

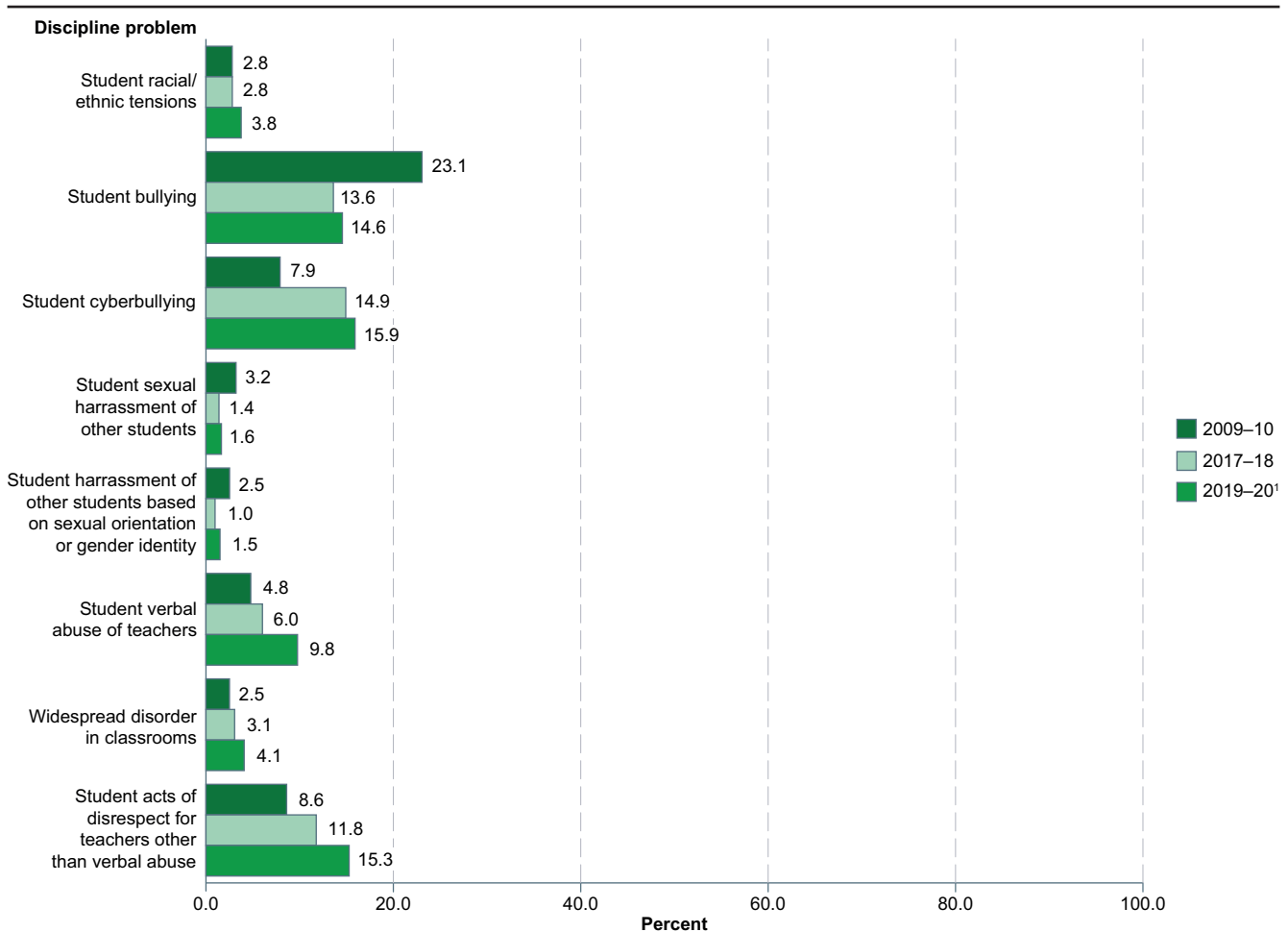
Discipline Problems Reported by Public Schools

The percentage of public schools reporting that student bullying occurred at least once a week was lower in 2019–20 than in 2009–10 (15 vs. 23 percent). In contrast, a higher percentage of public schools reported student cyberbullying in 2019–20 than in 2009–10 (16 vs. 8 percent).

The School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) asked public school principals how often certain disciplinary problems happened in their schools during the school year. This indicator focuses on reports of various discipline problems occurring at least once a week. These discipline

problems include student behaviors at school as well as cyberbullying.¹ The most recent SSOCS data available are for 2019–20. Due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in spring 2020, caution is recommended when making comparisons to earlier years.²

Figure 1. Percentage of public schools reporting selected discipline problems that occurred at least once a week: Selected school years, 2009–10, 2017–18, and 2019–20



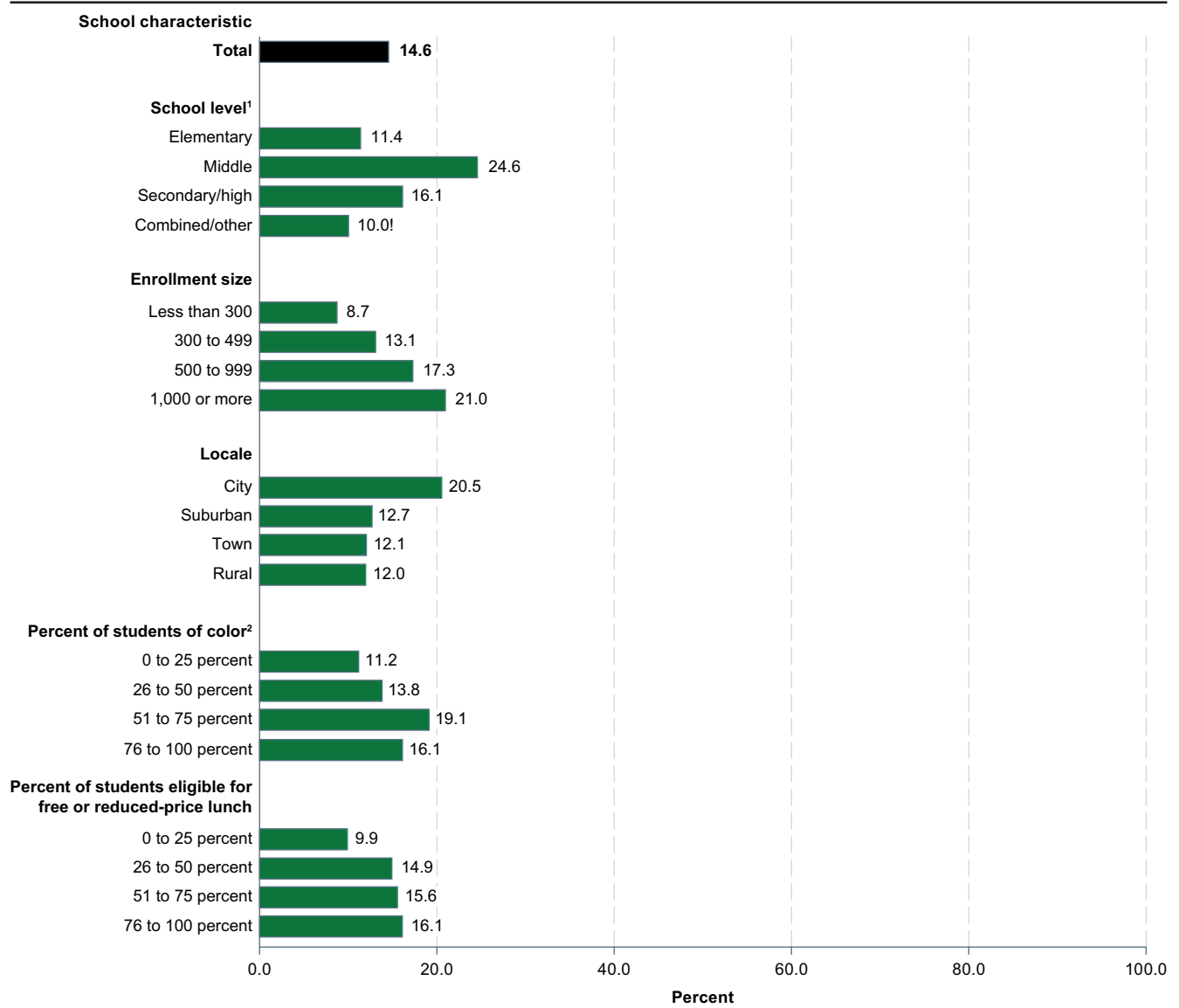
¹ The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019–20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when comparing 2019–20 estimates with those from earlier years. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming). NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. “At school” was defined to include activities that happen in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities. Respondents were instructed to include discipline problems only for those times that were during normal school hours or when school activities or events were in session, unless the survey specified otherwise. For the “student cyberbullying” item, respondents were instructed to include cyberbullying “problems that can occur anywhere (both at your school and away from school).” Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009–10, 2017–18, and 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2010, 2018, and 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 230.10.

In 2019-20, student bullying and cyberbullying were among the most prevalent discipline problems reported by public schools. Specifically, 15 percent of public schools reported that bullying occurred among students at least once a week. Sixteen percent of public schools reported that cyberbullying occurred among students at least once a week. Student verbal abuse and other acts of disrespect for teachers were also relatively common. Ten percent of public schools reported student verbal abuse of teachers, and 15 percent reported acts of student disrespect for teachers other than verbal abuse. In addition, 4 percent of public schools reported widespread disorder in the classroom and 4 percent reported student racial/ethnic tensions. Also, 2 percent each reported sexual harassment of other students and harassment of other students based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Of the discipline problems occurring at least once a week in 2019-20, some problems were more prevalent and some were less prevalent compared with a decade ago. Specifically, a higher percentage of public schools

reported cyberbullying in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 (16 vs. 8 percent). Additionally, higher percentages of public schools in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 reported student discipline problems related to teachers and classrooms. Specifically, higher percentages reported student verbal abuse of teachers (10 vs. 5 percent), student acts of disrespect for teachers other than verbal abuse (15 vs. 9 percent), and widespread disorder in the classroom (4 vs. 3 percent) in 2019-20 than in 2009-10. In contrast, behaviors at school that targeted fellow students were generally less prevalent compared with a decade ago. Specifically, lower percentages of public schools in 2019-20 than in 2009-10 reported student bullying (15 vs. 23 percent), student sexual harassment of other students (2 vs. 3 percent), and student harassment of other students based on sexual orientation or gender identity (2 vs. 3 percent) at school. There were no measurable differences between 2019-20 and 2009-2010 in the percentages of public schools reporting that student racial/ethnic tensions occurred at least once a week.

Figure 2. Percentage of public schools reporting that student bullying occurred at school at least once a week, by selected school characteristics: School year 2019–20



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
¹ Elementary schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades K through 4 than in higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 5 through 8 than in higher or lower grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools include all other combinations of grades, including K–12 schools.
² The term “students of color” is being used synonymously with “minority students” in *Digest* table 230.10. Students of color include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races.
 NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. “Bullying” was defined for respondents as “any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated.” “At school” was defined to include activities that happen in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities. Respondents were instructed to include discipline problems only for those times that were during normal school hours or when school activities or events were in session, unless the survey specified otherwise. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 230.10.

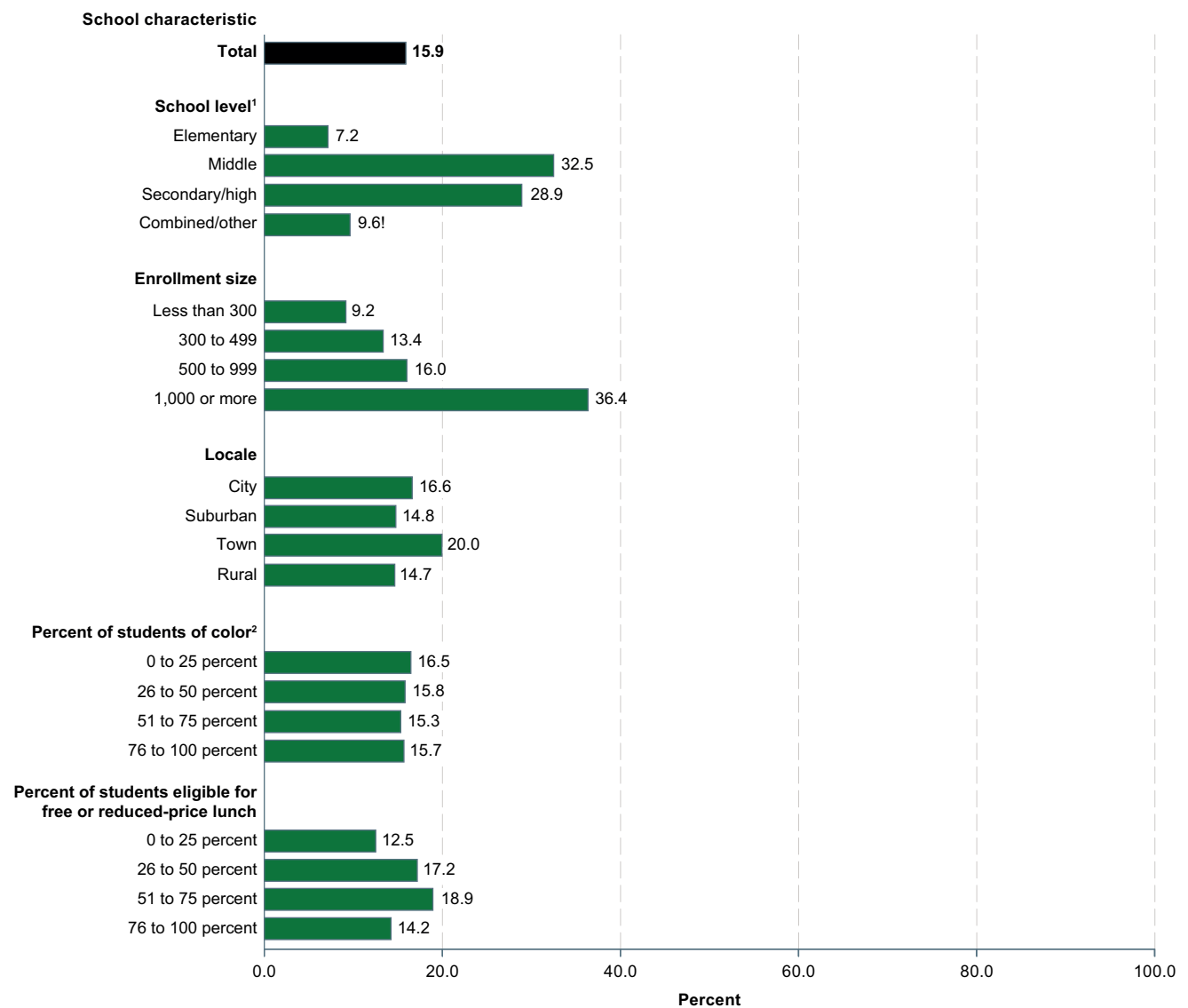
During the 2019-20 school year, the percentage of public schools reporting student bullying varied by school characteristics. For instance, about 25 percent of middle schools reported that student bullying occurred at least once a week, which was higher than the 16 percent of secondary/high schools, 11 percent of elementary schools, and 10 percent of combined/other schools that did so. The percentage for secondary/high schools was also higher than the percentage for elementary schools.³

In 2019-20, the percentage of public schools reporting student bullying was generally higher for public schools with higher enrollments. Specifically, a higher percentage of public schools with 1,000 or more students (21 percent) than of those with 300 to 499 students enrolled (13 percent) or those with under 300 students enrolled (9 percent) reported student bullying. The percentage was also higher for public schools with 500 to 999 students

enrolled (17 percent) than for those with under 300 students enrolled.

Reports of student bullying also differed along other school characteristics. In 2019-20, about 21 percent of public schools in cities reported student bullying, compared with 13 percent of schools in suburban areas, 12 percent of schools in towns, and 12 percent of schools in rural areas. The percentage of public schools reporting student bullying was lower for those where 25 percent or less of the students were students of color⁴ (11 percent) than for those where 51 percent to 75 percent of the students (19 percent) and 76 percent or more of the students (16 percent) were students of color. Public schools where 25 percent or less of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch reported the lowest percentage of student bullying (10 percent); the percentage reported by other schools ranged from 15 to 16 percent.⁵

Figure 3. Percentage of public schools reporting that student cyberbullying occurred at school or away from school at least once a week, by selected school characteristics: School year 2019–20



¹ Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
¹ Elementary schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades K through 4 than in higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 5 through 8 than in higher or lower grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools include all other combinations of grades, including K–12 schools.
² The term “students of color” is being used synonymously with “minority students” in *Digest* table 230.10. Students of color include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races.
 NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. “Cyberbullying” was defined for respondents as occurring “when willful and repeated harm is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices.” “At school” was defined for respondents to include activities that happen in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities. For the “student cyberbullying” item, respondents were instructed to include cyberbullying “problems that can occur anywhere (both at your school and away from school).”
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019–20 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 230.10.

Public schools' reports on the occurrence of cyberbullying at school or away from school also varied by school characteristics in 2019-20. Higher percentages of middle schools (33 percent) and secondary/high schools (29 percent) than of combined/other schools (10 percent) and elementary schools (7 percent) reported cyberbullying among students. The percentage of public schools that reported cyberbullying was generally higher for schools with larger enrollment sizes. For instance, 36 percent of schools with an enrollment size of 1,000 or more students reported cyberbullying, compared with 16 percent of schools with 500 to 999 students enrolled, 13 percent of schools with 300 to 499 students enrolled, and 9 percent of schools with fewer than 300 students enrolled.

Public schools' reporting of student cyberbullying did not measurably differ by locale or by percent of students of color but did differ by eligibility for free- or reduced-price lunch. Specifically, the percentage of public schools reporting the percentage of public schools reporting cyberbullying was lower for those where 25 percent or less of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (13 percent) than for those where 26 to 50 percent of the students (17 percent) and 51 to 75 percent of the students (19 percent) were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Endnotes:

¹ "Cyberbullying" was defined for respondents as "occurring when willful and repeated harm is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices."

² The coronavirus pandemic affected the 2019-20 data collection activities. The change to virtual schooling and the adjusted school year may have impacted the data collected by the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Readers should use caution when comparing 2019-20 estimates with those from earlier years. For more information, see *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019-20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety* (NCES 2022-029; forthcoming).

³ Elementary schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades K through 4 than in higher grades. Middle schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of

grades 5 through 8 than in higher or lower grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll students in more of grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools include all other combinations of grades, including K-12 schools.

⁴ The term "students of color" is being used synonymously with "minority students" in *Digest* table 230.10. Students of color include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races.

⁵ The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs is a proxy measure for school poverty. For more information on eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch and its relationship to poverty, see NCES blog post "[Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)"

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 230.10

Related indicators and resources: [Bullying at School and Electronic Bullying](#); [Students' Reports of Gangs at School](#); [Students' Reports of Hate-Related Words and Hate-Related Graffiti](#)

Glossary: At school; Bullying (School Survey on Crime and Safety); Cyberbullying; Free or reduced-price lunch; Gender identity (School Survey on Crime and Safety); Harassment (School Survey on Crime and Safety); Locale codes; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group; Sexual harassment (Fast Response Survey System and School Survey on Crime and Safety); Sexual orientation (School Survey on Crime and Safety)