. Charisse Nixon and I found that elementary and middle school youth who said they feel they belong at school reported lower levels of trauma due to peer mistreatment. High school youth who said they were valued and respected at school also reported less trauma from peer mistreatment. Feeling connected to school staff is a key element of feeling a sense of belonging and of being valued and respected. Youth who feel connected to adults at school are more likely to seek help from adults if support is needed. Youth are also more likely to respond to efforts to change their behavior. For a summary of research on the positive effects of connectedness to school, see the *Wingspread Declaration* [Journal of School Health, <http://www.jhsph.edu/wingspread/Septemberissue.pdf>].

We suggest schools set the goal of having 95 percent or more students report they feel connected to one or more staff members. This should also be our goal across subgroups at the school – for both males and females, for youth in special education and not in special education, and for minority racial and ethnic groups.

Maine results (see also graphs A, B, C, and D in appendix)

% of youth reporting that they have a positive connection with at least one adult at school:

Maine overall	90% (Range of Maine schools surveyed: 76% to 93%)
Grade 5	92%
Grade 6	93%
Grade 7	91%
Grade 8	89%
Male	89%
Female	92%
Gender: prefer not to answer	84%
Help from special education	92%
No help from special education	90%
African-American	76%
Asian-American	85%
Hispanic	82%
White	92%
Native American	86%
Mixed race	89%

Discussion: The overall student sample reports 90% of students saying that they have a positive adult connection at school. This is a positive finding and also indicates a need to build increased connection for the youth who do not, and to build connections to multiple adults for those young people who are connected with only one adult at school. Youth choosing not to answer the gender

question reported a somewhat lower rate of connection, as did African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth. Males were slightly less likely to report connection than females, though this was a small difference. Youth in Special Education report strong connections with school adults.

We asked students: “*What do those adults [the adults you have a positive connection with] do that helps you connect with them?*” Here are some of their answers, reflecting the importance of positive feeling tone, welcoming and greeting, and showing interest in students in building these crucial connections:

- Actually try to understand things from the kids point of view
- First off, they are very nice and I feel like I can tell them anything if something is wrong. I feel that they really do care about their students and are willing to do anything to help us.
- Give a warm welcome.
- Give me advice.
- Greet you outside before the day starts, help you with questions, friendly and open
- He welcomes me to this class room every morning and another one says hello to me every morning.
- I feel connected to them because when I have a problem I will go to them for advice and they don't judge me.
- Provide a humorous and warm environment
- They make me feel like I can be safe here at school, they watch over me and I feel comfortable.
- They talk to me about problems.
- They accept me for who I am, and comfort me when I feel troubled.
- They fix the problem without yelling at me or somebody else.
- They are not strict and are very supportive. They embrace learning and creativity.
- They don't act like kids are beneath them and treat us as equals.
- They don't get mad at you for doing something that you didn't know was against a rule.
- They don't give lots of negative feedback. If the feedback is negative, it doesn't seem negative to me, because it's worded in a way that helps me understand my mistake(s).
- All adults at this school will treat me as if I have been in this school all my life and will always help me if I have problem, big or small.
- By seeing that I need help in a certain subject and offering to help me. Or being kind and answering my questions.
- If I have a problem they listen and help me figure it out.
- If I have a problem they will always try to solve it. They always make me take my mind off of things and try to make me smile when I am down.
- They're always a strong role model and have personal relationships with all of their students.
- ...they always say hi to me when they pass by, and they just make me feel good about school.
- The adults are kind, nice and respectful of our ideas and problems. The adults know what is necessary for us children to succeed.

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- The adults are very nice to me. They give me compliments. They'll say "how's it going?" and stuff like that.
- The adults are welcoming and say hi and if I need help on something in that subject they always help me and then I understand the problem.

Do you feel that you are part of this school? Do you feel valued and respected at school?

These two parallel questions measure young peoples' connectedness with the entire school, not just with a few teachers. They let us identify the extent to which all students, and subgroups of students, feel part of the school, and to set goals and work toward connections. These two questions were included in the National Youth Voice Project survey, and we are reporting national results for comparison purposes. In the Youth Voice Project, students who answered these questions YES! or yes reported lower rates of trauma if they were mistreated. For graphic comparisons, see graphs E, F, G, and H in the appendix, which also compare mistreatment rates and school responsiveness by group.

Do you feel that you are part of this school? Percent responding YES! or yes.

Maine overall	89%	(Range of Maine schools surveyed 84%-94%)
National youth voice project	81%	
Grade 5	90%	
Grade 6	93%	
Grade 7	89%	
Grade 8	88%	
Male	90%	
Female	91%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	75%	
Help from special education	85%	
No help from special education	90%	
African-American	73%	
Asian-American	83%	
Hispanic	79%	
White	91%	
Native American	79%	
Mixed race	85%	

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Do you feel valued and respected at school? Percent responding YES! or yes.

Maine overall	81% (Range of Maine schools surveyed 73%-89%)
National youth voice project	70%
Grade 5	80%
Grade 6	85%
Grade 7	80%
Grade 8	80%
Male	83%
Female	81%
Gender: prefer not to answer	69%
Help from special education	76%
No help from special education	82%
African-American	73%
Asian-American	78%
Hispanic	68%
White	83%
Native American	68%
Mixed race	76%

Discussion: Overall, Maine's schools compare quite favorably with the national Youth Voice Project (YVP) data on these measures of connectedness. African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth were less likely to report belonging and being valued at school in the Maine survey population than were White youth. Youth in special education were somewhat less likely to report belonging and being valued at school than youth not in special education. Youth who chose not to indicate gender were much less likely to report belonging or being valued at school than youth identifying themselves as males or females.

In the past month, how often have you seen students do ___ at school?

In many bullying prevention efforts, survey data has focused primarily on the frequency and location of negative peer-to-peer behavior. Often, youth are given a definition of bullying and then asked to indicate how often they have been bullied, witnessed bullying or bullied others.

There are several problems with using frequency data as the **primary** indicator of the effectiveness of school programs over time. It is clear that the number of reports varies dramatically from survey to survey, based on the exact wording of the definition of bullying used. Many often-used definitions of bullying ask youth to judge the intentions of the person who mistreats others to decide if a behavior is bullying or not. Sometimes youth are asked to make a judgment about the social status or popularity of a young person who mistreats someone else. Other times, survey respondents are asked to judge whether the mistreated youth was hurt by the behavior. These are all difficult distinctions to make with any certainty.

Additionally, before they even read the definition provided, youth have diverse, culturally-derived meanings of the concept of "bullying." Some youth will respond according to their own understanding of the word and not according to the given definition. As we raise students' awareness of bullying, we may expand the range of actions which they label as bullying. If a

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follow-up survey shows an increase in the rate of bullying, we will have no way to know whether there is more peer mistreatment or increased awareness. For those reasons, our survey asked Maine youth about how often they observed a wide range of **specific** behaviors.

This list shows the percentage of surveyed youth who reported seeing the behaviors described once a week or more at school:

- 79% Indirect use of biased language (that's retarded; that's so gay; etc.)
- 75% Talking negatively behind someone's back
- 73% Swearing at someone
- 64% Starting or spreading rumors (true or false)
- 53% Namecalling based on appearance or body shape
- 50% Namecalling based on ability, either intelligence or athletic
- 48% Taking things that belong to other students
- 45% Threatening others with words or actions
- 41% Obscene gestures
- 41% Punching, Kicking, or Jabbing
- 39% Exclusion
- 30% Threatening physical harm or violence
- 29% Namecalling based on sexual orientation
- 27% Namecalling based on gender
- 26% Namecalling based on disability
- 24% Namecalling based on race or ethnic/religious background
- 20% Touching or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies
- 17% Namecalling based on family income

Discussion: The most frequently-reported negative action, indirect use of biased language to describe an object or an event, does not fit into most definitions of bullying, because it is not directed at an individual – yet this behavior does harm because it creates a pervasive atmosphere of bias and of negative attitudes aimed at subgroups. Even the behaviors reported less frequently on the list above have the potential to cause harm when 1/5 to 1/4 or more of students report seeing or hearing them weekly or more often.

If students do these actions, what do you think staff should do? Options are:

- **There should always be a fair consequence for this behavior to keep people safe**
- **There should be a fair consequence if this behavior is repeated**
- **Staff members should discourage the behavior**
- **Staff members should stay out of this unless they are asked for help**

We can survey both staff and students about how school staff should react to a wide range of specific negative peer-to-peer behaviors. The total percentage of youth choosing any of the first three options represents the number who think school staff should intervene to stop the behavior. Basing discipline interventions on student and staff input increases buy-in. When students' responses to these questions indicate that 75 percent or more take potentially harmful actions seriously and want them stopped, we can feed that survey data back to young people so they are influenced by the positive norms of their peers. When fewer than

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75 percent of youth think adults should act in the face of potentially harmful behaviors, this indicates a need for further education about the harm these behaviors can do.

Maine student survey results: % of students who indicated that they believe adults at school should take action to stop the listed behaviors.

- 91% Namecalling based on disability
- 91% Threatening physical harm or violence
- 90% Namecalling based on race or ethnic/religious background
- 90% Punching, Kicking, or Jabbing
- 89% Threatening others with words or actions
- 88% Namecalling based on sexual orientation
- 88% Touching or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies
- 88% Namecalling based on appearance or body shape
- 87% Pushing/Shoving/Slapping/Running into other students roughly
- 86% Namecalling based on family income
- 85% Namecalling based on ability, either intelligence or athletic
- 85% Taking things that belong to other students
- 85% Obscene gestures
- 83% Namecalling based on gender
- 82% Indirect use of biased language (that's retarded; that's so gay; etc.)
- 81% Swearing at someone
- 78% Exclusion
- 76% Starting or spreading rumors (true or false)

Discussion: It is clear that the students surveyed want the behaviors listed to stop. These results, and the accompanying text comments in the survey, could be the basis of a statewide social norms campaign helping youth to see that their peers share their positive values and concerns. They can also communicate to educators that Maine youth want them to take effective action to stop these behaviors.

If students do these things, do you think other students should tell adults?

This question, and the concept of asking about students' thoughts of what peers should do, comes from an influential article: "*Rethinking the Bystander Role in Violence Prevention*¹." The authors propose following the lead of students and community adults in defining which potentially harmful actions youth should tell adults about. These answers let us build widespread agreement that youth should tell adults about the behaviors at the top of the list. When actions that have moderate to high potential for harm are rated low on the "tell adults" list, this is an indicator of the need for education about the harm of these behaviors and about the importance of telling adults about them.

Maine student survey results:

¹ Stueve, A., Dash, K., O'Donnell, L., Tehranifar, P., Wilson, R., Slaby, R., et al. (2006). *Rethinking the bystander role in school violence prevention*. Health Promotion Practice, 7(1), 117-124.

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% of students saying that students should tell adults when they become aware of the listed behaviors:

- 88% Threatening physical harm or violence
- 88% Touching or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies
- 87% Namecalling based on disability
- 86% Namecalling based on race or ethnic/religious background
- 86% Punching, Kicking, or Jabbing
- 86% Namecalling based on sexual orientation
- 81% Threatening others with words or actions
- 80% Namecalling based on appearance or body shape
- 79% Taking things that belong to other students
- 78% Namecalling based on family income
- 72% Namecalling based on ability, either intelligence or athletic
- 70% Namecalling based on gender
- 68% Exclusion
- 67% Obscene gestures
- 63% Swearing at someone
- 58% Starting or spreading rumors (true or false)
- 57% Indirect use of biased language (that's retarded; that's so gay; etc.)

Discussion: More than 75% of students reported a belief that students should tell adults for some of these behaviors, reflecting school cultures that encourage youth to tell adults their concerns. This data can be used for social norms interventions to show youth how many of their peers believe they should tell adults about these serious actions. It is also notable that many fewer reported that they should tell adults about behaviors involving relational aggression (exclusion and rumors). It is also notable that only slightly more than half of students report that students should tell adults about indirect use of biased language, which was the most frequently-observed negative action, and which most students said they want stopped. Schools may not have communicated to youth that they wish to be involved in stopping these particular behaviors.

In the past month, how often have students at your school hurt you emotionally or excluded you? In the past month, how often have students at your school threatened to hurt you or hurt you physically?

Answers to these two questions can be compared to those from the national Youth Voice Project. In that study of more than 13,000 students around the United States, **26 percent** of students said other students at school hurt them emotionally or excluded them twice a month or more in the past month. **11 percent** said other students at school threatened to hurt them or hurt them physically twice a month or more in the past month.

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Maine results show higher rates of mistreatment than the Youth Voice Project's national data. These percentages of Maine youth reported mistreatment twice a month or more in the past month at school. Rates of mistreatment are summarized graphically in graphs E, F, G, and H in the appendix. In the past month, **how often have students at your school hurt you emotionally or excluded you?** Percent responding twice a month or more.

Maine overall	37%
National youth voice project	26%
Grade 5	40%
Grade 6	35%
Grade 7	37%
Grade 8	35%
Male	33%
Female	37%
Gender: prefer not to answer	48%
Help from special education	41%
No help from special education	35%
African-American	44%
Asian-American	36%
Hispanic	51%
White	35%
Native American	39%
Mixed race	41%

In the past month, **how often have students at your school threatened to hurt you or hurt you physically?** Percent responding twice a month or more.

Maine overall	17%
National youth voice project	11%
Grade 5	19%
Grade 6	14%
Grade 7	19%
Grade 8	18%
Male	21%
Female	12%
Gender: prefer not to answer	27%
Help from special education	26%
No help from special education	16%
African-American	25%
Asian-American	19%
Hispanic	46%
White	16%
Native American	20%
Mixed race	20%

Discussion: there are dramatic differences reported in mistreatment rates for African-American, Hispanic, and Native American youth compared to White youth. Males are more likely to report physical mistreatment than females, and females are somewhat more likely to report being hurt emotionally or excluded than males. Youth in special education are much more likely to report mistreatment (especially physical mistreatment) than youth not receiving special education services. The graphs in the appendix will be useful in clarifying these patterns.

**When other students teased, hit, threatened, or excluded you, did you tell an adult at school?
When you told an adult at school, what happened?**

This series of questions helps us judge a school's responsiveness to reports of peer mistreatment. We learn to what extent mistreated students are telling adults and what happens when they do tell adults. Youth perceptions of fairness or unfairness of discipline interventions influence their willingness to report negative actions. These perceptions influence the way young people interpret disciplinary action. Gathering youth perceptions of the fairness and effectiveness of disciplinary interventions helps schools to evaluate their efforts in using consequences to deter mean peer behavior. The Youth Voice Project found dramatic differences between schools based on young peoples' answers to this question. Clearly students' perception of a school's disciplinary interventions is important to their feeling of safety. The Wingspread Declaration summarized these themes in this way: *"Based on current research evidence, the most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school include...applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are **collectively agreed upon** and fairly enforced."*(emphasis added)

When other students teased, hit, threatened, or excluded you, did you tell an adult at school? Of those who were mistreated, percent who told an adult.

Maine overall	38%	(Range of Maine schools surveyed 29%-41%)
National youth voice project	33%	
Grade 5	61%	
Grade 6	48%	
Grade 7	36%	
Grade 8	29%	
Male	37%	
Female	39%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	38%	
Help from special education	52%	
No help from special education	36%	
African-American	38%	
Asian-American	43%	
Hispanic	36%	
White	40%	
Native American	56%	
Mixed race	34%	

Discussion: Maine students who were mistreated reported being more likely than students in the national YVP sample to seek help from adults. This was especially true for younger grades

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represented, for youth in Special Education, and for Native American and Asian-American youth. There does not seem to be a gender difference in this response.

When you told an adult at school, what happened? See graphs I,J,K, and L in the appendix for a graphic illustration of these results				
	I told and things got worse	I told and there was no change	I told and things got better	
Maine overall	23%	36%	42%	Range of % saying things got better after telling adult at school- Maine schools surveyed: 17%-55%
National youth voice project	27%	35%	38%	
Grade 5	30%	20%	50%	
Grade 6	19%	27%	54%	
Grade 7	26%	39%	35%	
Grade 8	24%	47%	30%	
Male	21%	36%	43%	
Female	22%	37%	41%	
Gender: prefer not to answer	30%	32%	38%	
Help from special education	27%	32%	41%	
No help from special education	22%	38%	41%	
African-American	44%	33%	22%	
Asian-American	29%	7%	64%	
Hispanic	44%	22%	33%	
White	21%	37%	42%	
Native American	21%	50%	29%	
Mixed race	33%	38%	29%	

Discussion: Maine schools did somewhat better overall than the Youth Voice Project. Overall, more Maine students reported a positive outcome from telling adults at school about what was done to them than in the national sample. This rate of positive outcome, though, still falls below 50%, indicating that Maine's schools have work to do to become more responsive to student reports of mistreatment. African-American, Hispanic, and Native American youth reported dramatically lower rates of positive outcomes after telling adults at school about what others did to them. Youth who

did not indicate gender reported a somewhat lower rate of positive outcomes if they told an adult. Youth in special education, the third group reporting a higher frequency of aggression toward them compared to the overall school population, reported an equal rate of positive outcome after seeking adult help as did youth not in special education, which is a positive indicator of responsiveness.

Positive actions by peers

We asked young people what their peers had done that helped them. Here are some of their answers, chosen to reflect the results of the Youth Voice Project survey, in which almost 3,000 mistreated youth said that they benefited from peers who connected with them and supported them more than they benefited from peers confronting bullying youth. Some youth wrote about the painful experience of *not* receiving peer support, as described in this way by one student: *“No one has ever stood up for me when I'm made fun of. Some people who are RIGHT THERE don't do anything but watch. No one has ever tried to stop someone hurting me, not even who I thought was my bff.”* Others wrote about positive actions by peers:

- A student went on my side and helped me ... not by talking to the student, but just by being there for me.
- My friends explained to me that these people are not worth thinking about and they are very supportive
- The only student that helped me was my best friend. She hung out with me all day and said they are wrong and stuff like that. If I was hurt, she would go tell a teacher with me. When she spent time with me, I felt more important and that I could trust her.
- When I told my friends about getting bullied about my drawings they told me to keep drawing what I wanted to draw. They said that they didn't care what I drew and to keep drawing my favorite things and I have been ever since. After they did that the person still kept bullying me but I ignored them until they finally stopped.
- I'm not usually teased, hit, threatened, and well yesterday when I got kicked out of my volleyball team for no reason I talked to my other friends who all agreed that the person who kicked me out was being mean.
- Other students would cheer me up. When things like that happen it's good to have someone to talk to that you can trust.
- Well, it didn't really bother me that much, because we often tease each other a little more roughly than other kids, so I wasn't hurt emotionally or physically. It really bothered me when I was teased by being called lesbian or comments about my gender the most, then my friends were really supportive.
- I felt like someone cared and the person that did it got in trouble because the person helping me told on them

Many youth in our survey wrote about what they did for others and what happened when they did that. Here are some examples of positive actions by Maine youth, who can serve as positive examples:

What have you done to help someone who was mistreated or who was alone? What happened when you did that?

- A kid at lunch was sitting alone and I came over and sat and all my friends came too.
- Do you want to play with us? They play with us
- Encouraged them and told them it would be ok.

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- I ask them if they want to work with me if they look alone, or if it is a friend will try to cheer them up and tell a joke which makes them laugh so they feel better and join me with my friends. I also will smile at people who look lonely!!!! :) :)
- I asked a girl in our class who came from Italy to come over and play with us, and she did come and played with us.
- I brought my best friend and my new friend in to the guidance teacher because my best friend was excluding my new friend and making her feel really bad! They are now best friends and get along with their differences
- I comforted them because they were alone and I made them happy
- have included somebody into my group in a class because they were alone and didn't know how to ask to be in somebody group. They accepted the invitation and joined our group. None of the group members showed negativity towards my choice.
- I have just let them talk to me about it so they will let it out instead of doing something rash that they might regret later.
- I have made friends with new people who seemed to be a bit timid, and now I have a few really good, close friends out of that.
- I help someone who was alone and seemed to need someone to hang out with for a bit, I decided to leave my group and friends for a bit and hang out with the lonely person. When I did that the person that was lonely thought it was nice of me to do so and my friends even joined up with us and we became friends and now she joins us at recess to hang out with us.
- I joined peer helpers to help people that need a friend or need some help with their disabilities. I feel like it is a great way to show your kindness to other people and a great way to make some new friends! I have played games with this person and just simply talked with them. It has been fun!
- I've tried to comfort them and make them feel better. This has lead to either a blooming friendship or a comfort zone for the person who I was defending.
- Made them be my friends and ask do you want to come and chill with us?
- My friends tried to ditch someone and I said no, and waited for him.
- I went over and talked to them and we became closer and she felt better
- If they were alone I would go over and talk to them and ask them what's wrong and bring them over with me and my friends.
- When I saw someone that was really upset or all alone I would go up to them and ask them what made them sad? When I did that they were really glad to tell me what their problem was.
- I asked them if they wanted to come into my group and after they did they were having fun
- I asked them if they wanted to sit with me at lunch and we became friends.
- I became friends with a student that not a lot of people seemed to like. We became good friends and we hang out a lot. He seems to be happier now that he has a good friend.
- I went and talked to them and told them everything was going to be alright

Overall summary

Strengths:

Students responding to our surveys said that most of the Maine schools surveyed had significant protective factors. More than 3/4 of youth in most of the schools said they perceive discipline to be fair. More than 9/10 of students surveyed said that they have a positive connection with at least one adult at school. Maine schools were reported to do better in building a sense of belonging for students and a sense of being valued and respected at school compared with the average of the 31 schools in the national Youth Voice Project survey. Maine students reported somewhat more likelihood of a positive outcome if they told an adult at school about mean peer behavior, compared to the national Youth Voice Project survey. Youth in special education reported themselves more likely than youth not in special education to have positive connections with adults at school, and to experience positive outcomes if they told an adult at school about mean behavior.

Youth responding to this survey reported strong positive values. First, Maine youth surveyed stated clearly, by substantial majorities, that they want adults to take action to stop a wide range of peer mistreatment. Second, large majorities of Maine youth told us that they believe students should tell adults about most negative peer actions. Third, a large majority of Maine youth indicated through their text responses that they have acted supportively toward isolated and mistreated peers. These findings can be the foundation of a peer norms campaign by and for Maine's teens.

Needs:

Maine youth report higher rates of relational and physical mistreatment than do the youth in the national Youth Voice Project study. This finding parallels other recent Maine survey findings indicating that Maine youth are more likely to report being bullied than the national average.

Minority youth, youth who chose not to indicate gender in this survey, and youth who get special education services reported an increased likelihood of being the targets of both relational and physical aggression compared to the survey group overall, with marked increases in physical aggression toward these groups. African-American, Hispanic, and Native American youth reported less connection with adults and with their school than White youth and reported that telling adults was less likely to lead to positive outcomes compared to White youth. These indications of bias are strengthened by our overall finding that almost 4 in 5 Maine teens surveyed reported hearing biased language at school once a week or more often, and that 1/4 of youth reported hearing or witnessing name calling based on race, sexual orientation, or disability weekly or more often at school. These findings indicate that Maine's schools – and Maine as a society – has work to do in reducing bias.

While rates of youth telling adults about mean peer behavior and the likelihood of positive outcomes for youth who tell adults about what others have done to them are slightly better than the national YVP findings, a majority of mistreated youth said they did not tell adults at school about what was done to them. Similarly, a majority of mistreated youth who told an adult at school did not report that things got better afterwards. These findings indicate that work needs to be done in developing and implementing telling school cultures and positive responses by schools in the event of mean peer behavior.

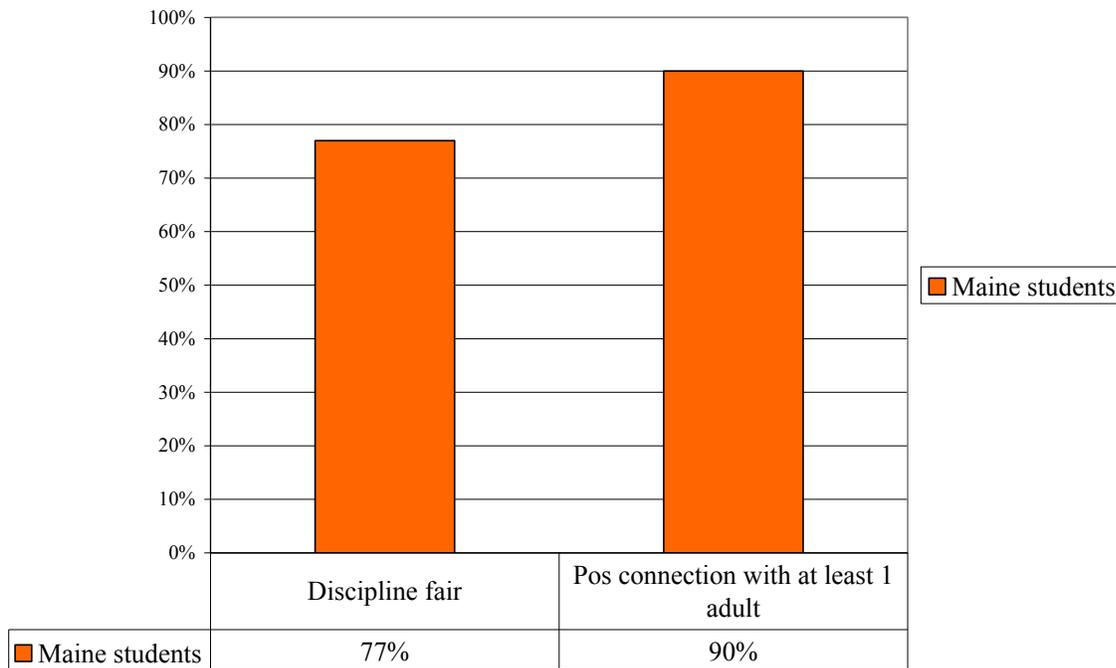
Future plans:

This survey to date has focused almost exclusively on the middle school grades. We plan to make the survey available again in the fall to High Schools and would like to extend the survey to more students in Maine in grades 4-12, so further information can be collected, so schools can compare their functioning with the composite figures, and so schools can collect this data annually to track efforts to maintain program strengths and supplement areas of weakness.

Appendix- graphs

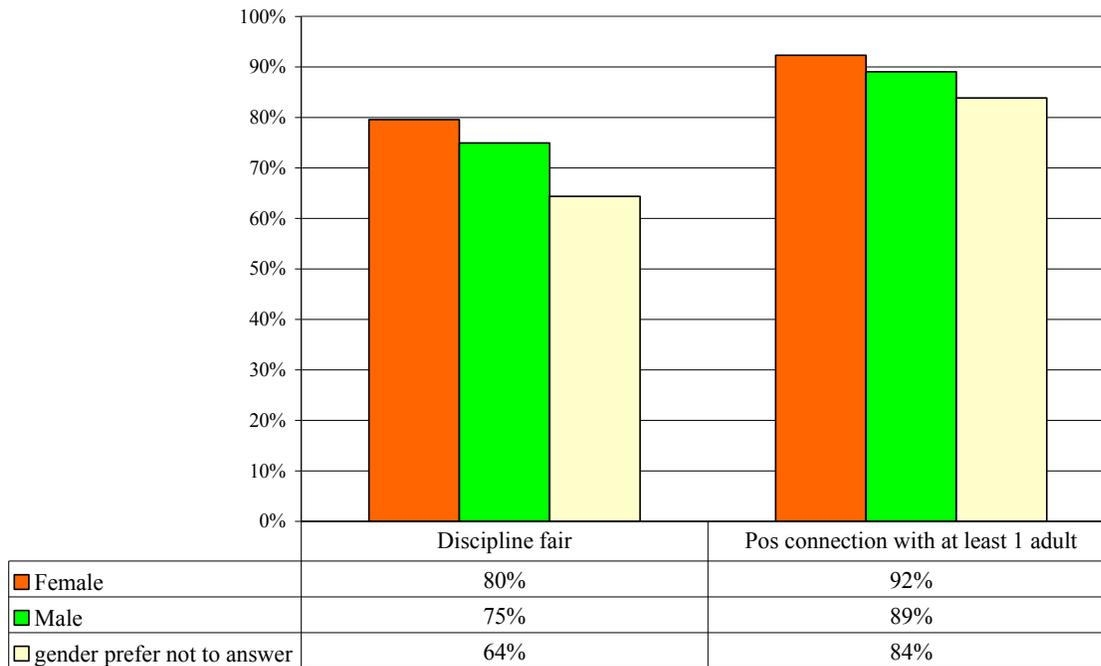
Graph A

Maine students (1)



Graph B

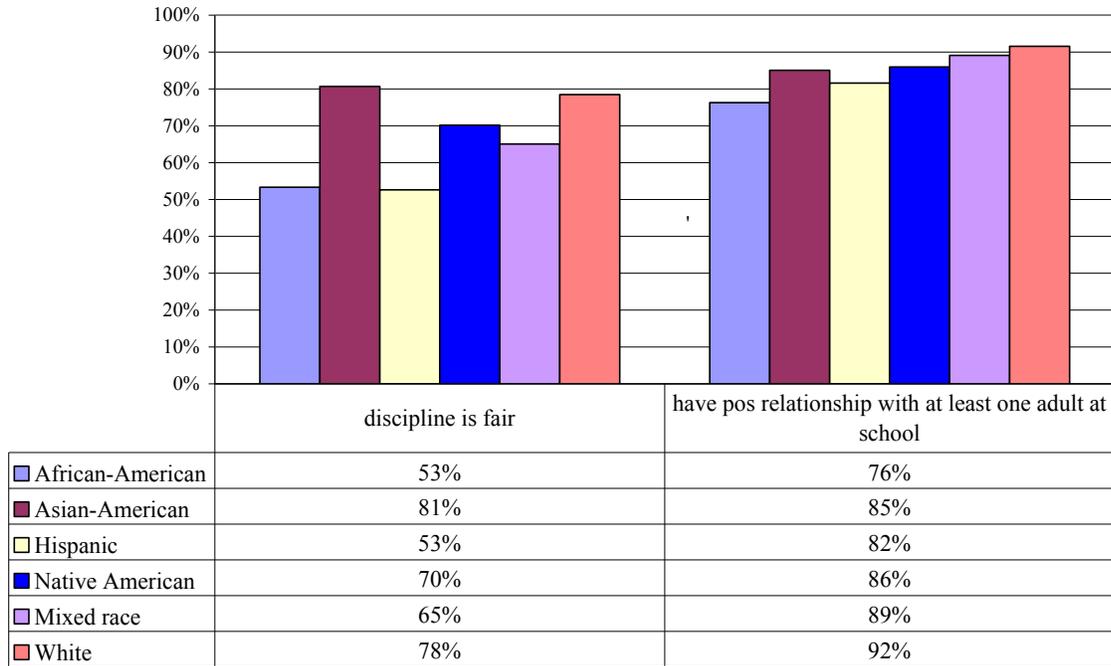
Gender (1)



Summary of Maine Youth Voices Survey, June 2011

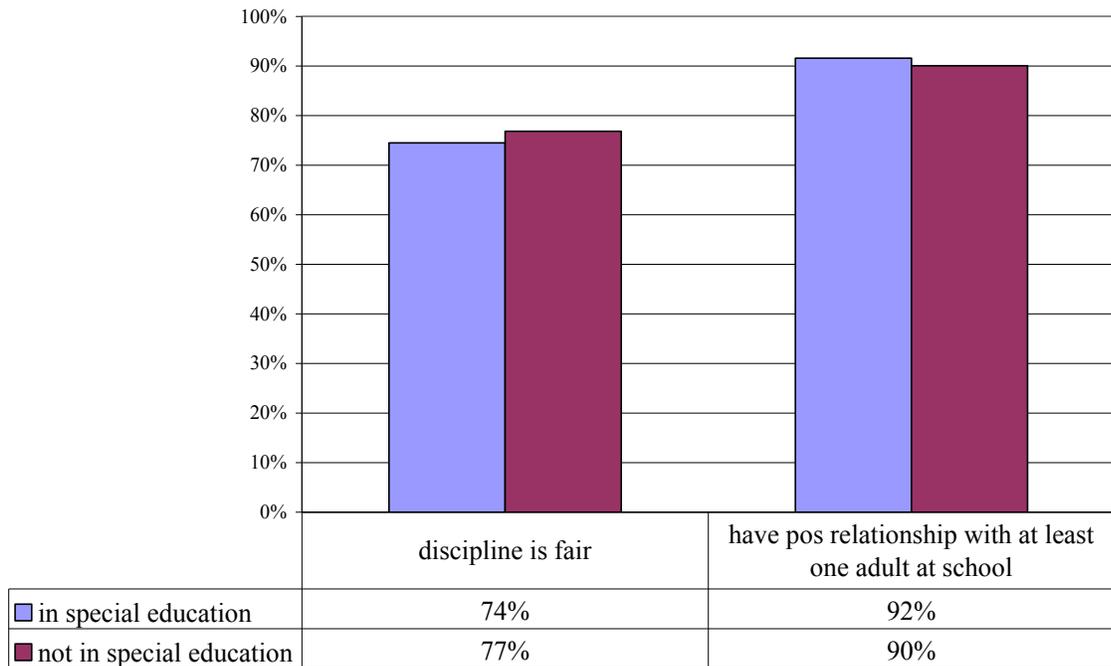
Graph C

Racial comparisons part 1- Maine



Graph D

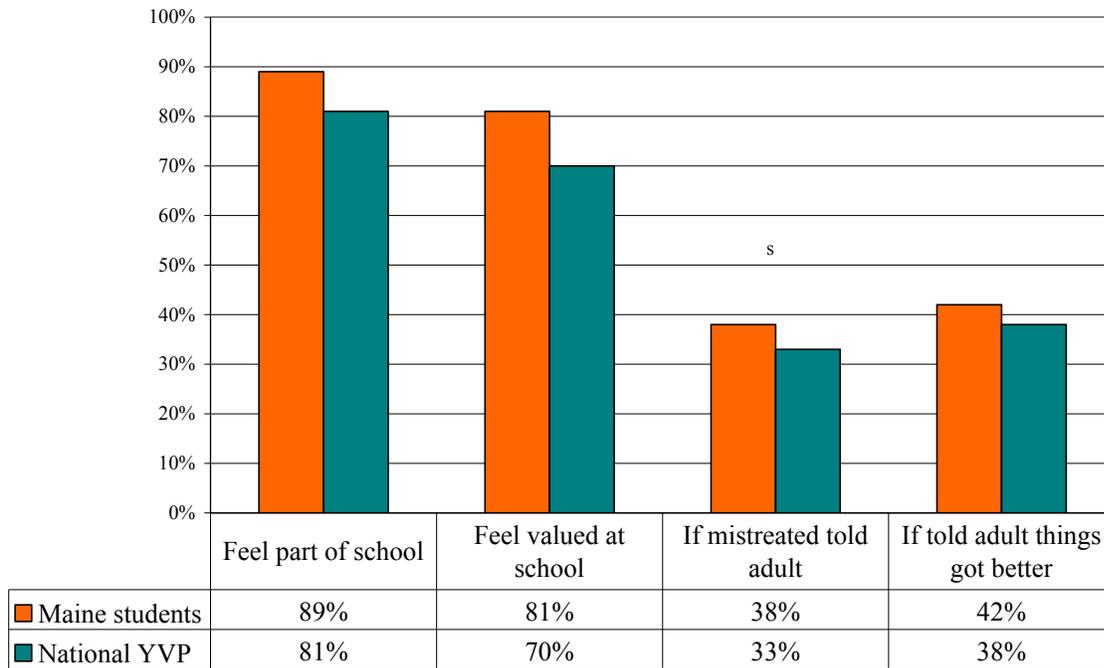
Special education regular education comparison (1)



Summary of Maine Youth Voices Survey, June 2011

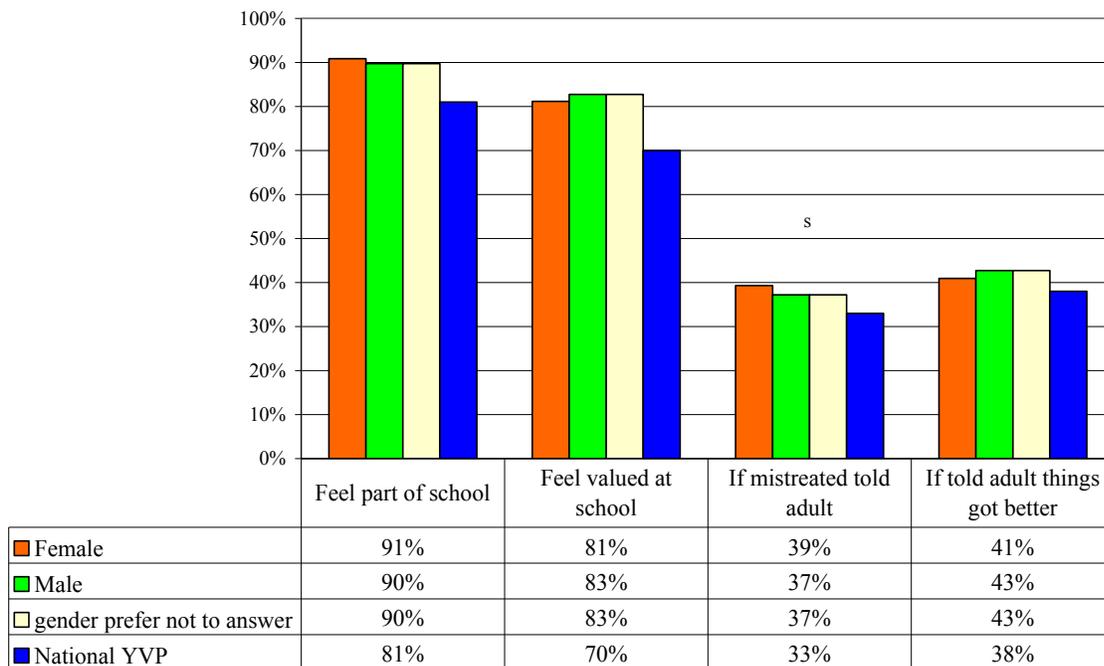
Graph E

Maine students (2)



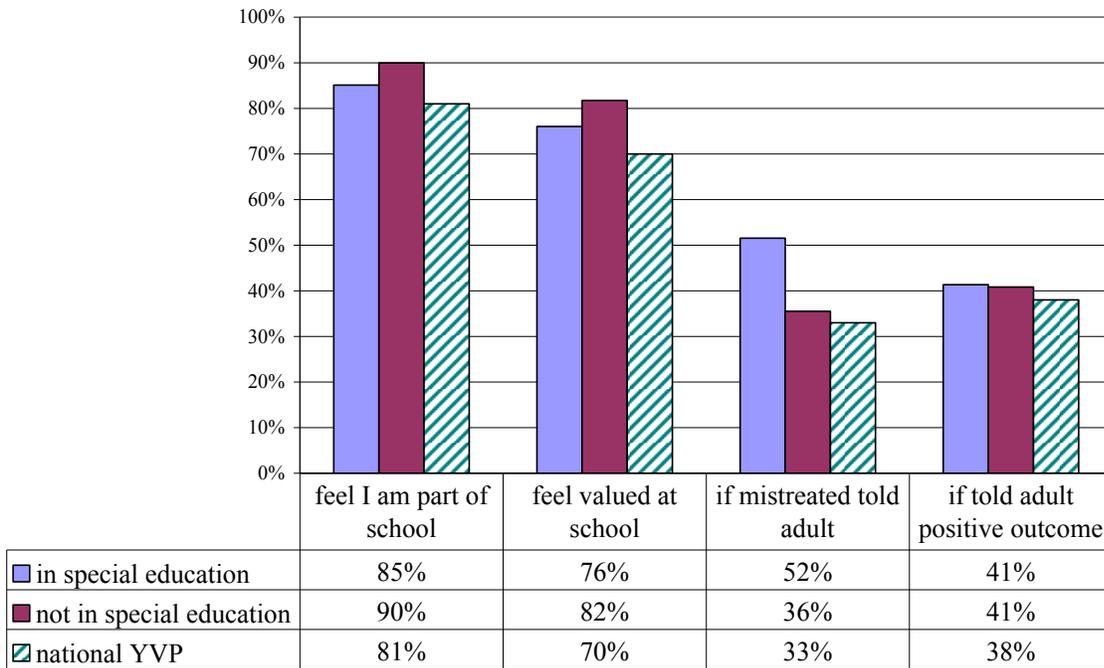
Graph F

Gender (2)



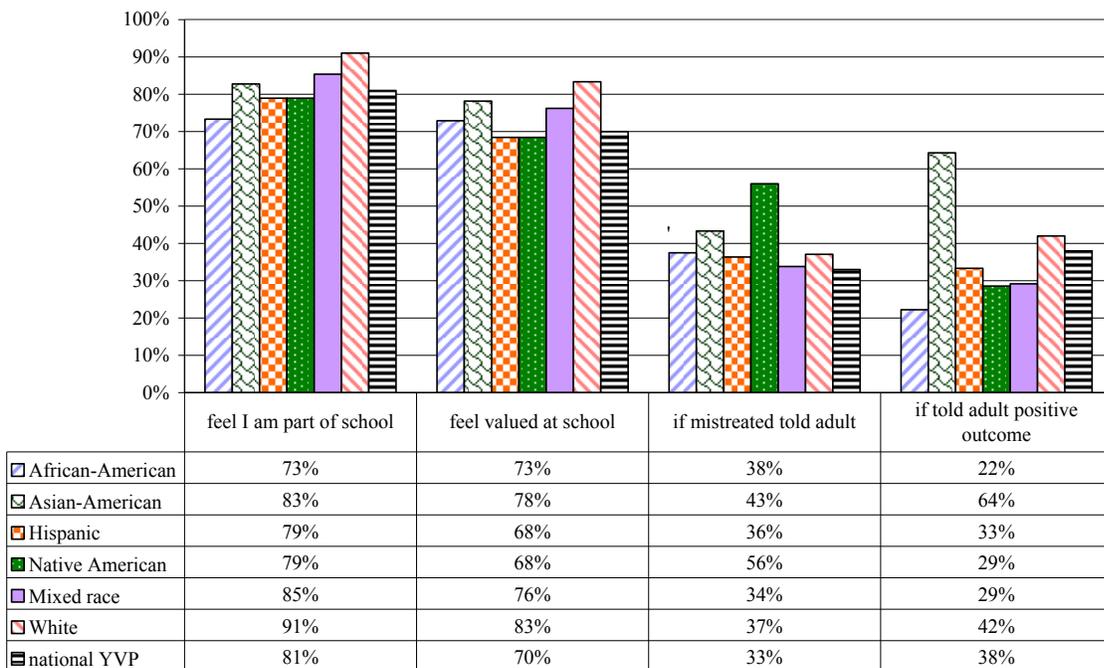
Graph G

Special education regular education comparison (2)



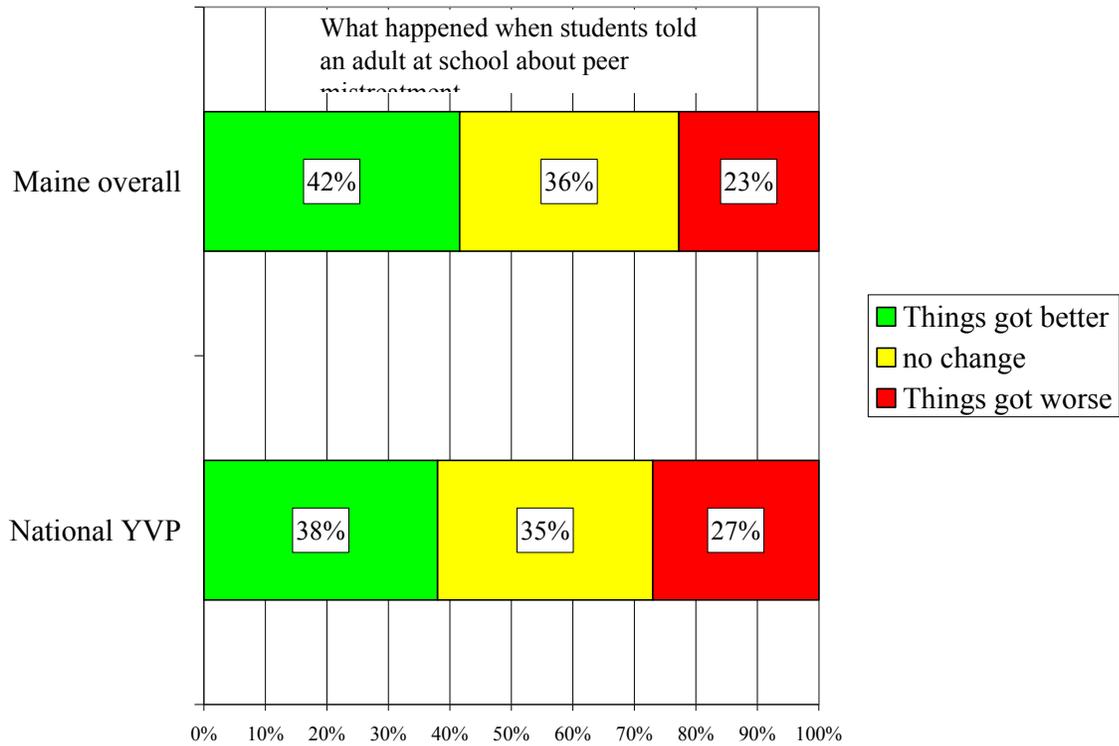
Graph H

Racial comparisons part 2- Maine

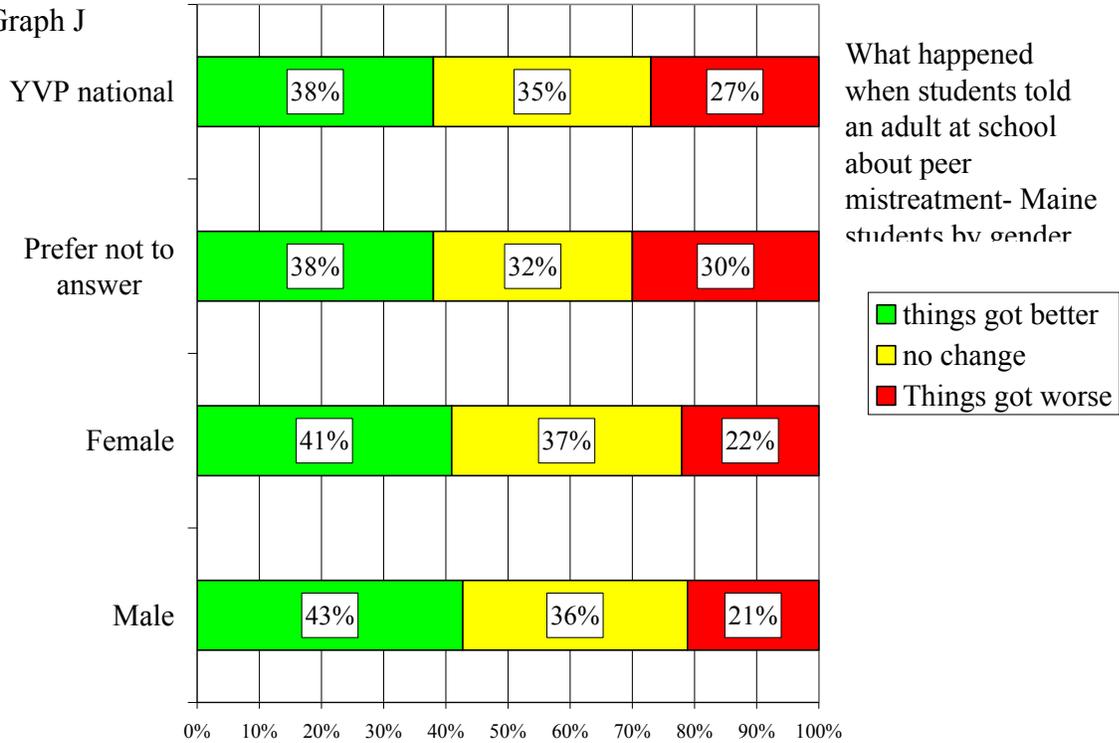


Summary of Maine Youth Voices Survey, June 2011

Graph I

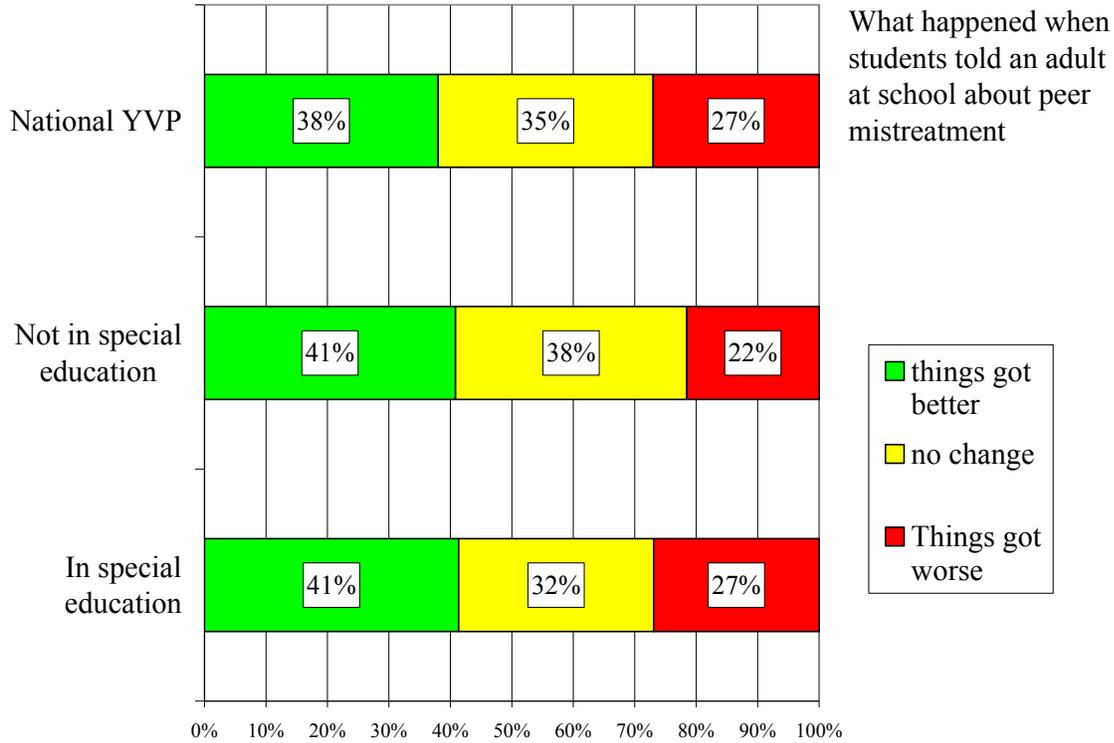


Graph J



Summary of Maine Youth Voices Survey, June 2011

Graph K



Graph L

