

BRIEF REPORT

Economic Costs of Bias-Based Bullying

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Because many school districts receive funding based on student attendance, absenteeism results in a high cost for the public education system. This study shows the direct links between bias-based bullying, school absenteeism because of feeling unsafe at school, and loss of funds for school districts in California. Data from the 2011–2013 California Healthy Kids Survey and the California Department of Education were utilized. Results indicate that annually, California school districts lose an estimated \$276 million of unallocated funds because of student absences resulting from feeling unsafe at school. Experiences of bias-based bullying were significantly associated with student absenteeism, and the combination of these experiences resulted in a loss of funds to school districts. For example, the absence of students who experienced bullying based on their race or ethnicity resulted in a projected loss of \$78 million in unallocated funds. These data indicate that in addition to fostering student safety and well-being, schools have the societal obligation and economic responsibility to prevent bias-based bullying and related absenteeism.

Impact and Implication

Because school districts receive funding based on attendance, student absenteeism related to feeling unsafe and bias-based bullying results in a high cost for the public education system. In the current study, bias-based bullying is significantly associated with student absenteeism, and the combination of bias-based bullying and absenteeism results in an estimated annual loss of \$276 million of funds for California school districts. These data indicate that in addition to fostering student safety and well-being, schools have the societal obligation and economic responsibility to prevent bias-based bullying and related absenteeism.

Keywords: bias-based bullying, absenteeism, economic costs, education system, daily attendance

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Bias-based bullying, or bullying based on prejudice or discrimination, continues to be a prevalent, pervasive, and damaging form of bullying in school (Newman & Fantus, 2015; Toomey & Storlie, 2016). Approximately 40% of high school students experience bullying directed at their race or ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability (Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, & Koenig, 2012), driving students to miss school (e.g., Gastic, 2008; Kearney, 2008). Further, bias-based bullying contributes to lower student well-being and poorer academic performance (Coker et al., 2009; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Rosenthal et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2012), even more than nonbiased bullying (Russell et al., 2012).

To date, the economic cost of bias-based bullying to schools has not been examined. Funding for school districts in several states in the United States is calculated based on data for average daily attendance in schools; if students are chronically absent because they feel unsafe, average daily attendance will be depressed. Bias-based bullying, absenteeism because of feeling unsafe, and the projected loss of funds for school districts because of missed attendance by students is examined in this study using data from the California Department of Education and the California Healthy Kids Survey.

Bias-Based Bullying and School Functioning

Bias-based bullying is defined as bullying motivated by a person's actual or perceived membership in a social group or legally protected class, such as race or ethnicity, whereas nonbias based bullying does not have such a motivation (e.g., Greene, 2006; Rigby, 2002; Russell et al., 2012). Youth experience bias-based bullying in school for a number of reasons, many of which stem from not conforming to social norms or from perceived differences in personal characteristics or social status (Killen, 2007; Killen & Stangor, 2001). Victims of bias-based bullying report poorer mental health and higher substance use compared with students who experience non-bias-based harassment and compared with students who do not experience harassment at all (Russell et al., 2012). In addition, students who experience bias-based bullying report

lower grades and school connectedness (Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005).

Bullying is one of the reasons why students feel unsafe in school. Other reasons include the presence of guns or witnessing aggression (Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008). Students' experiences of victimization, however, are a strong predictor of school absence because of feeling unsafe (Astor, Benbenishty, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002). In addition, bias-based bullying is prevalent and a strong predictor of lower student well-being (Coker et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2000; Rosenthal et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2012). For example, anti-LGBT harassment is linked to student absenteeism (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Russell et al., 2006), and students often feign illness or skip school to avoid bullying (Rivers, 2000). Based on this prior research, this study examines bias-based bullying and its link to student absenteeism (e.g., Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003).

Absenteeism has serious consequences for students. Even at young ages, absence is related to lower academic performance (Chang & Romero, 2008), and even to a lack of academic growth (Ready, 2010). By middle school, attendance is predictive of on-time high school graduation (BERC, 2011). Further, minority students who are chronically absent have lower odds of closing the achievement gap (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006). By high school, school attendance plays a role in test scores (Allensworth & Easton, 2007), dropping out of school, and being overage for their grade (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; State of California Department of Justice Office of the Attorney General, 2015). In addition, bullying and school absenteeism can have potentially lasting effects on their adjustment in college (Goodboy, Martin, & Goldman, 2016). In a sample of British youth, truancy during high school related to lower academic achievement and higher rates of unemployment after graduation (Attwood & Croll, 2006). Among gay, bisexual, and transgender adults from the United Kingdom, academic achievement was lower among those who reported retrospective absenteeism and suicidal ideation and self-harm behavior was higher (Rivers, 2000).

In addition to negative outcomes for students, there are also effects in the form of financial losses to the school system (State of California Department of Justice Office of the Attorney General, 2015). For example, students who are bullied can suffer negative mental health consequences for which they may require mental health services, which can be costly to schools (Nabors, Leff, & Mettrick, 2001; Taras & the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health, 2004). Further, in the state of California, school districts receive funding based on average daily attendance (ADA). Hence, when students miss school, the school district's average attendance falls and funding allocation is lower. Recent attention has shifted to the economic costs of absenteeism. In 2013, the total estimated loss of funds to the California school system because of absenteeism and related costs added up to \$1 billion per year (State of California Department of Justice Office of the Attorney General, 2013). This dollar amount shows a "truancy crisis" in California schools, but it does not address the reasons why students miss school, or how bias-based bullying and feeling unsafe translate to costs for California school districts.

Current Study

In this study, data from the California Department of Education and California Healthy Kids Survey is utilized to estimate the projected economic cost to California school districts when students are absent because they feel unsafe at school. The current study uses this information to fulfill two aims. First, the association between bias-based bullying and school absenteeism because of feeling unsafe is examined, specifying five forms of bias-based bullying: (a) race or ethnicity, (b) religion, (c) gender, (d) sexual identity, and (e) disability. The first hypothesis is: Students who experience higher levels of bias-based bullying report higher levels of absenteeism because of feeling unsafe.

Second, the projected economic cost to school districts when students are absent because of experiences of bias-based bullying and feeling unsafe is estimated in this study. The second hypothesis is: A fiscal loss of

potential funds because of student absenteeism is incurred from students feeling unsafe and experiencing bias-based bullying at school.

Method

Procedure and Participants

Participants in this study came from the cross-sectional 2011–2013 California Healthy Kids Survey ($N = 800,740$). WestEd administers the California Healthy Kids Survey in middle and high schools, generally in Grade 7, 9, or 11, with support from the California Department of Education. Its goal was to track health risks and resilience among youth in California (Austin, Hanson, Skager, Polik, & Clingman, 2014). Students with consent of parents or guardians could participate, and each student's participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Of California middle and high schools, 46.4% of schools participated. As recommended by WestEd, we excluded youth whose response validity were questionable. Exclusion of these youth was based on meeting two or more criteria related to inconsistent responses (e.g., never using a drug and use in the past 30 days, exaggerated drug use, using a fake drug, and answering dishonestly to all or most of the questions on the survey; Austin, Bates, & Duerr, 2013). Based on these criteria 2.06% of participants were excluded from the current analyses.

In total, the analytic sample included 784,280 students (age range 10–18). Slightly less than one half of respondents identified as male (49.2%), 50.8% identified as female. A subsample ($n = 41,132$) completed an additional question about school absence because of feeling unsafe. See Table 1 for demographic characteristics of the full sample and the subsample.

Measures

Average daily attendance. For the current study, 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 expense per ADA for high school and unified school districts were obtained from the California Department of Education (California Department of Education, 2016).

Bias-based bullying. To assess experiences with bias-based bullying, five items from

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Full Sample and Subsample

Demographic Characteristics	Full sample (<i>N</i> = 784,280)	Subsample (<i>n</i> = 41,132)
Female (%)	50.78	51.79
Grade (%)		
6th grade	0.66	0.54
7th grade	29.02	28.58
8th grade	0.84	0.65
9th grade	30.04	32.31
10th grade	5.94	1.91
11th grade	27.64	33.44
12th grade	5.65	2.36
Other grade	0.11	0.11
Ungraded	0.11	0.12
Age min/max	10/18	10/18
Ethnicity (%)		
Latino/Hispanic	51.56	45.34
Race (%)		
Asian	12.54	16.69
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.60	2.83
Black or African American	5.91	3.63
White	31.67	35.02
American Indian or Alaska Native	4.74	4.48
Mixed (two or more) races	42.54	37.34

the 2011–2013 California Healthy Kids Survey were used. Students were presented with the prompt: “During the past 12 months, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons?” Types of bias-based bullying that were presented include: your race, ethnicity, or national origin; your religion; your gender (being male or female); because you are gay or lesbian or someone thought you were; and a physical or mental disability. As part of this question, students were presented with the following definition of bullying: You were bullied if you were shoved hit, threatened, called mean names, teased, or had other unpleasant physical or verbal things done to you repeatedly or in a severe way. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight.” Possible responses were: *0 times*, *1 time*, *2 to 3 times*, and *4 or more times*. See Table 2 for an overview of bullying experiences for the full sample and the subsample.

Absenteeism because of feeling unsafe.

To assess student absenteeism because of feeling unsafe, a subset of participants (*n* = 41,132) completed items from a module on Safety and Violence. These students were presented with the prompt, “During the past 30 days, on how

many days did you not go to school because you felt unsafe at school.” Possible responses were: *0 times*, *1 time*, *2 to 3 times*, and *4 or more times*. Students in schools that included the Safety and Violence module (695 schools in total) reported feeling safer in school and reported lower rates of bullying based on religion, compared with students in schools that did not include this module.

Analytical Strategy

The California Healthy Kids Survey data has a nested structure (students nested in schools); therefore, the survey adjusted frequencies (svy) command in Stata version 14 was used to obtain frequencies (using the school identifier as the primary sampling unit) and provide corrected standard error estimates. To examine the correlations between bias-based bullying and school absenteeism Pearson’s correlations were estimated. Again, to handle the nested structure of the data, the estimates were weighted by the number of students per school by adding the command [aw = aweight]. To regress the different forms of bias-based bullying on school absenteeism because of feeling unsafe, a survey

Table 2

Interrelations Between Bias-Based Bullying and Absence Because of Feeling Unsafe, Proportion of Students Bullied, and Logistic Regression Results

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i> (<i>SE</i>)	% Ever bullied		Odds ratio	[95% CI]
							Full sample	Sub sample		
1. Bullying based on race or ethnicity ^a	—					.29 (.00)	15.8	15.0	1.13	[1.08, 1.18]
2. Bullying based on religion	.44***	—				.15 (.00)	9.1	8.4	1.18	[1.11, 1.26]
3. Bullying based on gender	.40***	.43***	—			.14 (.00)	8.0	7.9	1.21	[1.13, 1.29]
4. Bullying based on sexual orientation	.31***	.34***	.44***	—		.17 (.00)	9.2	9.0	1.24	[1.16, 1.32]
5. Bullying based on disability	.31***	.37***	.43***	.41***	—	.10 (.00)	5.6	5.4	1.45	[1.35, 1.56]
6. Absence due to feeling unsafe ^b	.14***	.17***	.18***	.19***	.23***	.19 (.02)	—	—	—	—

Note. CI = confidence interval.

^a The correlations for types of bullying are estimated in the total sample of 784,280. ^b The correlations for types of bullying and absence because of feeling unsafe are estimated in the subsample of students who completed the item on school absenteeism because of feeling unsafe = 41,132 students.

*** $p < .001$.

adjusted logistic regression analysis was conducted.

To estimate the average daily cost per student, 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 current expense per ADA across high school and unified school districts were averaged (\$8,709.67 and 8,801.70, respectively), and this resulted in an average annual state expenditure cost of \$8,755.69 per ADA. To establish a figure associated with the expenditure per student per day, the average annual state expenditure figure was divided by the number of school days per year. In the 2011–2012 school year, California schools were mandated to have an instructional year of 180 days ([Education Commission of the States, 2011](#)). For every day a student is present at school for a full school day, the school was allocated an average amount of \$48.64:

State Cost(\$) per Student per Day =

$$\frac{\text{Annual State Expense per ADA}}{\text{Number of School Days/Year}} = \frac{\$8,755.69}{180} \\ = \$48.64$$

To calculate the proportion of students who missed class because of feeling unsafe and reported bias-based bullying at least once, the percentage of students who reported both for

each form of bias-based bullying was observed (see online supplemental materials for detailed calculations). These calculations provide the percentage of students from the current sample who reported both absenteeism because of feeling unsafe and reported bias-based bullying. These percentages were calculated for each category of response of absenteeism because of feeling unsafe (missing 1 day, 2 to 3 days, or 4 or more days of school a month) and each form of bias-based bullying in the past 12 months (1 time, 2 to 3 times, and 4 or more times). The percentages of students who missed school because of feeling unsafe and reported bias-based bullying were used to estimate the number of days students were absent related to bullying each month in the California population. To then estimate the projected loss of funds because of absenteeism related to bias-based bullying, the estimated number of students who missed at least 1 day of school were multiplied by the state average daily attendance value (\$48.64), which gives the monthly unrealized costs because of absences and bias-based bullying. This figure was then multiplied by 9 to account for the nine school months in a year, which then resulted in the estimated annual loss of unallocated funds because of school absence and bias-based bullying (see online supplemental materials for detailed calculations).

Results

Bias-Based Bullying and School Absence

Consistent with the first hypothesis, correlational analyses show that different forms of bias-based bullying were interrelated (r s ranged from .32 to .45). A correlation analysis among the subset of participants who reported on their absenteeism ($n = 41,132$), shows that those who experienced bias-based bullying reported more frequent absences because of feeling unsafe (r s ranged from .14 to .23). Further, a logistic regression analysis shows that all forms of bias-based bullying significantly predicted school absenteeism because of feeling unsafe (dichotomized; odds ratios ranged from 1.12 to 1.45, see Table 2).

Cost of School Absence

Results indicate that 10.4% of students in the current study reported missing at least 1 day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe. Extrapolation for the averaged student body of California Grades 7–12 in the school years of 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 (2,907,223 students) estimates the number of students who miss school at least 1 day a month because of feeling unsafe as 300,926 students in California. Applying the average ADA, this projects a cost of absenteeism of \$276 million dollars a year that California school districts do not receive because students miss school because of feeling unsafe (see Table 3).

Costs of School Absence and Experiences of Bias-Based Bullying

Calculations of students in the current sample who reported student absenteeism and bias-based bullying were used to extrapolate the projected annual loss of funds for each form of bias-based bullying—5.4% of all students reported absenteeism because of feeling unsafe but did not report bias-based bullying; 18.8% of all students reported bias-based bullying but did not miss class in the last month because of feeling unsafe.

Of the 10.4% of students who missed school at least 1 day in the last month because they felt unsafe, 45.0% also reported experiencing a form of bias-based bullying. The percentages of students who missed school because of feeling unsafe and reported bias-based bullying (see Table 4) were used to estimate the number of days students were absent related to bullying each month in the California population. This figure was then multiplied by the state average daily attendance value (\$48.64), which resulted in the estimated annual loss of unallocated funds because of school absence and bias-based bullying (see online supplemental materials for detailed calculations).

Results indicate an estimated projected annual loss of funds of \$77.9 million for school absenteeism because of feeling unsafe and related to bullying based on race or ethnicity. For bullying based on religion and associated school absence because of feeling unsafe the

Table 3
Annual Economic Cost to California State School System for Student Absenteeism Because of Feeling Unsafe

School absence because of lack of safety	Monthly absence N (%)	Estimated monthly absence in California population ^a N	Estimated monthly absence in California population days
0 days	36,875 (89.65)	0	0
1 day	1,875 (4.56)	132,511.22	132,511.22
2–3 days	1,241 (3.02)	87,710.92	175,421.84
4 or more days	1,142 (2.78)	80,704.51	322,818.04
		Total absences	630,751.10 [times]
		Cost per student per day	\$48.64
		Estimated monthly cost	\$30,681,450.65
		Estimated annual cost	\$276,133,055.85

Note. Two to 3 days was conservatively calculated as 2 days absent. Four or more days was conservatively calculated as 4 days absent.

^a Total grade 7–12 enrollment in California averaged across 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 was 2,907,223.

Table 4

Annual Economic Cost to California State School System for Student Absenteeism by Type of Bias-Based Bullying

Bias-based bullying of . . .	Monthly absence because of unsafety <i>N</i> (%)	Estimated monthly absence in California population days ^a	Estimated annual cost
Race or ethnicity	1,167 (2.92)	178,135.64	\$77,985,020.31
Religion	820 (2.05)	124,658.65	\$54,573,624.82
Gender	817 (2.04)	124,715.78	\$54,598,635.30
Sexual orientation	927 (2.32)	143,438.92	\$62,795,337.10
Disability	726 (1.82)	112,138.55	\$49,092,521.13

^a Total grade 7–12 enrollment in California averaged across 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 was 2,907,223 ([California Department of Education, 2015](#)).

projected annual loss of funds was \$54.5 million; for bullying based on gender, \$54.5 million; for bullying based on sexual orientation, \$62.7 million; and for bullying based on disability, \$49.0 million (see [Table 4](#)).

Correlations between the different forms of bias-based bullying indicate that some students experienced multiple forms of bias-based bullying. For example, of the students in the current sample 12.8% reported one form of bias-based bullying, 5.7% reported two forms of bias-based bullying, and 2.8% reported three forms of bias-based bullying. Further, the correlation between bias-based bullying and school absence indicates that students who reported multiple forms of bias-based bullying were also likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe. For example, 27,286 students in the current sample reported being bullied based on both their gender and sexual orientation. Among this group, 35.0% of students reported having missed school because of feeling unsafe in the past month; projecting this percentage onto the California school populations, this results in a projected annual loss of unallocated funds of \$9.1 million for California school districts.

Discussion

Despite clear evidence of the negative impact of bias-based bullying on student well-being, no study has associated the economic costs to the school system with school absenteeism and bias-based bullying. With the current study we utilized two sources of data from the California Department of Education and California Healthy Kids Survey to show the association between bias-based bullying and school absent-

teeism, and to estimate the projected annual unrealized funds because of school absenteeism and feeling unsafe. The findings of the current study confirm that experiences of bias-based bullying relate to higher reports of absenteeism because of feeling unsafe. The harassment of students for their race or ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and disability has grave consequences for students' feelings of school safety and attendance. The current study also documents that different forms of bias-based bullying are likely to co-occur, and that students who report multiple forms of bias have especially high risks of absenteeism because they feel unsafe. These findings are consistent with past research on absenteeism and bullying, but also have important implications for schools and those they serve.

This study highlighted that just over 10% of students miss school at least 1 day a month because they do not feel safe at school. This becomes especially important because in California missing 3 days of school per year is considered "habitual" and parents can be prosecuted and fined for this ([State of California Department of Justice Office of the Attorney General, 2015](#)). Almost half of those students who missed school because of feeling unsafe (45.0%) also reported experiencing bias-based bullying. California school districts receive a projected \$276 million less in annual funding because students feel unsafe and at least partly in response to bias-based bullying. The correlation and regression findings supported the connections between bias-based bullying and absenteeism, and these findings are consistent with previous studies (e.g., [Card & Hodges, 2008](#)).

Further, the current data show that some students experience multiple forms of bias-based bullying. For example, 35.0% of students who experience bullying based on their gender and sexual orientation also report missing school because of feeling unsafe, resulting in a projected loss of unallocated funding of \$9.1 million. As a call for bullying prevention and intervention continues to go out (Cook et al., 2010; Merrell et al., 2008), prevention program developers and interventionists like school psychologists must consider the intertwining of biases in bullying's forms.

The role of school psychologists has shifted from assessment of mental ability and health to consultation and prevention services (Hawken, 2006). These services have to be sensitive to the different backgrounds and struggles students face at school (Lopez & Rogers, 2001). School psychologists have also been encouraged to work more with parents (Christenson, 1995) and teachers (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003) in addition to the students they serve. All of these stakeholders will need to be involved in cultivating safer school environments through daily work and bullying prevention and intervention programs.

Implications

Acknowledging that feeling unsafe in school may differ across regions and urban versus rural areas, the loss of unallocated funds adds up to significant amounts, especially for poorly resourced or large school districts. For example, for California's largest school district Los Angeles Unified, with a 2015–2016 enrollment of 639,337 students, the calculations from the current study would project that an estimated \$60.7 million a year in unallocated funds is lost because of student absence because of feeling unsafe. For a smaller but quickly growing school district such as Fresno Unified (2015–2016 enrollment = 73,460), the annual loss of unallocated funds because of student absence because of feeling unsafe is estimated to be \$6.9 million. Thus, policies and practices that promote student safety can increase funds for individual school districts.

In addition, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) specifies that schools' accountability systems need to include at least one indicator that goes beyond academic achievement and

graduation rates, such as student engagement or school climate and safety (California Department of Education, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Thus, ESSA gives states and school districts the opportunity to focus on school climate and safety as one of their goals to improve the school and student success. At the same time, under ESSA, schools also have the obligation to support marginalized or underperforming youth, and limit dropout. The results from this study indicate that decreasing bullying and improving school safety is an important avenue for accomplishing these goals. For school psychologists, counselors, and school nurses the current findings highlight the importance of considering bullying in student attendance and student success. Not only does school absenteeism limit students' learning opportunities, inadequate safety in school leads to high costs for school districts, further limiting the resources available to support marginalized students.

Further, research on absenteeism and punitive measures in California schools has identified marginalized groups that are more likely to be absent and disproportionately disciplined: students with disabilities, gender and sexual minority students, and students of color (Snapp & Russell, 2016). Moreover, school discipline and suspension of these youth costs the state of California an estimated \$2.7 billion in increased criminal justice costs and lower taxes paid over the course of their lifetimes (Rumberger & Losen, 2017). The current findings again highlight these vulnerable groups of youth: Those with multiple marginalized identities that leave them as targets to multiple forms of harassment and school punitive measures, exacerbating minority stress and detrimental school and health outcomes (Parks, 2001; Snapp & Russell, 2016). Thus, for school districts an important question is: How can bias-based bullying and absenteeism because of feeling unsafe be prevented?

Although research into effective (preventive) interventions to specifically target bias-based bullying is limited, recent research into antibullying policies and their effects suggest that schools play a crucial role in improving school climates (Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013; Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014). In addition to efforts to reduce bullying in school, school districts are paying more attention to the

consequences of absenteeism. Preliminary findings from school districts in California show that involving parents, streamlining referral to support systems, improving onsite health services and monitoring can reduce absenteeism (State of California Department of Justice Office of the Attorney General, 2015). Changing school norms and values that ultimately protect and improve student well-being is not only a school's responsibility, but is economically strategic.

Limitations

The current study applied a novel design to calculate projected loss of funds because of bullying, school safety, and student absenteeism for school districts. However, there are several important limitations to note. First, the current study used self-report measures of both bias-based bullying and school absenteeism because of feeling unsafe. Although reliable peer- or teacher report of bias-based bullying and feelings of safety are difficult to obtain, the shared-method variance may pose a problem. One solution would be to ask schools for their official student records of absenteeism, although one would not be able to ascertain the reasons for their absenteeism. The second limitation pertains to the measurement of absenteeism because of feeling unsafe. In the current study, students were asked about the number of days they missed school because they felt unsafe in the past month, with "4 or more days" as the highest option. With this question, we may have underestimated the number of days students missed. Further, we cannot conclude whether they missed the same number of days across the school year; nor can we conclude whether they missed school *because* they were bullied. Important to note here, the analyses on bias-biased bullying and school absenteeism because of feeling unsafe were based on a smaller subsample of students ($n = 41,132$). This subsample of students reported greater school safety and lower bullying based on religion, indicating that the current findings are based on a subsample of students who feel comparatively safe in school—this may have, therefore, underestimated our projections for the California population of students.

Finally, data come from a state-wide survey in California schools; rates of bias-based bully-

ing and absenteeism because of feeling unsafe may differ in other U.S. states and in other countries. Further, education funding models and rates also vary across U.S. states. Although it is unlikely that the associations between bias-based bullying and absenteeism dramatically vary, these calculations of economic costs are not generalizable beyond the state of California. Still, survey methods are important measures because bullying can often go unreported by students to teachers or other school officials (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014).

Conclusion

This study combined student reports with data on economic costs to the school system to provide the first estimate of the annual loss of funding because of bias-based bullying and absenteeism. Given the pervasiveness of bias-based bullying, these findings also reveal the economic costs of bullying and absenteeism to the school system. Thus, preventing bullying and absenteeism while promoting feelings of safety has both economic and social benefits. While existing research often focuses on consequences of bullying to the individual, the work presented here gives schools information to assess costs of bias-based bullying and missed daily attendance to their school district. Now is the time for future research to elucidate what effectively improves feelings of safety in school, especially for students with (often multiple) marginalized identities.

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