

# C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

Child Health Evaluation  
and Research Unit



University of Michigan



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## Parents Give Schools Low Grades for Prevention of Bullying and School Violence

From bullying to school shootings, our nation's schools have the responsibility to keep children safe across a wide range of situations. The CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents to grade their children's schools on key aspects of school safety.

### Bullying Prevention and School Violence

Parents give schools low marks for prevention of bullying and school violence. Only about one-quarter of parents give secondary schools an "A" for prevention of bullying and school violence, while 38% of parents give primary schools an "A".

One in five parents give their children's secondary school a borderline or failing grade (a "D" or "F") for prevention of bullying and school violence, while one in ten of parents give their children's primary school a borderline or failing grade (Table 1). Results did not differ by whether parents lived in states with bullying prevention laws or not.

**Table 1. Report Card for Prevention of Bullying and School Violence, by School Level**

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	38%	26%
B	35%	28%
C	16%	25%
D	6%	12%
F	5%	9%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

### Keeping Parents Informed and Students Safe

Parents give primary schools the highest proportion of "A's" for keeping parents informed in school-wide emergencies (64%). In contrast, only 46% of parents give secondary schools an "A" for keeping parents informed (Table 2).

On keeping students safe in a school-wide emergency, 62% of parents give primary schools an "A", while only 36% of parents give secondary schools an "A" for keeping students safe (Table 3).

## Report Highlights

- Only 1 in 4 parents give secondary schools an "A" for prevention of bullying and school violence; just 2 in 5 parents give primary schools an "A".
- Only 1 in 3 parents give secondary schools an "A" for providing a safe place for students overall; in contrast, 3 in 5 parents give primary schools an "A".
- Parents of children in private schools give substantially higher marks for school safety issues than parents of children in public or charter schools.

**Table 2. Report Card for Keeping Parents Informed in School-Wide Emergencies, by School Level**

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	64%	46%
B	25%	25%
C	7%	15%
D	2%	6%
F	2%	8%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

**Table 3. Report Card for Keeping Students Safe in School-Wide Emergencies, by School Level**

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	62%	36%
B	29%	41%
C	7%	17%
D	1%	4%
F	<1%	2%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

## Building and Overall Safety

High marks are less common for building security. Only one-third of parents give their children's secondary school an "A" grade on building security, while about one-half of parents give primary schools an "A" (Table 4).

**Table 4. Report Card for School Building Security, by School Level**

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	49%	33%
B	34%	35%
C	12%	21%
D	2%	5%
F	3%	6%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Overall, 33% of parents give their children's secondary schools an "A" grade for providing a safe place for students, while 59% of parents give primary schools an "A" (Table 5).

**Table 5. Report Card for Providing a Safe Place Overall, by School Level**

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	59%	33%
B	31%	37%
C	6%	22%
D	2%	4%
F	2%	4%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Parents' ratings of their children's schools regarding safety did not differ by household income, race/ethnicity or region.

## Safety Grades for Public vs. Private Schools

Parents of children in private schools (about 10% of children overall) give those schools substantially higher marks for safety issues than parents of children in public or charter schools.

Parents give private secondary schools more than twice as high a proportion of "A's" as public secondary schools for issues of school safety. Of note, 83% of private school parents give their child's secondary school an "A" for the school being a safe place overall, while only 28% of parents of public school children give "A's" (Table 6 & 7, pg 3).

## Implications

The good news from this Poll is that, in general, parents appear pleased with schools' preparedness efforts regarding keeping children safe and keeping parents informed in case of school-wide emergencies. This may be a result of nationwide responses to well-publicized school violence tragedies in recent years that have led to extensive anticipatory planning by schools and localities.

In contrast, parents believe their children's schools could do much better when it comes to the prevention of bullying and other violence between students. In particular, parents of secondary school students feel that their schools are not meeting their expectations; only one-quarter give secondary schools an "A" grade when it comes to prevention of bullying and school violence.

Previous findings of the CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health (August 2009) indicate that the American public is concerned about the problem of bullying for children. Bullying can have serious health effects, including physical symptoms related to injuries and emotional symptoms such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts and actions.

Many states have passed bullying prevention laws to focus schools' attention on this problem. However, findings from this Poll indicate that such laws have yet to influence parents' impressions of school performance in this arena. Bullying prevention programs may need more time or better approaches in order to be more effective.

### Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc, for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in May 2009 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older with children in primary or secondary school (n=1,087) from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 59% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4 to 6 percentage points for the main analysis. For results based on subgroups, the margin of error is higher.

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**Table 6. Percentage of Parents Giving “A’s” for Issues of School Safety in Primary Schools, by School Type**

Safety Issue	A’s for Public & Charter Schools	A’s for Private Schools
Keeping parents informed in school-wide emergencies	62%	81%
Keeping students safe in school-wide emergencies	60%	79%
Building security	46%	74%
Prevention of bullying/ school violence	35%	64%
<b>Safe place for students overall</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>82%</b>

Source: C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital National Poll on Children’s Health, 2009

**Table 7. Percentage of Parents Giving “A’s” for Issues of School Safety in Secondary Schools, by School Type**

Safety Issue	A’s for Public & Charter Schools	A’s for Private Schools
Keeping parents informed in school-wide emergencies	43%	81%
Keeping students safe in school-wide emergencies	33%	72%
Building security	31%	63%
Prevention of bullying/ school violence	23%	65%
<b>Safe place for students overall</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>83%</b>

Source: C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital National Poll on Children’s Health, 2009