

# Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: Fidelity and School Characteristics

Center for Schools and Communities

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Program fidelity is a complex matter, particularly when programs are implemented in schools with myriad grade structures and building conditions that affect implementation. The Center for Safe Schools, a division of the Center for Schools and Communities, coordinates the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) in over 100 schools in Pennsylvania following the award of a major grant from Highmark Healthy High 5, an initiative of the Highmark Foundation. This Research Brief examines fidelity data from schools that implemented the Olweus Program in Pennsylvania to ascertain how different school conditions relate to program fidelity (the extent to which a program is implemented properly (Patton, 2008)). Specifically, in this brief we examine the fidelity teachers had to the OBPP model in terms of their attitudes about, and implementation of, the model. Both of these types of teacher reports are compared by school characteristics such as enrollment and location.

## How was the analysis conducted?

This analysis uses a sample of over 1,200 teachers in 61 schools across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The teachers worked in elementary (46 percent), middle (41 percent) and junior-senior high schools grades (13 percent), primarily in rural (50 percent) or suburban (35 percent) areas. The schools were in 23 counties across Pennsylvania and at least 10 teachers were sampled in each school.

Teachers anonymously rated their agreement with five attitudinal statements about the program on a 6-point scale (“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). They also rated the frequency with which they implemented the eight program components on a 6-point scale (“not at all” to “more than once a week”). Responses to these questions were compared for different school characteristics, including three levels of enrollment (the lowest, middle and top third of enrollments)

and whether schools were elementary, middle or junior-senior grade schools. Table 1 lists each of the attitudinal variables in rows and the percentage of teachers who indicated they either “strongly agree” or “agree” to each statement, for different school enrollments and school levels. Table 2 presents the percentage of teachers who implement each component at least “2–3 times per month.”

## School level is a common correlate of OBPP fidelity.

Program implementation and program attitudes varied according to whether teachers taught in elementary, middle or junior-senior high schools. Teachers’ attitudinal ratings of the importance of OBPP typically decline when they work in higher grades (Table 1). For example, whereas 85 percent of teachers in elementary schools “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that OBPP is important, only 62 percent of their counterparts in junior-senior high schools do. Differences in the ratings teachers gave to OBPP being “integral” to their school and in whether they received adequate training also varied by school level, again with teachers in higher grades showing less agreement. Teachers’ ratings of OBPP program knowledge was not statistically significant by school level, however.

Teachers’ implementation of OBPP components also varied by school level (Table 2). Generally, teachers in higher grade levels reported lower implementation frequencies. Some exceptions to this pattern are staff conversations about OBPP and staff meetings about bullying, each of which had more frequent implementation in middle school than elementary school. One of the biggest differences in implementation frequency were teachers’ reports of students’ reporting bullying itself, especially between elementary and junior-senior high schools.

## School enrollment also has important relationships to OBPP fidelity.

School enrollment is also associated with different amounts of teacher agreement with, and implementation of, OBPP components. Table 1 shows, for instance, that while 69 percent of teachers in the lowest enrollment schools (less than 547 students) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that OBPP was integral to their schools, about 50 percent of teachers in schools with the highest third of enrollments (more than 733 students) did so. Similarly, about 81 percent of teachers in low enrollment schools “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that OBPP was important, while only 64 percent in high enrollment schools did so.

**Table 1: Percent of Teachers Who Strongly Agree or Agree with 5 Attitudes about OBPP, by School Characteristics**

	Enrollment			School Level		
	Low	Mid	High	ES	MS	JrSr
Know OBPP Components	80.5	74.1	74.1	77.4	74.2	80.2
Received Adequate Training	71.2	61.3	47.8	69.9	52.4	62.8
Received Adequate Support	74.5	67.6	55.1	72.4	59.7	69.8
OBPP Important for School	80.6	73.5	64.1	84.5	67.1	62.0
OBPP Integral to School	69.4	53.0	49.8	69.4	52.2	42.0

Source: PA CARES Data Collection System, 2009-10.  
Comparisons for percentages across enrollment and school level are statistically significant (overall chi-square,  $p < .05$ ) except for “Know OBPP” by school level.

### Other correlates of teacher attitudes and implementation.

School location also had a strong relationship to teachers' attitudes and implementation practices overall for several of the 11 attitude and implementation measures (two are shown in Figure 1). For example, ratings that OBPP was important and integral were higher in rural schools than in suburban or urban communities (a difference between suburban and urban schools was not statistically significant). Finally, teachers' attitudes and implementation frequency are correlated themselves—that is, as teachers' attitudes about OBPP decline, so do their levels of implementation frequency ( $r=.252$ ). While this correlation is small, it does indicate that important implementation differences may occur for teachers with low versus high attitudinal commitments to OBPP.

### What can we conclude about the role of school characteristics on OBPP fidelity?

Several implementation trends are evident when fidelity indicators and school characteristics are examined together. While program knowledge is consistent across school types and grade levels, respondents report several important differences in their attitudes about the OBPP and implementation of important program components. For instance, this analysis suggests that OBPP implementation may achieve higher fidelity when it is applied in smaller schools and at lower grade levels. In addition, elementary teachers report higher implementation of key program components, although the frequency of staff conversations about the OBPP and staff meetings about bullying was highest among teachers in middle schools. This finding is significant to educators and bullying prevention consultants because it suggests that “staff conversations and meetings” may be important leverage points in middle school implementation.

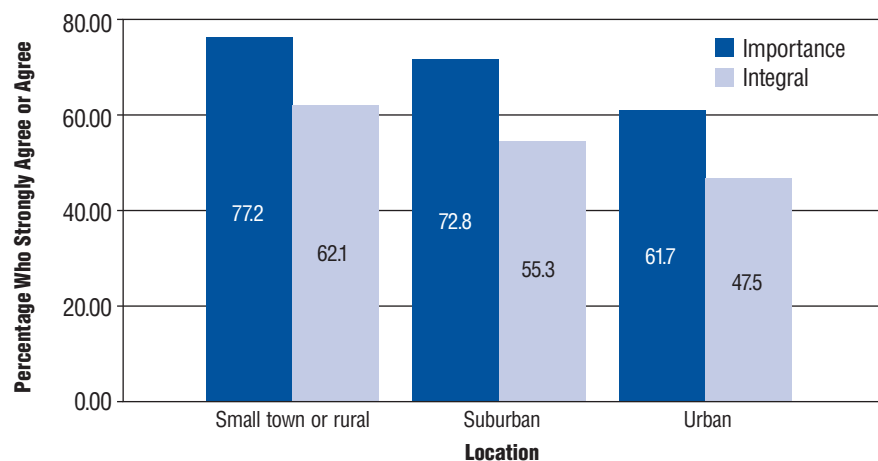
**Table 2: Percent of Teachers Who Implement Key OBPP Components 2-3 Times a Month or More, by School Characteristics**

	Enrollment			School Level		
	Low	Mid	High	ES	MS	JrSr
Rec'v Reports from Students	46.0	41.4	40.4	49.6	45.1	14.9
Staff Conversations About OBPP	73.5	60.8	75.2	66.2	77.2	48.6
Intervene in Bullying	48.1	37.7	42.1	47.6	45.2	20.6
Staff Meetings About Bullying	71.4	68.3	83.0	71.6	82.3	47.4
Follow-up on Bullying Incidents	53.5	45.4	47.7	57.3	49.6	21.1
Use Role Play Activities	27.6	19.3	19.7	23.6	22.8	13.9

Source: PA CARES Data Collection System, 2009-10.

Comparisons for percentages across enrollment and school level are statistically significant (overall chi-square,  $p < .05$ ) except for “Rec'v Reports from Students” by enrollment and “Role Play” by school level.

**Figure 1: Teacher OBPP Attitudes by School Location**



Finally, these data confirm a positive relationship between teachers' attitudes about OBPP and their implementation of program activities. Like earlier studies (Mihalic, et al, 2004), this correlation suggests that practitioners must not only perform program activities but also be committed to the program to bolster its fidelity. At the secondary level, specific attention to adapting the implementation to enhance its fit to students and teachers alike may be required. ■

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### References

Mihalic, S., Irwin, K., Fagan, A., Ballard, D., and Elliott D. (2004). Successful program implementation: Lessons from blueprints. Office of Justice Programs. (Washington DC: US Department of Justice).  
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<sup>1</sup>All differences discussed in the text of this Research Brief are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

The Center for Safe Schools (CSS), through a unique partnership with the Highmark Foundation, its Healthy High 5 Initiative, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, created the PA CARES (Pennsylvania Creating an Atmosphere of Respect and Environment for Success) Initiative. PA CARES is a dedicated opportunity to build local school readiness and capacity for the successful implementation of the research-based Olweus

Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and other proven intervention strategies within approximately 120 schools within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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