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ABSTRACT

Parents' Perceptions of Bullying Prevalence, Type, and

Intervention Efforts in Utah Schools

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Bullying is a pervasive and disruptive issue in the schools (Stockdale, Hanguduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002). It has been shown to have serious negative consequences for students who are frequently targeted, including lower academic achievement, lower self-esteem, and more interpersonal problems in adulthood compared to their non-targeted peers (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005; Olweus & Limber, 1999; Rigby, 2003; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006). However, when parents are engaged as active members of the school community, significant benefits accrue for children, educators, and parents. Such benefits include improved grades and test scores for students, greater job satisfaction among teachers, and decreased likelihood that children will be involved in bullying behaviors (Christenson, 1996; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007). Despite the important role parents play in their child's success in school, there is little research concerning parents' perceptions of bullying behaviors in schools. This research project surveyed parents in order to understand their perspectives regarding bullying prevalence, type, and intervention efforts taking place in schools. This was done through a survey administered at a statewide Parent Teacher Association Conference in Provo, Utah, in May 2008. Because attendees at the conference were assumed to be fairly involved in the local schools, the results of this study were expected to represent the perceptions of parents who are involved in the school community.

The findings indicated that almost half (42.9–48.1%) of these parents are hearing their child report about verbal and relational bullying at least once a week. Parents noted that they are personally intervening in bullying situations approximately once each school year. Parents responded that they believe students are most at-risk for being bullied between classes, during break periods, and after school, as well as on the playground, on the school bus, and in the hallways, bathrooms, and school cafeteria. Overall, parents rated the most frequently used interventions as somewhat effective in combating bullying in their child's school. Such interventions included counseling or talking with the bully, suspension, and time-out for the bully following an incident.

Keywords: bullying, parent perceptions, school intervention, Parent Teacher Association

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Introduction

In the past two decades, bullying among school-aged youth has emerged as a serious threat to school safety and to the physical and psychological well-being of children (Stockdale, Hanguduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002). With approximately 45% of students reporting being personally harassed by peers in school, it is not surprising that childhood and youth violence in schools is a major concern in our society (Boulter, 2004).

School violence ranges from teasing to such acts as theft, assault, and rape. Among these, however, bullying of students by fellow classmates is a common descriptor for recurring and sometimes severe violence in the schools. In a survey of the families, friends, and neighbors of 41 school shooters involved in incidents between 1974 and 2000 it was found that 71% had been a target of a bully (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior prevalent in all schools and has serious negative consequences for the health and well-being of students who are frequently targeted (Rigby, 2003; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006).

As typically defined, bullying is "repeated acts of aggression, intimidation, or coercion against a victim who is weaker than the perpetrator in terms of physical size, psychological/social power, or other factors that result in a notable power differential," (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2006, p. 26). Likewise, some authors have defined bullying as typically having both physical and verbal aggressive elements, which are systematic and ongoing. Likewise, research indicates that bullying is typically instituted by an individual or group in an attempt to gain power, prestige, or goods (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). These repeated acts over a long period of time contribute to seriously negative outcomes for those

involved, potentially leading to extreme violent outbursts in schools (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002).

Targets of bullying are shown to experience lower academic achievement, lower self-esteem, and more interpersonal problems in adulthood compared to their non-targeted peers (Olweus & Limber, 1999; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Additionally, many victims experience poorer physical and psychological health, including higher rates of depression and suicidal thoughts compared to their non-bullied peers (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005). Targets of bullying are more likely than perpetrators to bring weapons to school for the purpose of revenge (Merrell et al., 2006).

Likewise, long-term negative consequences have been found for those who bully. In childhood and adolescence bullies often experience mental health problems such as depression and poor emotional judgment (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Bullies have an increased involvement in criminal activity as adults and tend to show more aggression toward their spouses and children than those who are not identified as bullies (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

Certain student characteristics serve as risk factors for bullying involvement in the schools. One of the strongest predictors is gender, with males being more likely than females to be involved in bullying, both as targets and as bullies (Barquet, 1999; Conye et al., 2008; Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Nansel et al., 2001; Seals & Young, 2003). Age is also strongly connected to bullying. Bullying behaviors seem to escalate through a child's educational experience, peak during the middle school years and puberty, and then decrease during the high school years (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001). Characteristically, both male and female targets tend to have distinctive attributes: (a) cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn, passive, or shy; (b) low self-esteem; and (c) difficulty asserting oneself with peers

(Olweus, 1993). There is, however, mixed research regarding whether or not a child's ethnicity or race may be a risk factor for bullying others (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). These important risk factors should be carefully noted as school personnel and the community attend to bullying incidents, and designing prevention and intervention strategies.

Parents, likewise, appear to have an effect on their child's bullying involvement (Duncan, 2004). The family environment plays a pinnacle role in a child's development related to social interactions, and in turn, youth bullying involvement (Duncan, 2004). Lack of supervision, violence in the home, and poor modeling from parents and siblings are family characteristics that tend to increase a child's chance of bullying involvement (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Students who bully are also more likely to come from families with parents who use authoritarian strategies and who condone fighting back (Baldry & Farrington, 2000). These students are also more likely to come from homes that lack warmth and structure (Oliver, Oaks, & Hoover, 1994; Olweus, 1993), have low family cohesion (Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1992; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuji, & Van Oost, 2002), and have high levels of conflict (Stevens et al., 2002).

Conversely, when parents are engaged as active members of the school community, significant benefits accrue for children, educators, and the parents (Christenson, 1996). Such benefits include improved grades and test scores for students, greater job satisfaction among teachers, and increased parental involvement with learning activities at home. In one study completed in 2007, researchers found that parents of students who were willing to speak with teachers and help their child with homework were less likely to have children involved in bullying behaviors (Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007). This important element of parental involvement and home life speaks to the importance of incorporating parents into the school community, specifically when addressing bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

When it comes to reporting bullying, many students are reluctant to report bullying incidents to adults in general (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Their hesitation to report bullying to adults is based on fear of potential retaliation from the bully, belief that adults will do nothing to resolve the problem, and the perception that the incident of bullying was not serious enough to report to an adult (Newman & Murray, 2005; Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998). Other studies, however, have found that many targets of bullying typically tell someone about being bullied and are more likely to tell someone at home rather than a teacher (Eslea & Smith, 2000; Holt, 2009; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Since some students do confide in parents, understanding parent perceptions about bullying and interventions is important for researchers and educators.

Bullying is clearly a persistent and expansive problem in schools, and yet there is still information lacking from parents, an informed part of the community regarding its pervasiveness in the schools. Since research shows that many students are reporting incidents of bullying to someone at home rather than someone at school (Eslea & Smith, 2000), it would be important to understand parents' perspectives regarding the type and prevalence of bullying in the schools. Likewise, research is also showing limited effectiveness of school interventions alone to decrease bullying behaviors. Therefore, it would also be meaningful for researchers to make further efforts to better understand parent perspectives on the bullying intervention efforts in schools, and how they perceive the effectiveness of the interventions.

Taking into account the conclusions of the literature review, a survey considering the perspectives of parents about the experiences of their children regarding bullying in the schools is a reasonable next step in the research process. Through a quantitative survey that collected parents' perspectives, this study gathered answers to the following questions:

What are parents' perceptions of bullying in Utah schools? Specifically, how frequent are bullying behaviors happening in Utah schools? What types of bullying do parents believe to be the most pervasive? Where are bullying incidents taking place in the school? When are those incidents taking place? What school-based interventions are taking place in the school to combat bullying? And how effective do parents perceive those interventions to be in deterring bullying in the school?

Review of Literature

Violence among children continues to be a major concern in the United States (Pettit & Dodge, 2003). Specifically, violence in the schools has received increased media exposure for its pervasiveness and prevalence (Espelage &Swearer, 2003). Ranging from extreme acts of violence such as school shootings to teasing on the playground, many forms of violence exist in the schools and continue to impede on the success of students (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005). Among the various kinds of notable violent acts taking place in the schools, personal harassment is said to affect approximately 45% of students in school (Boulter, 2004). Both bullying and being bullied at school are associated with key violence-related behaviors, including carrying weapons, fighting, and sustaining injuries from fighting (Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003). In an effort to reduce violence and harassment, dealing with bullying behaviors has become an important initiative for both educators and parents (Bosworth, Esplelage, & Simon, 1999).

The Nature of Bullying

Bullying, as defined in the literature, occurs when a person is subjected, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions from one or more people. The bully or group of bullies also possesses more physical or social power than the targeted person (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2006; Olweus, 1993). Likewise, some authors define bullying as typically having both physical and verbal aggressive elements, which are systematic and ongoing, and instituted by an individual or group who are attempting to gain power, prestige, or goods (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Even though these definitions of bullying are generally acknowledged, related terms such as teasing (Ross, 1996), peer aggression (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988), and peer abuse (Olweus, 1995) are sometimes used synonymously for bullying.

Bullying is identified as a form of peer aggression for various reasons. Olweus (1999) stated that bullying is an aggressive behavior or intentional harm-doing based on an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power. Olweus also wrote that bullying behavior often occurs without apparent provocation, and it is done intentionally to harm another individual. Based on the imbalance of power, where the target may find defending themselves difficult, and the description of repeated acts over time, bullying behaviors are meant to be aggressive and hold the intent to harm. This kind of definition clearly places bullying as a subset of aggressive behavior (Smith, 2002).

Prevalence rates. Bullying behaviors are shown to affect between 15.0 to 30.0% of students around the world (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005; Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Specifically, bullying has been identified as a major problem in the United States, with over 28.0% of children from both private and public schools reporting being bullied at school (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007). This statistic coincides with another study completed in 2001 where 150,000 U.S. junior high and high school students were sampled and 29.9% of students reported moderate to frequent involvement in bullying (Nansel et al., 2001). That percentage includes individuals self-identified as bullies (13.0%); targets (10.6%); and bully-victims (6.3%), students who sometimes bully others and at other times are bullied, themselves. Other studies indicate a lower rate of prevalence, such as The School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey completed in 2001. That survey indicated that 14.0% of 12- to 18-year-olds reported being targets of both direct and indirect forms of bullying six months prior to the survey (cited in DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005). These statistics seemingly narrow the already pervasive 45.0% of students reporting being personally harassed by peers in school (Boulter, 2004).

These reported rates vary quite notably, and call into question the method by which statistics are being gathered regarding bullying behavior among students. National data collected on bullying behaviors, however, may also be inaccurate in appropriately approximating bullying, since the actual amount of students' participation in these activities is not consistently defined in the studies or across the nation. Typically, each state and district has a different method for tracking and reporting these occurrences within the schools. Notably, adherences to acts of violence and the policies regarding bullying also vary between states and even school districts. Because there are different standards for measuring the types and occurrences of bullying, it may be difficult to synthesize some elements of the bullying research, but it is clear that bullying is a pervasive and serious problem within schools (Boulter, 2004; Rigby, 2003; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006).

Types. Bullying can take many different forms, often categorized as physical, verbal, and types relational aggression. Direct and indirect aggression are terms used to describe bullying. In the Bullying Fact Sheet Series, created by the National School Safety Center (Quiroz, Arnette, & Stephens, 2006), the authors listed examples of direct bullying as hitting, tripping, shoving, pinching, excessive tickling, and verbal threats, such as name calling and racial slurs. Insults also fall under direct bullying in addition to demanding money, property or service. Stabbing, choking, burning and shooting are also forms of direct bullying. Indirect bullying can take the form of rejecting, excluding, isolating, ranking or rating, humiliating, manipulating friends and relationships, writing hurtful or threatening e-mails and postings on web sites, blackmailing, terrorizing, and proposing dangerous dares. Another source describes indirect aggression simply as covert aggression, often using third parties through gossiping,

spreading rumors, and implementing social exclusion (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefooghe, 2002).

Within these categories, specific bullying types have been individually defined. These operationalized terms make it easier to measure the pervasiveness and occurrence of these actions in the schools. Physical bullying, which falls under the direct bullying category, involves hitting, shoving, pushing, kicking, spitting at, or beating up others. It also involves the stealing of another person's property. Relational aggression is a form of bullying that intends to damage relationships, through a variety of ways. Specifically, relational aggression is excluding others from a friendship group, gossiping or spreading rumors about someone, setting up an individual to be embarrassed, or manipulating others to purposefully exclude another person (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, 1996; Galen & Underwood, 1997). Verbal aggression implements bullying tactics through spoken means, such as name-calling, hurtful teasing, through insults, or by humiliating or threatening someone (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefooghe, 2002).

More recently, a different form of bullying has received increased media exposure: cyber bullying (Li, 2006). This form of aggression implements a few methods listed under direct aggression, such as sending e-mails, phone or text messages, or pictures that threaten or that are meant to deliberately hurt another person's feelings (Chibarro, 2007). These messages, done through technology, are often meant to single an individual out, embarrass, or make the target appear inferior. Cyber bullying is also used to spread rumors or reveal private information and secrets about another person (Li, 2006).

Another notable form of bullying found in the literature relates to sexual harassment among students in the schools. Gender-based bullying, or homophobic bullying, is a form of

aggression based on an individual's gender, sexual orientation, or sexual preference (Rivers, 1995), and it is present at all levels of education (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Operationally, this bullying type involves leaving others out or treating them badly because they are a boy or a girl, making sexist comments or jokes, harassment related to sexual preference, and using statements such as "he is a fag" or "she is a lesbian."

Another form of bullying is racial or ethnocultural bullying. This form of aggression is aimed at individuals with varying cultural or racial backgrounds, and it usually implements elements within verbal or relational bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). Actions such as treating a person differently or badly because of their culture, their racial or ethnic background, or the color of their skin are included in this category. Other behaviors in this area include saying negative things about someone's culture, racial or ethnic background, or their skin color, calling them a racially derogatory term, or telling a racist joke. These thorough lists suggest a myriad of negative behaviors that represent bullying in many forms.

Locations. With bullying affecting so many students within the schools, it is important to better understand where bullying is taking place. While some bullying is taking place in community and home settings, most incidents are reported to be happening at school and, specifically, where there is limited supervision (Fleming & Towey, 2002; Olweus, 1993). Areas such as school hallways, the playground, the lunchroom, and the bathrooms seem to fall within this category and show high levels of reported bullying incidents. For elementary school students, bullying most often occurs on the playground (Rivers & Smith, 1994), while for secondary school-aged children, students reported a similar amount of bullying taking place in the outside areas of the school, in the corridor, in the classroom, or in another place (Parault, Davis, & Pelligrini, 2007). As indicated in the latter study, students are reporting bullying in the

classroom and other well-supervised areas in the school, reporting that more indirect forms of bullying (i.e., relational aggression) are taking place (Glew et al., 2005; Parault, Davis, & Pelligrini, 2007).

While bullying behaviors are taking place in the school, additional harassment between students takes place off of school grounds via electronic devices. One estimate approximates 20 to 40% of students being targeted via the Internet or cell phones (Stover, 2006), while another study indicates approximately one-fourth of junior high school students report being bullied through these means (Li, 2006). In 2007, 2% of students ages 12–18 who participated in a nation-wide survey said that they had experienced cyber bullying in the form of another student posting hurtful information about them on the Internet, while another 2% of students reported unwanted contact, including being threatened or insulted, via instant messaging by another student during the school year (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009). Research summaries and their documentation in the media help explain the importance of this topic and justify further research projects that can contribute to prevention efforts.

Risk factors. With the varying forms of bullying behavior affecting many students in the schools, it appears that students may find it difficult to avoid being a part of bullying situations, whether as a bully, a target, or a bystander. Aside from this fact, the research indicates that there are certain characteristics that may positively influence the likelihood of certain students to bully or be bullied.

Gender. One of the strongest predictors is gender, with males being more likely than females to be involved in bullying, both as targets and as bullies (Barquet, 1999; Conye et al., 2008; Glew, et al., 2005; Nansel et al., 2001; Seals & Young, 2003). Particularly for homophobic bullying, male targets are at risk, especially those who are poor at sports but excel

in academic work (Rivers, 1995). Although female students are considered at lower risk, they also have bullying experiences, although their aggression can look somewhat different from that of males. In 2001, female students in the U.S. reported being bullied more frequently via verbal or relational means, such as through rumors or sexual comments (Nansel et al., 2001).

Age. Age is also strongly connected to bullying. As mentioned earlier, bullying behaviors seem to escalate through a child's educational experience, peak during the middle school years and puberty, and then decrease during the high school years (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001). For many children who are bullied daily, the physical acts of bullying have been reported to peak at age 12 (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). With this being the case, the transition from elementary school to middle school appears to be the most vulnerable time for students who are at risk for bullying involvement (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

Personal traits. Aside from gender and age, one study indicated that there are some personal traits that are more common among targeted students, as well as similarities among students who bully others (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). These individual factors include anger, depression, anxiety, and social skills deficits. Targets of bullying have been shown to have specific characteristics that make them more likely to be bullied in school. Some possible indicators of both male and female targets are (a) being cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn, passive, or shy; (b) having low self-esteem; and (c) having difficulty asserting oneself in a peer group (Olweus, 1993). Likewise, elements of social competence play a significant role. Targets are more likely to be perceived by themselves, their peers, and their teachers to have poor social skills (Fox & Boulton, 2005). Students who have greater peer acceptance and less peer rejection are less likely to be targeted in bullying situations (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988).

Aside from social competence, certain personality characteristics also play an important role in influencing whether or not a student will become a target of bullying. With regard to homophobic bullying, boys are often ridiculed if they are perceived to have effeminate traits (Rivers, 1995). Likewise, physical size, specifically a smaller frame or build for boys, makes them more likely to be the target for bullying (Olweus, 1993). Also, some research shows that a student is more likely to be victimized if they have a disability compared to students without disabilities (Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994). These disabilities can range from specific learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, physical impairments, and intellectual disability (Flynt & Morton, 2005).

Ethnicity or race. There is mixed research regarding whether or not a child's ethnicity or race may be a risk factor for bullying incidence (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). In a large-scale national study, Nansel and colleagues (2001) found that Hispanic youth reported marginally higher involvement in moderate and frequent bullying of others in the school (10.4% compared to 8.5% of white students and 8.3% of black students), while black youth reported being bullied significantly less than all other races overall. Other research from 2003 found no significant differences between African American and Caucasian students when considering bullying involvement (Seals & Young, 2003). In contrast, Graham and Juvonen (2002) found that African Americans were more likely to be peer nominated as more aggressive than Latino and multiethnic urban middle school students. Another study in 1998 simply concluded that ethnicity was not as significant of a factor for being bullied, when compared to gender or grade level (Kaufman et al., 1998). These results suggest, then, that the prevalence of bullies and victims of various ethnicities and races may be an indicator of the racial dynamics apparent in

the particular school setting, and that the content of the actual bullying incidents may be related to a student's specific race or ethnicity (Graham, Bellmore, Nishina, & Juvonen, 2009).

Family environment. In addition to individual-level risk factors, identified family characteristics such as family violence, hostile discipline, poor modeling of problem-solving skills, family member drug use or incarceration, sibling bullying, and lack of family cohesion tend to increase a child's chance of bullying involvement (Baldry, 2003; Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Bullies tend to have fewer positive adult role models and receive less emotional support from their home environment compared to their non-bullying peers (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Zimmerman, Glew, Christakis, & Katon, 2005). Olweus (1993) reported that the likelihood of a child becoming a bully is strongly linked with the home environment, and noted that some child-rearing conditions are more likely to produce aggression in children. These include lack of parental warmth and involvement, a permissive parenting style, and parental discord. Bullying behavior is also correlated with physical discipline by parents, or authoritarian-style parenting (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000). These ideas are also supported by other researchers, finding that low parental warmth, low family cohesion, low involvement with parents, and single-parent family structures are also positively associated with bullying involvement in youth (Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1994; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Stevens & Joyce, 2002). Lack of parental supervision is a key factor in influencing children's and adolescents' involvement with bullying, indicating that limited parental monitoring affects aggression (Gage, Overpeck, Nansel, & Kogan, 2005; Simons-Morton, Hartos, & Haynie, 2004).

Notably, the limited focus on the relationship of the family environment to a child's involvement in bullying behaviors at school could be said to contribute to the maintenance of these aggressive problem behaviors (Stevens, DeBourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2001). With these

influential factors, it is important that educators and school personnel pay special attention in caring for students that have these risk factors for being involved in bullying. Additionally, parental involvement and education regarding bullying prevention tactics used in the school could possibly be helpful in dealing with aggressive children.

      Effects. In the past two decades, research has documented that bullying among school-aged children has emerged to become a potentially serious threat to the physical and psychological well being of children (Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002). With this being the case, researchers have identified a variety of negative outcomes for students dealing with bullying, either as a bully or as a target.

      Children who are targets of bullying are shown to experience lower academic achievement, lower self-esteem, and more interpersonal problems in adulthood compared to their non-targeted peers (Olweus & Limber, 1999; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Additionally, many have been shown to have poorer physical and psychological health, including higher rates of depression and suicidal thoughts compared to their non-bullied peers (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005). Targets who reported being bullied in school also reported that bullying promoted social withdrawal, isolation, and depression later in life (Rivers, 1995). Glew and associates (2005) found that those involved in bullying had an increased likelihood of feeling unsafe at school, of feeling that they do not belong at school, and of feeling sad most days. Internalizing problems are not the only outcome for students being targeted for bullying. In fact, targets of bullying are more likely than perpetrators to bring weapons to school for the purpose of revenge (Merrell et al., 2006).

      Likewise, long-term negative consequences have been found for those who bully. Bullies have been shown to have an increased involvement in criminal activity as adults,

underachievement in school, and an increased aggression toward their spouses and children (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Additionally, they often experience mental health problems such as depression and poor emotional judgment (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). For targets as well as bullies and bully-victims, outcomes such as poor physical health, emotional maladjustment, alcohol use, trouble with school adjustment, and poor relationships with classmates were also present (Nansel et al., 2001; Nansel et al., 2004).

     Reporting. With the amount of bullying occurring in the schools and the significant student outcomes that occur as a result, it is important to examine how often bullying behaviors in the school are being reported to adults. Unfortunately, one research study found that today's youth do not perceive most acts of fighting and aggression as violence (Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 2001), which seems to impact students' reporting such incidents. One example includes bullying among friends in the school, which is often not perceived as aggression and thus is less reported (Mishna, 2004).

     Other students, however, recognize bullying behaviors but simply do not confide in adults regarding these occurrences (Oliver & Candappa, 2007; Olweus, 1995). Their hesitations behind reporting to adults include the fear of potential retaliation from the bully, a concern that the adult will do nothing to resolve the problem, or, as addressed earlier, a perception that the incidence of bullying is not serious enough to report to an adult (Newman & Murray, 2005; Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998). Some researchers suggest that many students specifically do not confide in school personnel when it comes to reporting incidents at school because they do not respect the adults and do not feel they will offer security regarding the matter (Beyer, 1997). Conversely, Eslea and Smith found in 2000 that many targets of bullying do tell somebody, and they are more likely to tell someone at home than at school. Considering that parents are likely

to hear about bullying, this research was completed to better understand the bullying experiences of youth, as the experiences are reported to parents.

Parental influences. Aside from the negative influences of some parenting styles and methods, other important bullying factors are correlated with home life. For example, the best predictor of a child's not displaying bullying behavior was having positive adult role models (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000). Some research has indicated that the more children receive cognitive stimulation and emotional support from their parents and the less time they spend in front of the television, the less likely they are to bully others (Zimmerman et al., 2005).

From a school perspective, research has also found that when parents are engaged as active members of the school community, significant benefits accrue, including better grades and behavior from students, improved parental communication with their children in general and about school specifically, increased parental involvement in learning activities in the home, and schools' being rated as more effective by parents (Christenson, 1996). In fact, Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, and Haynie (2007) found that parents who were willing to speak with teachers and help their child with homework were less likely to have children involved in bullying behaviors. Likewise, safe school plans that involve the entire community, including teachers, students, parents, law enforcement professionals, mental health professionals, politicians, and business, religious, and community leaders, have been shown to be the most effective program for keeping students safe (Kitsantas, Ware, & Martinez-Arias, 2004). The involvement of these community members has been shown to support students' perceptions of schools being safe (Warren et al., 2006); and in turn, such involvement appears to encourage positive experiences for students in school. From elements of home life, to parents and community involvement, the importance of

incorporating parents into the school community is especially valuable in improving students'
perception of safety and minimizing the overall influence of students' being involved in bullying.

Ways of Addressing School-Based Bullying

Typically school-based interventions to address bullying are guided and implemented by
educators and administrators. Various interventions have been researched and tested in public
schools to determine their effectiveness in deterring bullying behaviors (Merrell et al., 2006).
Research shows that school-based programs that do not involve parents are not as effective as
programs that involve community members (Boulter, 2004; Werle, 2006). Parent organizations,
such as the Parent Teacher Association, have been used to better involve parents in the
implementation of school programs and in addressing problems that take place within the school
community. Understanding the breadth of bullying interventions and the paucity of research
regarding parents' roles in bullying interventions will help in creating a context for this project's
research questions.

School-based interventions. Many school districts and intervention teams have
implemented anti-bullying programs within the schools to address aggression problems.
However, these programs often fail to show a significant positive impact in the schools (Merrell
et al., 2006). In a meta-analysis of various bullying programs across a 25-year period from 1980
to 2004, Merrell and colleagues found that a majority of outcomes within these programs yielded
little positive, meaningful change. At best there was some evidence supporting the effectiveness
of these interventions in improving students' social competence, peer acceptance, and self-
esteem, but not in reducing the actual number of bullying incidents reported in the schools.
Other researchers have suggested that bullying programs do have the potential to develop
educators' knowledge of effective practices, feelings of confidence in implementing intervention,

and actual behavioral response to incidents of bullying at school; however, it is noted that these programs show insufficient efficacy to be considered highly meaningful or influential in actually diminishing bullying behavior in the schools (Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004).

Interventions such as zero-tolerance discipline policies are often implemented in the schools for acts of violence, yet these programs tend to have limited effectiveness in positively influencing teacher and student perceptions of safety because they are often disruptive to the educational setting and can increase the potential for academic failure of at-risk students (Kitsantas, Ware, & Martinez-Arias, 2004). Likewise, these policies have resulted in more negative and hostile school environments (Sugai & Horner, 2001) and do not typically create teaching opportunities that promote pro-social behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Factors such as students' opportunities for success, positive teacher-student relationships, and high expectations for achievement are shown to increase positive student behavior (Esposito, 1999). Likewise, for students to report feeling safe, research has demonstrated the important connection between student behavior and school factors such as positive school climate, discipline code, fairness, and security actions taken by the school (Farmer, 1999; Jacobson, 2009); students who report higher levels of feeling safe in school attend schools that incorporate these factors (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). Specifically, positive school culture and climate increase students' feelings of safety in their school (Kitsantas, Ware, & Martinez-Arias, 2004). Students are less likely to commit violent acts and feel unsafe in the school if they have more positive experiences in school and feel a sense of belonging and a bond to school through community involvement. Cultivation of trusting relationships with teachers, administrators, and other school personnel also are important in developing a positive school climate (Anderman, 2002). These findings indicate that schools can improve students' behavior and help them feel

safer at school by creating an overall environment of positive learning and emotional connectedness.

However, some studies suggest, then, that school programs are not enough to combat violence in the schools, but that combined efforts between school personnel, parents, and students are needed to create a community web of support to help the students feel safety, comfort, and connectedness to their school (Boulter, 2004; Werle, 2006). Parents have agreed with the perspective that more efforts need to be made involving parents in the community. In fact, 85% of adults place the responsibility for preventing future violence incidents in the hands of parents (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2000). This indicates the agreed importance of parents in combating bullying incidents in the schools. To more fully incorporate parents in these anti-bullying efforts, further research is justified in understanding their perspectives on bullying programs in the schools and their parental experience with bullying reports from their children. Therefore, future research projects questioning parents on perceived effectiveness of bullying preventative measures as well as interventions would prove to be useful. Likewise, obtaining parental opinions on what they are hearing from students could further focus school efforts to develop potentially more effective bullying interventions.

Parent organizations. Parent organizations in the schools are a way for parents to provide their input and perspective on student outcomes. One well-known group that utilizes the viewpoint and influence of parents within schools is the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA was founded in 1897 in Washington, D.C., as the National Congress of Mothers by Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst. It has provided information, resources, and support to families for over 100 years as it focused on the health and education of children. This national, non-profit organization focuses on a home-school collaboration model that works in a

partnership with a wide array of individuals and organizations to accomplish agreed upon goals. Historically, the PTA has had goals related specifically to "securing adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth" and "bringing into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teacher may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth" (Parent Teacher Association, 2010b). These purposes align significantly with the research that documents meaningful collaboration and connection between multiple community outlets in providing more positive outcomes for students in the schools (Kitsantas, Ware, & Martinez-Arias, 2004; Warren et al., 2006).

The PTA calls itself "the largest volunteer child advocacy association in the country," as well as the United States' first and primary parent involvement organization in schools. Total number of members is difficult to determine since involvement is "open to all who support the health and educational achievement of our nation's children," but an estimated 5 million parents, teachers, and community members are currently PTA members (Parent Teacher Association, 2010a). This organization works to increase and support parent involvement in all schools, and it also works to make certain that nationwide access to quality public education happens by providing parents and communities with tools and resources to support their students. These goals and program outcomes connect well with this research effort to better understand and involve parents in school-wide efforts to increase safety and potentially decrease bullying incidents.

Conclusion

Given that parents are likely to be told about their children's experience with school-based bullying, there is surprisingly limited research regarding parental perspectives on the prevalence of bullying and bullying interventions. Understanding parents' perspectives on

bullying in the schools could help educators and parents work together to create prevention and intervention strategies for bullying.

This research project was designed to better understand these important parent perceptions and experiences of student bullying in schools. Done through a primarily quantitative survey, parent participants were asked to report what bullying behaviors one of their children has discussed recently, how prevalent they feel bullying is in their child's school, what prevention and intervention efforts their child's school has implemented, and the perceived effectiveness of those interventions. The survey also included information about where they believe bullying has happened at their child's school, what times of day bullying occurred, and what parents perceive has been done to best help their child's school address bullying. This survey was administered at a statewide Parent Teacher Association (PTA) conference held in Provo, Utah, in May 2008.

Method

Participants

Adults attending the May 2008 Parent Teacher Association (PTA) statewide conference were recruited to participate in the research. Researchers were seated at a booth in a general gathering area and asked passersby to participate. All individuals who completed the survey were parents of students within the State of Utah and were present at the conference. Of those invited to participate, 156 successfully completed the survey (out of 1600 to 1700 parent participants at the conference). Others, who could not complete the survey in person at the conference, were invited to participate by going online to fill out an identical electronic version at http://updc.org/abc/. Because no parents chose to respond through the online measure, no data were available from that sampling option.

Participants ranged in age from 26 to 60 years old. Thirty-four percent of those who completed the survey were between the ages of 36 and 40 years old. The next highest percentage of respondents was those ages 31 to 35 years old, who comprised 30.1% of total respondents. A total of 98.7% of those who responded were female. The respondents were generally well educated, with 52.3% having earned a bachelor's or associate's degree. Comparatively, among Utahns ages 25 to 34, less than 36.0% have a college degree, while nationally, 39.0% have a bachelor's or associates degree, according to 2000 U.S. Census data (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002). Additionally, 41.2% of respondents reported their highest educational degree as a high school diploma or GED, while 5.9% had a graduate-level degree. A total of 96.1% of the participants described themselves as White/ European American, which is comparable to Utah's ethnic demographics, with 91.0% identifying themselves as White on a census completed

in 2000 (Population Estimates Program). Other participants reported the following ethnic

backgrounds: 2.6 % Hispanic/ Latino, 0.7% Pacific Islander, and 0.7 % multiracial.

Instrument

The survey was created under the model of another survey that was designed to sample

the opinions of educators in Utah schools regarding the prevalence of bullying in their school.

The educators' and parents' surveys were both created under the direction of the Utah Bully

Task Force, in conjunction with the Utah Personnel Development Center. Before distributing the

survey, approximately 10 college-educated individuals assisted in reviewing the questions,

including several university professors and educational professionals from Utah. Each of these

individuals contributed to the wording of the survey questions and helped to refine the overall

purposes of the survey in addressing specific research questions regarding prevalence, type, and

pervasiveness of various kinds of bullying in the schools. Their input was incorporated into the

final draft of the distributed survey.

The survey contained 23 questions, with several items having multiple parts. The parent

was to complete the survey based on the experience of only one child, specifically the child that

had talked with them the most about bullying at school. The first seven questions asked

respondents to describe the number of children in their family, and then after selecting the child

they chose to respond for in the remainder of the survey, provide information regarding that

student's gender, age, and disability status. Two questions targeted the demographic

characteristics of the child's school, including how many students there were in the child's

school and the area where their child's school was located (rural, suburban, or urban). There

were five questions about the parent: age, gender, highest educational degree completed, race,

and where they become aware of the survey. The remaining 11 questions asked the participant

to provide detailed responses regarding their understanding of the prevalence of various kinds of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, relational, cyber, gender-based, or racial), how often their child reported being bullied, where the reported bullying was happening, what their school was doing about it, and if they believe those interventions were working. The survey took participants 20 minutes on average to complete. A copy of the instrument is available in Appendix A.

Procedures

Graduate students trained by a Utah Bully Task Force member prior to the PTA conference administered the survey instrument. Parent participants completed the paper-pencil survey on-site with the graduate students available to answer questions and to collect the survey. Parents were given the option to participate in a raffle if they completed the survey; three iPod Shuffles were given away. Participants were also given contact information of the primary researchers if they wanted the results of the survey following the analysis, or if they had any questions or concerns following completion of the survey that the students could not answer. The instrument was created and distributed exclusively in English. The Brigham Young University McKay School of Education Institutional Review Board approved the research and all respective procedures followed.

Data collection. This quantitative research study utilized the responses from the completed parent surveys. The data from those surveys was used to assist in answering the research questions outlined, specifically to better understand parent perspectives on bullying in Utah schools. The surveys were kept in a locked filing cabinet to reference during the analysis of project.

Data analysis. Individual survey responses were entered into an SPSS file to systematically analyze the answers to various items on the survey. This program was also used

to help the researchers run frequency and descriptive statistics on the data and identify overall trends and outcomes in parent responses. A graduate student was used as an outside auditor to review the entering of survey responses while data was entered into the file from a team member researcher.

The primary researcher reviewed and analyzed statistics within the data related to parent perceptions of the frequency and type of bullying behaviors taking place in Utah schools, the location and time when bullying is taking place in Utah schools, and the perceptions regarding intervention efforts made in Utah schools. Percentages of respondents within each category, response trends, as well as demographic information is presented.

Results

Conclusions stated within this section are the results from the analysis of the information received at the PTA conference. These results were found using SPSS analysis, in which researchers ran frequency and descriptive statistics on the data. Such results include demographic information about the students chosen by parents, frequency of bullying behaviors, common and serious types of bullying, times and locations for bullying, and prevention and intervention efforts and their effectiveness, as reported by parents.

Demographic Characteristics of Students

To summarize parent perceptions regarding school safety, descriptive statistics and frequencies were completed. Parents were asked to select one child from their family to be the focus of their responses; they were encouraged to choose a child who had talked with them the most about bullying incidents that happened at school. A total of 36.2% parents responded for their student in grades 4–6, 34.2% responded for a child in grades 1–3, and 18.8% answered for their child in grades 7–9. Parents were much less likely to choose to respond for children of other ages, including pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and high school. Of those responding, 57.1% answered for a male child, 41.0% responded for a female child, and 1.9% chose not to indicate their child's gender. Table 1 presents the percentage of children chosen by the parent responder according to gender and grade, and Table 2 summarizes the total percentage of male and female children chosen by the parent, by grade.

A total of 90.8% of participants chose a child without a disability, while 9.2% indicated their child had some type of disability. A majority of those students with disabilities were in grades 1–3, with 11.8% indicated that their child had a disability. Half of respondents indicated

that their child attended a school with a population of 500–1000 students and in a suburban area

(see Table 3).

Table 1

Percent of Respondents' Children Within Each Grade Range

	Male	Female
Grades 1–3	52.9	47.1
Grades 4–6	64.8	35.2
Grades 7–9	75.0	25.0

Table 2

Percent of Respondents' Children for Each Gender

	Pre-Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Grades 1–6	Grades 7–9	Grades 9–12
Male	0.0	4.5	67.1	23.9	4.5
Female	1.6	8.2	75.4	11.5	3.3

Table 3

Description of Respondent's Child's School

School demographic descriptors	Valid percent[a]
Less than 200 students	1.3
200–500 students	29.6
500–1000 students	50.0
1000–1500 students	15.1
1500–2000 students	2.0
More than 2000 students	2.0
Urban	8.5
Suburban	68.0
Rural	1.3

[a]Indicates the percentage of question respondents who completed this particular question, not

including those who left the item blank.

Parent Perceptions of Bullying

Of the parent respondents, 98.6% indicated that they believe bullying is occurring at their child's school more frequently than they know and that a quarter to one half of all students experience bullying in some form in Utah schools. Likewise, they believe a majority of bullying goes unnoticed by other parents; specifically, 65.4% thought that half or more of all bullying goes unnoticed.

When asked how prevalent they believed bullying was in their child's school, 39.1% of respondents thought that a quarter of students in their child's school experience bullying, while 38.5% believed that half of all students in their child's school experience bullying. Results showed that 10.3% of those who responded indicated that three-quarters of students experience bullying, 7.7% marked that very few students experience bullying, and 2.6% indicated that more than three-quarters of students in their child's school experience bullying.

Student Reports to Parents

The type of bullying also influenced parents' perception of its frequency. Comprehensive results showed that for 48.1% of parent responders, their student is reporting incidents of verbal bullying one or more times a week. By comparison, 42.9% of parents indicated that relational bullying is being brought to their attention one or more times a week. Notably, overall analyses also showed that 48.7% of these parents are never hearing from their child about incidents of cyber or electronic bullying, while 42.3% of all respondents report never having gender-based or homophobic bullying brought to their attention, either. However, more detailed analyses indicated that age and gender do influence these results.

The age of the child chosen influenced the frequency in which parents reported discussions of bullying. For respondents who chose to answer for their child who was in grades

1–3, 47.1% of parents heard about verbal bullying most often as it was brought to their attention one or more times per month. Parents of students in grades 4–6 showed verbal aggression as the most commonly heard form of bullying reported by their child, with 51.9% of parents hearing it one or more times per week. Closely, 46.3% of those same parents also heard about relational bullying one or more times a week. A total of 64.3% of parents of students grades 7–9 indicated that relational aggression was being reported one or more times per week. Also, verbal bullying was frequently reported to parents of junior high-aged students as well, with 60.7% of responders hearing about it one or more times per week. Where previously not noted, parents of junior high students also showed an increased report of electronic or cyber bullying, with 25.0% hearing about it once a semester; similarly, 25.0% reported hearing about gender-based bullying once a semester, and 39.3% hearing about racial or ethnic bullying once a semester. Other target age groups had fewer than 10 respondents (<6.0 valid percent) and were not included in this analysis.

Frequency reports indicated differences when gender was considered as a factor. For parents reporting for female students, relational aggression was reported as the most frequent type of bullying, with 46.9% of parents hearing about it one or more times per week. However, 45.3% of parent respondents also indicated that they were hearing from their daughter about verbal bullying one or more times a week as well. Parents of male children reported verbal bullying as the type of bullying behavior brought to their attention most frequently, with 50.6% of responders saying they are hearing about it once or more times per week. Likewise, parents of male students reported hearing about relational aggression, with 39.3% hearing about it once or more times per week.

Parent Experiences with Bullying

Parents were asked how often they have personally intervened in a bullying situation. A total of 39.5% of parent respondents indicated that they intervened one or more times a school year, while 21.8% indicated they have never intervened. A total of 16.3% of respondents intervened once or more a semester, and 13.6% intervened once or more per month. Only 8.8% of respondents indicated they personally intervened once or more per week regarding bullying situations in their child's school. More detailed analysis showed that the frequency of intervention also differed by age group. Parents of primary students indicated that 36.7% intervened once or more per school year, while 28.6% had never intervened. A total of 43.4% parents of elementary students intervened once or more per school year, with 18.9% intervening once or more a semester. A total of 41.7% of parents of junior high students personally intervened once or more a school year, with 29.2% intervening once or more a semester. A total of 48.2% of parents of male students intervened once or more per school year, while parents of female students ranged in frequency. A total of 26.7% of parents of female students had never intervened, another 26.7% intervened once or more per school year, and 21.7% intervened once or more per semester.

Types. A total of 66.9% of parent respondents believed that verbal aggression or bullying is by far the most common form of bullying in their child's school. Other types of bullying were reported among Utah parents, with 19.2% of parents reporting relational aggression or bullying as most common, 12.3% indicating physical aggression or bullying as most common, and 1.5% indicating that racial aggression was the most common form. Within this sample, cyber bullying and gender-based bullying were not rated by any of the survey's responders as the type of bullying perceived as most common. More detailed analysis indicated

that parents of primary and elementary-aged students agree with the overall analysis, while junior high-aged students' parents believe that verbal aggression is the most common, but with 21.7% indicating that physical aggression is the next most common form of bullying taking place among that age range of students. Parents of female students also agreed with the trends found in the overall analysis, but 19.5% of parents reporting for male students believe that physical bullying is the second most common form of bullying taking place for their child.

Parents also responded about the form of bullying they considered to be the most serious, with many parents choosing more than one type of bullying. More than half of all responders indicated that both verbal and physical aggression were the most serious kinds of bullying. Despite 39.3% of parents of male students reporting hearing reports of relational aggression one or more times per week, 80.2% of those parents thought that relational aggression was not the most serious form of bullying taking place in the school. Instead, half of all parents of male students indicated that both verbal and physical bullying were the most serious.

Times and locations. When asked about their perceptions regarding the time of day when bullying behaviors occur in their child's school, parents indicated between classes, during break periods, and after school as the times when students were most at risk. Particularly, 81.7% of total responders believed that students were often or always at risk during break periods, such as lunch or recess. Also, 61.9% of all respondents reported that students are often or always at risk for being bullied after school, and 47.7% of all respondents also indicated that students were often or always at risk between classes.

Parents were also asked to report locations where they perceived youth to be at risk for bullying. Parents reported elevated, daily offenses on the playground (33.1% of respondents),

bus (22.4%), hallways (19%), bathrooms (18.5%), and the cafeteria (17.4%). These were noted as the most frequent locations for bullying during the four weeks prior to completing the survey.

More detailed analysis indicated that 80.2% of parents of male students believed that during breaks students were most at risk, with 66.3% indicating that after school was also an at-risk time. A total of 33.3% of parents of male students also indicated that bullying on the playground happens daily, and 22.0% of respondents reported bullying on the bus daily for their male child. A total of 28.9% shared that their male child is being bullied in the cafeteria every week, with 22.4% reported bullying happening in the bathrooms every week.

For female students, 86.4% of parents indicated that during breaks was a time for their student to be at-risk for bullying. A total of 80.0% of parents of female students showed that their child was often or always at risk for being bullied during class, with 50.0% reporting that bullying was taking place in the classroom every week. Also, school entrances and the locker room were places of bullying mentioned by 50.0% of respondents of female children.

Parent Perceptions of Interventions

In a series of questions that sampled parents' perceptions regarding school climate and proactive prevention efforts toward bullying in their child's school, parents rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with various statements. Reviewing this data, researchers determined that 52.9% of parents disagreed that their child's school spends plenty of time and resources on bullying preventions. However, 58.2% of parents believed that their child's school has assessed the scope of bullying at the school and is aware of most problems. A total of 64.0% of parents also agreed that students in their child's school were willing to go to teachers and staff with personal or academic problems, while 25.5% disagreed with that statement. More detailed analysis showed that results were consistent within each age and gender group.

A total of 55.8% of respondents agreed that rules about bullying were well defined in their child's school, while 34.4% disagreed, and 9.7% of respondents did not know. Likewise, 45.8% indicated that rules were not publicly posted in their child's school, while 40.6% said that they were posted, and the remaining percentage of respondents did not know. A total of 40.6% of parents disagreed that their child's school consistently and fairly enforces rules about bullying, while 43.3% believed that the rules are consistently enforced and 16.0% did not know. A total of 70.9% agreed that their child's school is proactive when it comes to students' treating each other with respect, while only 20.0% disagreed with that statement and 9.0% did not know. Throughout these parent responses, approximately 10–16% of all respondents did not know whether or not their child's school was implementing these prevention efforts.

Of the interventions listed in the survey, 81.5% of parents responded that counseling is being used as a consequence for bullying in their child's school, and 54.8% of those individuals believe it is somewhat effective. A total of 74.4% of parents said their child's school uses suspension as an anti-bullying tactic, and 57.3% of those parents believed it is somewhat effective as well. Other frequently used interventions are time-out following a bullying incident, which 61.0% of respondents indicated is being used in their child's school; 59.5% of respondents said closer supervision or tracking; and 54.7% indicated that school-wide Positive Behavior Support is being used—all of which were most likely to be rated as somewhat effective by parents.

More detailed analysis showed that 42.4% of parents of students grades 4–6 who said their school was implementing increased supervision of particular bullying-prone areas responded that this was effective as an intervention. Likewise, 44.4% of the group of elementary parents indicated that implementation of Positive Behavior Support in their schools was also

effective in helping to combat bullying, and 35.0% also indicated that parent report following a bullying incident was effective in their child's school. Parents of high school students found suspension to be the most effective intervention effort being used in their child's school, with 66.7% of those with schools implementing the program finding it effective. Additionally, 34.0% of parents of male students thought that increased supervision was effective in their child's school, and of those who reported their son's school was using a specific anti-bullying program, 36.4% rated it as effective.

Discussion

The general purpose of this research project was to increase researchers' and educators'

understanding of the perceptions of parents about bullying in their children's schools. Since

minimal research has been available regarding parents' knowledge of bullying types, frequency

of bullying behavior, and locations of bullying, the results of this study contributed to

understanding parental knowledge of bullying and bullying interventions in schools.

Additionally, these results can help in designing and implementing intervention efforts that

include parent knowledge and perceptions of this pervasive issue.

Insights Gained from Parent Responses

Through the survey administered, parents were given the opportunity to provide their

perspective on the information reported from their student regarding bullying incidents in Utah

schools. Likewise, parents provided insights regarding their own perceptions of school-based

interventions taking place in their child's school and the effectiveness of those interventions.

Results showed that parents perceived bullying to be happening fairly frequently in the schools,

and parents most frequently chose to intervene approximately once a school year. While their

child reported some forms of bullying as much as once a day, parents indicated that bullying is

still taking place more than they or other parents are made aware. Based on the number of

parents who reported not knowing about school-based interventions, it can be implied that

schools are not adequately involving parents in bullying interventions.

Parent perceptions of student reports. Based on global analysis of the data collected

from the survey, it appears that verbal and relational bullying are reported to parents by both

male and female students of the age ranges included in the survey. Parents of female children

indicated that they were hearing about relational and verbal aggression relatively equally, while

parents of male children were more likely to report verbal aggression than relational aggression, when compared to parents of female students. Most parents in the sample reported that they were hearing about these forms of aggression from their bullied child one or more times a week.

Considering that parents identified verbal and relational bullying as being heard the most often, it would also be expected that parents would then report those two forms of bullying as the most common within their child's school. Overall, this consistent perception was found for most groups. However, when the data were analyzed according to age and gender, the results indicated that despite the reported high prevalence of these two forms of bullying by parents regarding their individual child's experience, parents of male students marked verbal aggression as the most common form of bullying, with physical bullying being the second most common form in their child's school. The same response occurred for parents of students in grades 7–9, in that they also indicated that relational aggression was reported most frequently by their bullied child, and verbal aggression was second in reported incidents to parents. However, when asked which form of bullying was most common, parents of junior high students specified that verbal aggression was the most common, with physical bullying being the next most common form of bullying taking place in their child's school.

With parents reporting that their child typically experiences verbal and relational aggression most often, it is notable to find that some groups of parents indicated that different forms of bullying were more common in their child's school. It would be expected that parents' general perception of their child's school population would reflect their child's experiences with bullying. This inconsistency in responding presents the possibility that parents perceive their child's bullying experiences to be different from most of their child's peers. Based on the results found, it could be concluded that parents of male students and parents of students in grades 7–9

do not believe their child's experiences are typical for other same-age, same-sex peers, or for their child's student population overall. This research question could be further explored in a qualitative research project where unstructured answers could be considered and explored.

Through more detailed analysis, it was also shown that parents of junior high-aged students indicated that their child reported cyber bullying, gender-based bullying, and racial or ethnic bullying when parents of students in other, younger, age ranges had not reported any occurrence of these types of bullying. This may be due to the lack of technological exposure and experience that most elementary school students possess. Likewise, the emphasis placed on gender and racial identity that comes with adolescence would put students in grades 7–9 at increased risk for these kinds of bullying incidents than their younger, elementary-aged peers (Berk, 2003).

Comprehensive analyses showed that survey respondents indicated that daily offenses happen for their bullied child most often on the playground, hallways, bathroom, and cafeteria. These results are consistent with research that considers students' reports of bullying. For elementary school students, bullying most often occurs on the playground (Rivers & Smith, 1994). Locations identified by the sampled population coincided with this research because parent responders within this sample were most often responding for an elementary-aged student.

However, more detailed analysis revealed that these problem areas are more of a concern for parents of male students than for parents of female students. Contrastingly, parents of female students reported that their child is more likely to be bullied during class, at school entrances, or in locker rooms. This aligns with the research literature that describes bullying among secondary school-aged students occurring in the corridor, in the classroom, or in other places (Parault, Davis, & Pelligrini, 2007), despite the fact that many parents of female students within this

sample reported for a child in grades 1–6. The literature also states that within those locations, students are reporting more indirect forms of bullying, such as relational aggression (Glew et al., 2005; Parault, Davis, & Pelligrini, 2007), which is the most common form of bullying reported by parents of female students in the sampled population. Interestingly, parents of female students reported the locker room as a place of concern for their child experiencing bullying. Historically, this specific location has been known as a key area for male hazing, especially among adolescent populations (Hoover & Pollard, 2000). Thus, according to this study, this ritual may be shifting, with locker rooms becoming a key targeting place for females to relationally aggress one another, outside the adult supervision provided in alternate locations throughout the school.

Parent perceptions of intervention effectiveness. Parents perceived school intervention efforts to be somewhat effective. Various groups indicated a few key specific interventions as effective (e.g., increased supervision, Positive Behavior Support, parent report), but the perceived effectiveness depended on the age of the child for whom parents were reporting. A slight majority of parents indicated that the bullying problem was properly assessed and understood by school personnel; however, they also believed that not enough time and resources were being spent on bullying preventions at their child's school.

Aside from the information presented above, it is important to note that 10–16% of all parents who responded to the intervention questions did not know whether or not prevention efforts were being made in their child's school. Especially given that this study's sample of parents are perhaps among the most involved parents in local schools, and given that individuals who took the time to complete the survey may have an interest in bullying issues, it appears that parents may not be integrally involved in school-based bullying prevention and intervention

efforts. This seems to be an unfortunate oversight, as parents are quite aware of bullying incidents, but response and prevention efforts remain the responsibility of the educators and staff. Possibly, educators may not realize the rich, informative outlook and resources that parents can and should provide.

According to analysis of the respondents' data, parents of female students and parents of students in grades 1–3 reported the least amount of personal intervention in a bullying situation during the school year. Approximately 25% of the parent respondents within each of these populations reported never intervening during the school year, despite the reported daily occurrences of relational and verbal bullying happening at their child's school. In contrast, parents of students in grades 4–6 and parents of high school students reported higher rates of personal intervention, with only 15.1% of parents of elementary-aged students reported never having intervened and a total of 16.7% of parents of high school students having never intervened.

Implications for Practice

The information received through analyses of the respondents' data shows the need for further implications in practice for the entire school community. Training for students, staff, and parents would be an advantageous start for schools as they work to better involve parents and combat bullying incidents. Likewise, better program support and input from parents should be sought by school professionals in an effort to improve prevention and intervention efforts being used in the schools.

Curriculum for students. Since the population sampled responded primarily for elementary-aged students, it is apparent that addressing bullying at an early age is important because there are a notable number of bullying incidents among this age group. Programs that

target social skill training and socially appropriate replacement behaviors related to verbal and relational aggression would directly respond to parent reports within Utah schools and are shown to be effective (DeRosier, 2004). Likewise, since parents of junior high-aged students indicated that their children reported cyber bullying, gender-based bullying, and racial or ethnic bullying, when parents of other, younger, age ranges had not reported any occurrence of these types of bullying, it would be wise to use school resources to combat these forms of bullying starting in late elementary school (4–6 grade) in order to prevent incidents that could take place in the junior high setting.

With the increase in reported levels of cyber bullying among students in grades 7–9, school efforts might best be spent in implementing programs that incorporate proper use of technological devices regarding relationships and personal information shared publicly. Additionally, prevention programs that teach strength in diversity in a variety of categories such as gender, sexual orientation, or racial identity may also prove to be helpful in combating these specific types of bullying incidents within junior highs and high schools.

Staff training. One important implication for practice involves training teachers and other school personnel to properly identify and watch for bullying behavior in classrooms, especially for female students. This area is difficult to address, since it is acknowledged that students are able to relationally and verbally aggress toward others in discreet ways that teachers may not readily observe. However, adequate time and resources would assist in teaching staff skills that could be used in various settings throughout the school and serve as an important element in school-wide implementation of anti-bullying efforts. Results received in this research project showed the implementation of Positive Behavior Support within the school was perceived by parents as being effective. Such programs are research-based and shown to

decrease problem behaviors from students overall (Scott, Park, Swain-Bradway, & Landers, 2007).

Also, as the data showed that various locations were considered to be potentially hazardous for students, especially for the female student population. Increased supervision at school entrances and in the locker rooms might prove helpful and prevent further incidents of bullying from taking place in these settings. Likewise, as previously mentioned, if teachers are properly trained in how to identify bullying behaviors, they can be more prepared to stop bullying within these locations when they see it (Jacobson, 2009).

Increased parent involvement. Parents perceived that their child's school had properly assessed the scope of bullying at the school and that administrators were aware of most of the problems. However, parents then noted that they did not believe the school was spending adequate time and resources on bullying prevention. Therefore, after properly assessing the scope of the bullying problem, school administrators and psychologists could involve parents in the design and implementation of bullying efforts made in the school. Specifically, efforts to consider parents' perspectives regarding use of resources and then to integrate their ideas in intervention efforts seems only reasonable, given that parents indicated they are quite aware of school-based bullying.

Parent training. Considering the 10–16% of all parents who did not know whether or not prevention efforts were being made in their child's school, it might be wise for future plans for bullying prevention and intervention projects to incorporate more parent forums or information sessions to assist in educating and instructing parents on school-wide policies and implementation of bullying rules made within the school. Forums such as back-to-school night, Parent Teacher Association meetings, or school Community Council meetings would serve as a

place for parents to learn about school-wide programs and to offer additional ideas in aiding

programs within the school. Such trainings could also provide more opportunities for parents to

be involved in the decision-making process, to negotiate time and resources related to prevention

and intervention efforts, and to offer suggestions with the perspective of school-wide needs and

objectives. Helping parents understand how to respond to their child's reports of bullying would

be another important outcome for parent training, one that could be accomplished, at least to

some extent, through a school newsletter column or a take-home letter from school personnel.

Limitations

Limitations from this research project are related to the sample characteristics and the

unknown psychometric properties of the survey instrument. Due to the nature of the sampling

pool at the Parent Teacher Association conference, the characteristics of the sample were not

comparable to national stratified samples. Respondents from this study were predominantly

female (97%) and White/ European American (96%); they were well educated, with a majority

earning an associate's or bachelor's degree (52%). Recognized as a convenience sample, this

population was an opportunity for researchers to easily sample potentially well-informed and

motivated participants. However, results can simply be generalized to female, well-educated

parents participating in PTA in Utah. Implications for future research would indicate a broader

sampling of parents from both genders, from various states, and from more diverse ethnic,

educational, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Another limitation was the survey instrument used in this study. It was developed under

the direction of the Utah Bully Task Force, and was not rigorously tested with a pilot group to

determine reliability statistics or validity evidence on multiple respondent groups. Professionals

in this group administered a similar survey to educators across Utah, but no statistical data was

received regarding these important statistics. It was also noted that the survey instrument used had a discrepancy in the area where respondents were to indicate the grade level of the student for which they would be responding, showing "junior high or middle school (grades 7-9)" and "secondary (grades 9-12)," creating the possibility that a child in the ninth grade could have been marked in either category.

Likewise, results analyzed from this research project indicated more parent respondents focused on a child who was attending grades 4–6 or who was male. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if the results found regarding type, location, and parent involvement with bullying can be generalized beyond the specific experiences reported by these parents. Additionally, it is important to note that the population sampled was from a local Parent Teacher Association conference in Utah. Thus, it is difficult to determine if these results are a general trend of parent perceptions on bullying across the nation or are more of a reflection of the population who attended the conference.

Finally, this was only a survey of parent perceptions about bullying experienced by their targeted child. Participants appropriately relied on their own experiences and perceptions. However, their perceptions may have reflected some inherent biases. For example, when a child is reporting a bullying incident to a parent, he or she may not share how his or her behavior may have been hurtful, aggressive, or bullying, as well. Parents were not asked to consider or report the possibility of their child acting aggressively or in the role of a bully. Further meaningful research could target parents of students who have been known to bully. This kind of research design could remediate this current research project's deficits within parenting perspectives overall.

Conclusion

Bullying is a pervasive and important issue facing professionals in the schools and parents of youth. It is a threat to school safety and to the physical and psychological well being of children (Stockdale, Hanguduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002). Repeated acts of aggression, intimidation, or coercion against another student are taking place frequently in schools, according to parents. Specifically, the occurrence of verbal aggression and relational bullying are commonly reported by parents in Utah schools involved in the PTA, and are pervasive enough to be perceived as affecting approximately a quarter to one half of all students in the schools. A total of 98.6% of parent responders believed that bullying is happening more than they or other parents know. Parents also indicated that they agreed that their child's school was taking preventative measures in combating bullying, and that most interventions being used in the schools are somewhat effective.

Information gathered in this study is meaningful in providing previously unresearched parent perceptions on bullying in the schools. The analyzed results lead researchers to not only better understand what parents know, but to evaluate ways to design and implement bullying interventions in the schools that include parent knowledge and perceptions of this pervasive issue.

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Appendix A

Copy of the Survey Instrument

Bullying Awareness and Intervention Survey

Bullying is a common occurrence in today's schools and we would like your help in learning more about parent perspectives on this matter. Your information and experiences are important to us. In this questionnaire you will be asked questions about bullying experiences your child has discussed with you, and those you may have observed or experienced while at their school.

It will take you approximately 25 minutes to answer the questions that follow. Your answers will remain anonymous. The information you provide will be stored and safeguarded in a locked filing cabinet in Ellie Young's office at Brigham Young University. Only Ellie Young and others helping with research will have access to your responses.

The anonymous information you share will help us develop better understand your perspective on bullying in schools. Because the questions are personal in nature, you may experience some slight emotional discomfort. The risk is considered to be minimal; however, your reactions may vary depending on your and your child's experiences with bullying. Your participation is voluntary. Should you feel uncomfortable with the questions, you may choose to discontinue at any time.

This research is being completed by Ellie Young, associate professor at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. If you have concerns, you may contact me at (801) 422-1593, at ellie_young@byu.edu, or at 340-P MCKB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Dromey at (801) 422-6461, at christopher_dromey@byu.edu, or at 133 TLRB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.

Thank you for your help with this important research.
Ellie Young

Glossary of Terms

Physical bullying
- *hitting, shoving, pushing, kicking, spitting at or beating up others*
- *damaging or stealing someone's property*

Verbal bullying
- *name-calling, hurtful teasing*
- *insulting, humiliating or threatening someone*

Relational bullying
- *excluding others from "the group"*
- *gossiping or spreading rumors about others*
- *setting others up to embarrass them or make them look foolish*
- *making sure others don't associate with someone*

Electronic or Cyber bullying
- *sending e-mail or phone text messages or pictures to threaten or hurt someone's feelings; to single out, embarrass, or make them look bad; or to spread rumors or reveal secrets about them*

Gender-based bullying
- *leaving others out or treating them badly because they are a boy or a girl*
- *making sexist comments or jokes*
- *homophobic bullying (i.e. statements like "he's/she's a fag")*

Racial/ Ethnocultural bullying
- *treating people differently or badly because of their culture, their racial or ethnic background, or the color of their skin*
- *saying negative things about someone's culture, racial or ethnic background, or skin color*
- *calling someone by a racially derogatory term*
- *telling racist jokes*

Please complete the following survey of bullying prevalence and intervention for your child's school. *IF YOU HAVE MORE THAN ONE CHILD, PLEASE CHOOSE THE CHILD WHO HAS TALKED WITH YOU MOST ABOUT BULLYING AT SCHOOL.

1. Please indicate the *current* grades levels of _each of your children_ by writing the number of children you have in each grade level.

- ☐ Pre-school
- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ Primary (grades 1-3)
- ☐ Elementary (grades 4-6)
- ☐ Junior high or middle school (grades 7-9)
- ☐ Secondary (grades 9-12)

2. What school district do your children attend?

_____

3. What is the current grade level of the child for whom you are responding in this survey?

- ☐ Pre-school
- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ Primary (grades 1-3)
- ☐ Elementary (grades 4-6)
- ☐ Junior high or middle school (grades 7-9)
- ☐ Secondary (grades 9-12)

4. What is the gender of the child?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

5. Does this child have a disability?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. How many students are in your child's school?

- ☐ Less than 200 students
- ☐ 200-500 students
- ☐ 500-1000 students
- ☐ 1000-1500 students
- ☐ 1500-2000 students
- ☐ More than 2000 students

7. How would you describe the area your child's school is located in?

- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Urban

8. How prevalent do you think bullying is in your child's school?

- ☐ Very few students experience bullying
- ☐ 25% of students experience bullying
- ☐ 50% of students experience bullying
- ☐ 75% of students experience bullying
- ☐ More than 75% of students experience bullying

9. Think about different types of bullying at your child's school, do they differ in frequency?

Based on your personal experience, indicate how often the various kinds of bullying are brought to your attention by *selecting ONE response for each of the following statements*.	*Never*	Once or more per school year	Once or more per semester	Once or more per month	Once or more per week
How frequently do you hear about **physical bullying** at your child's school? *Examples: hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, spitting on or at someone; damaging or stealing someone's property*	O	O	O	O	O
How frequently do you hear about **verbal bullying** at your child's school? *Examples: name-calling, hurtful teasing; insulting, humiliating, or threatening someone*	O	O	O	O	O
How frequently do you hear about **relational bullying** at your child's school? *Examples: gossiping or spreading rumors about others, excluding someone from a group, setting someone up to embarrass them or make them look foolish*	O	O	O	O	O
How frequently do you hear about **electronic or cyber bullying** at your child's school? *Examples: sending e-mail or phone text messages or pictures to single out, threaten, or embarrass someone; hurt their feelings or make them look bad; spread rumors or reveal secrets about them*	O	O	O	O	O
How frequently do you hear about **gender-based or homophobic bullying** at your child's school? *Examples: leaving others out or making fun of them because of their gender; making sexist comments; making statements like "he's/she's a fag"*	O	O	O	O	O
How frequently do you hear about **racial/ ethnocultural bullying** at your child's school? *Examples: saying negative things about someone's culture, racial or ethnic background, or color of their skin; calling someone a racially derogatory term; telling racist jokes*	O	O	O	O	O
How often have you personally intervened in a bullying situation?	O	O	O	O	O

10. Do you believe that bullying is occurring at your child's school more frequently than you know?

☐ Yes
☐ No

10a. If yes, **how frequently do you believe bullying goes unnoticed by other parents as well?**

☐ It rarely goes unnoticed
☐ 25% of the time bullying goes unnoticed
☐ 50% of the time bullying goes unnoticed
☐ 75% of the time bullying goes unnoticed
☐ More than 75% of the time bullying goes unnoticed

11. As a parent, which form of bullying do you perceive as the most common?

☐ Relational aggression/bullying
☐ Verbal aggression/bullying
☐ Physical aggression/bullying
☐ Electronic or Cyber bullying
☐ Gender-based bullying
☐ Racial/ Ethnocultural bullying

12. Which form of bullying do you consider as the most serious?

- ☐ Relational aggression/bullying
- ☐ Verbal aggression/bullying
- ☐ Physical aggression/bullying
- ☐ Electronic or Cyber bullying
- ☐ Gender-based bullying
- ☐ Racial/ Ethnocultural bullying

13. The following questions ask about bullying at your child's school in general.

Based on your personal experience from the <u>past three months</u>, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about bullying at your child's school by selecting *ONE response for each of the following statements.*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	*Agree*	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
There is a high degree of bullying at my child's school.	O	O	O	O	O
Plenty of time and resources are being spent on bullying preventions at my child's school.	O	O	O	O	O
My child's school has assessed the scope of bullying at their school and is aware of most problems.	O	O	O	O	O
My child's school is aware of the areas where the most bullying occurs, and provides close supervision in those areas (hallways, restrooms, cafeteria etc.)	O	O	O	O	O
My child's school has held school-wide assemblies to raise awareness of the problem of bullying and to communicate the policy on bullying.	O	O	O	O	O
My child's school has held teacher/staff trainings to communicate how to handle bullying problems.	O	O	O	O	O
Students in my child's school have received training about responding to bullying.	O	O	O	O	O
Rules about bullying are well defined.	O	O	O	O	O
Rules about bullying are publicly posted in my child's school.	O	O	O	O	O
Rules about bullying are consistently and fairly enforced at my child's school.	O	O	O	O	O
My child's school has a confidential reporting system that allows children to report victimization.	O	O	O	O	O
My child's school provides activities that foster mutual understanding and appreciation of differences in others.	O	O	O	O	O
My child's school is proactive when it comes to students treating each other with respect.	O	O	O	O	O
Students in my child's school are willing to go to teachers and staff with personal and academic problems.	O	O	O	O	O

14. With your experience as a parent, think about the <u>past four weeks</u> and indicate what time period during the day you think students are most at risk of being bullied by selecting ONE response for each time.

When are students likely to be bullied?	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Before school	O	O	O	O
During classes	O	O	O	O
Between classes	O	O	O	O
During break periods (lunch, recess)	O	O	O	O
After school	O	O	O	O
On weekends	O	O	O	O

15. With your experience as a parent, think about the <u>past four weeks</u> and indicate the frequency of bullying in each of the following locations. If a location is not applicable to your child's school mark N/A.

Location	N/A	Not Once in 4 Weeks	Once or Twice in 4 Weeks	Every Week	Daily
Classrooms	O	O	O	O	O
Hallways	O	O	O	O	O
School entrances or exits	O	O	O	O	O
Library	O	O	O	O	O
Computer rooms	O	O	O	O	O
Gymnasium	O	O	O	O	O
Bathrooms	O	O	O	O	O
School Bus	O	O	O	O	O
Change room or locker rooms	O	O	O	O	O
Playground	O	O	O	O	O
On the way to and from school	O	O	O	O	O
Lunchroom or eating area/cafeteria	O	O	O	O	O
Parking lot	O	O	O	O	O
Areas off school property, but close to the school	O	O	O	O	O
Areas off school property where students smoke	O	O	O	O	O
On field trips	O	O	O	O	O
Other (please specify below)		O	O	O	O

16. Think about your child's school and bullying issues. What has your child's school done to help decrease bullying at the school? Please indicate which things your child's school has done *and* whether or not you think they have helped.

Intervention for Bullies	Tried at School?	*Not Effective*	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Should Try?
Peer Managers (peer examples)	O Yes O No O I don't know what this is (IDK)	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Counseling/Talk	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Suspension (removal from school)	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Time Out	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Closer Supervision or Tracking	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Self-Management Self-Control Training/Tracking	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Social Skills/Relationship Training	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Specific Bullying Package Program (i.e. Bully Busters)	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Sensitivity/Empathy Training	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Aggression Replacement Training	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No
Parent Report	O Yes O No O IDK	O	O	O	O Yes O No

Open Ended Questions
What does your child's school need most to prevent bullying? (Use the list above or write your own ideas)

What else would you like us to know regarding bullying in your child's school?

Demographic Questions
What is your age?

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ 31-35
- ☐ 36-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 51-60
- ☐ 61+

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

What is the highest educational degree you have completed?

- ☐ No degree completed
- ☐ High school diploma/GED
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Educational Specialist
- ☐ Doctorate degree

What is your race?

- ☐ White/ European American
- ☐ Black/ African American
- ☐ Asian American
- ☐ Hispanic/ Latino
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ American Indian
- ☐ Multiracial
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Where did you hear about this survey?

- ☐ PTA Conference
- ☐ Utah Parent Center newsletter
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Thank you very much for participating in our study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please direct your questions to the students at the booth.