2008 National Conference on the Social Norms Approach, Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport, CA, July 22, 2008

Assessing Bullying in New Jersey Secondary Schools

Applying the Social Norms Model to Adolescent Violence

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Abstract

An online survey has been developed for use in assessing bullying in secondary schools and for conducting social norms interventions. The survey reveals attitudes about bullying, incidence levels of bullying behavior as reported by perpetrators and victims and also assesses perceived norms among peers regarding these attitudes, bullying behavior, and experiences as victims. Results from more than 10,000 students from 19 schools show that while bullying is substantial, it is not the norm. The most common (and erroneous) perception, however, is that the majority engage in and support such behavior. Multisite analysis reveals that perceptions of bullying behaviors are highly predictive of personal bullying behavior—more so than actual school norms. Examples of media created to reduce harmful misperceptions about bullying will be presented.

ACKNOWLEGEMENT: The authors wish to thank the staff of the Center for Addiction Studies, Rowan University, for their work enlisting New Jersey schools and coordinating local school participation in this research. Funding for the development of this survey was provided in full through a grant by the New Jersey Department of Education with funds from the United States Department of Education under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of the No Child Left Behind Act.

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Web-based Survey Instrument

http://www.socialnormsurveys.org/bullya/
(Enter test for username and password)

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School Sample Demographics

School Characteristics	
Number of Schools	18 NJ + 1 NYC area 9 conducted surveys multiple times 35 school cohorts surveyed
School Size - mean (range)	690 (62 – 1,221)
Sample Sizes - mean (range)	302 (10 – 799)
Cohort Response Rate - mean (range)	53% (11% – 91%)
Percent on free lunch - mean (range)	20% (1% – 77%)
Percent White - mean (range)	62% (3% – 96%)
Percent Hispanic - mean (range)	14% (1% – 75%)
Percent Black - mean (range)	19% (0% – 47%)
Percent Asian - mean (range)	7% (0% – 41%)
Student-Teacher ratio - mean (range)	12 (8 – 18)
Respondent Characteristics	
Number of Respondents	10,586
Males / Females - %	48% / 52%
Grade Levels	
5-6	36%
7	32%
8-9	32%
Age – mean (range)	12.5 (11 – 16)
Geographic Area	
Suburban	53%
Urban/suburban	37%
Rural	10%

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Bully Behavior at School in Last 30 Days: Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms

Norm is not to bully but only a minority know it!

(N=10,586)

Pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, hair pulling, or tripping...

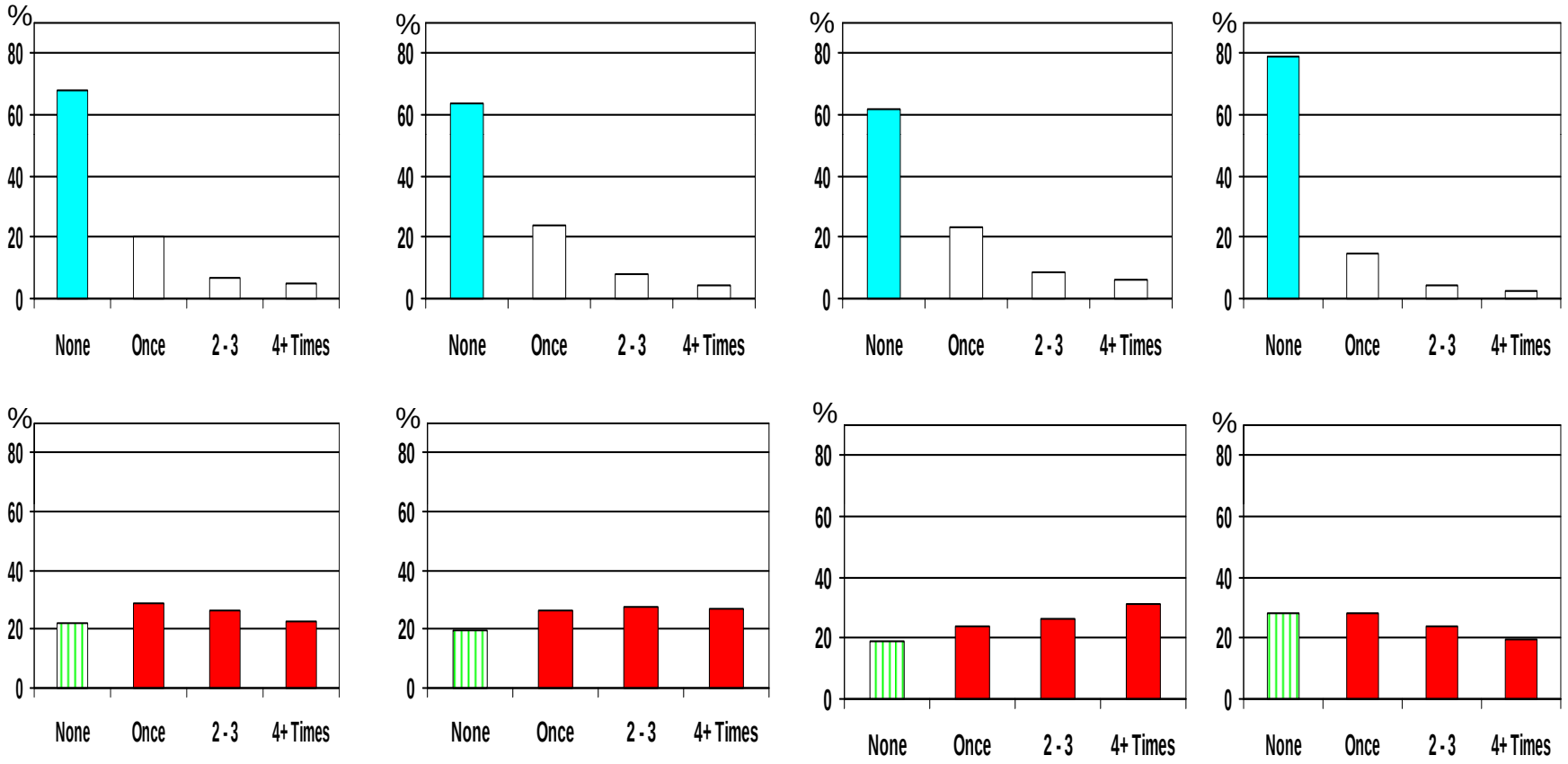
Teasing in an unfriendly way...

Calling hurtful names...

Excluding someone from a group to make them feel bad...

Actual Behaviors

Perceptions of Norm



Legend: actual norm misperceived norm accurately perceived norm

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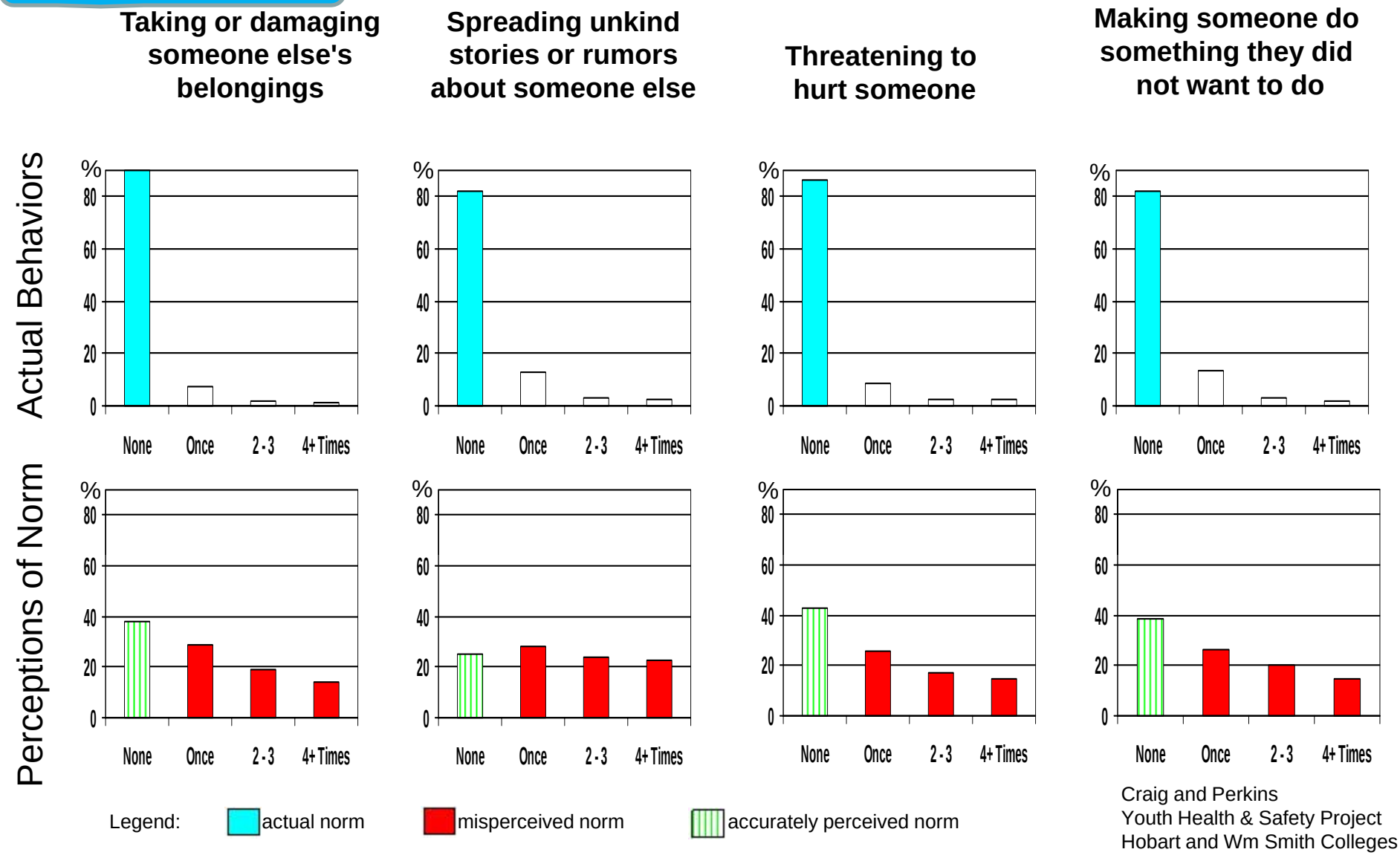

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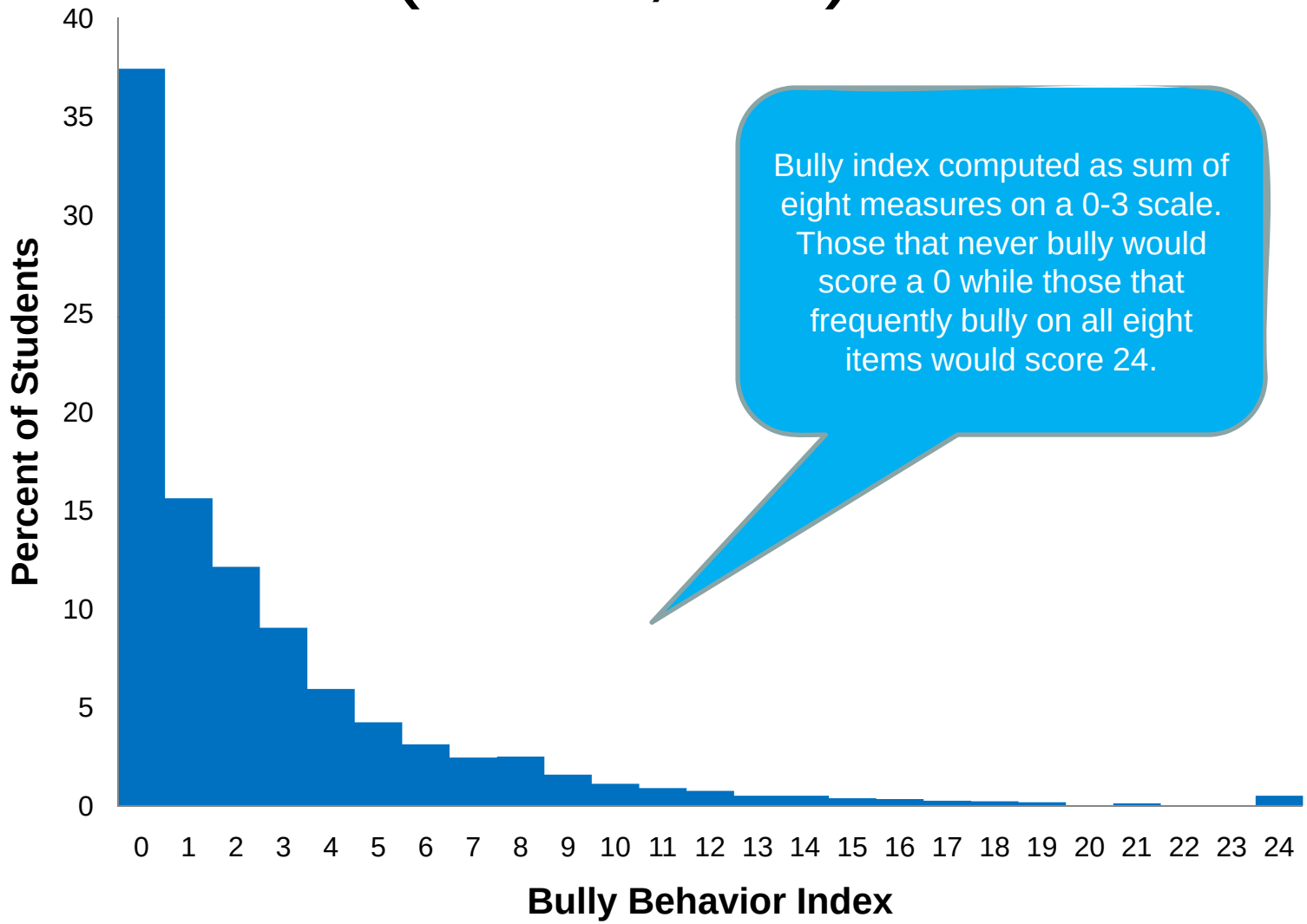
Distribution of Bully Behavior Index (N = 7,753)*



*Includes only schools where at least 50% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.

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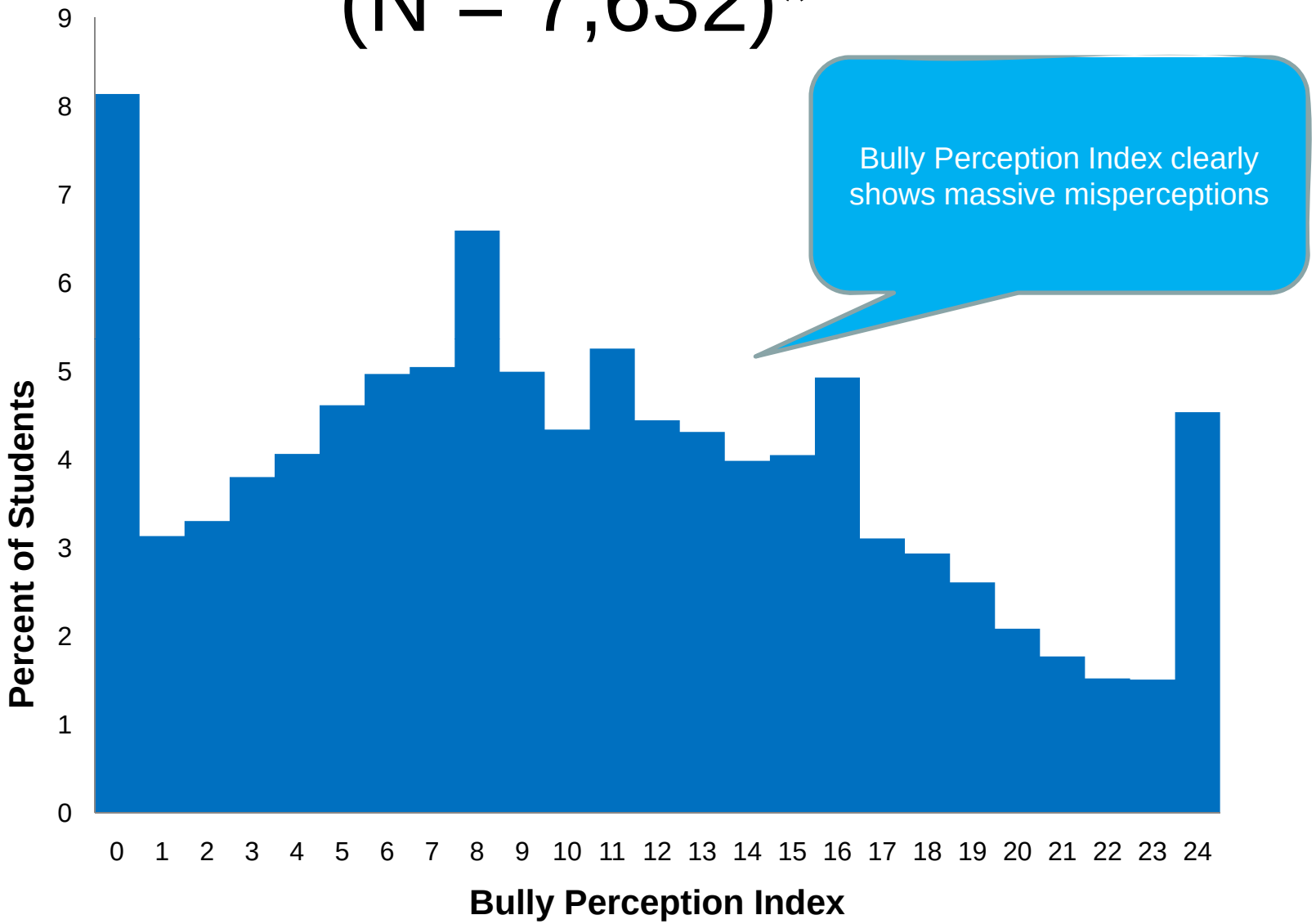
Distribution of Bully Perception Index (N = 7,632)*



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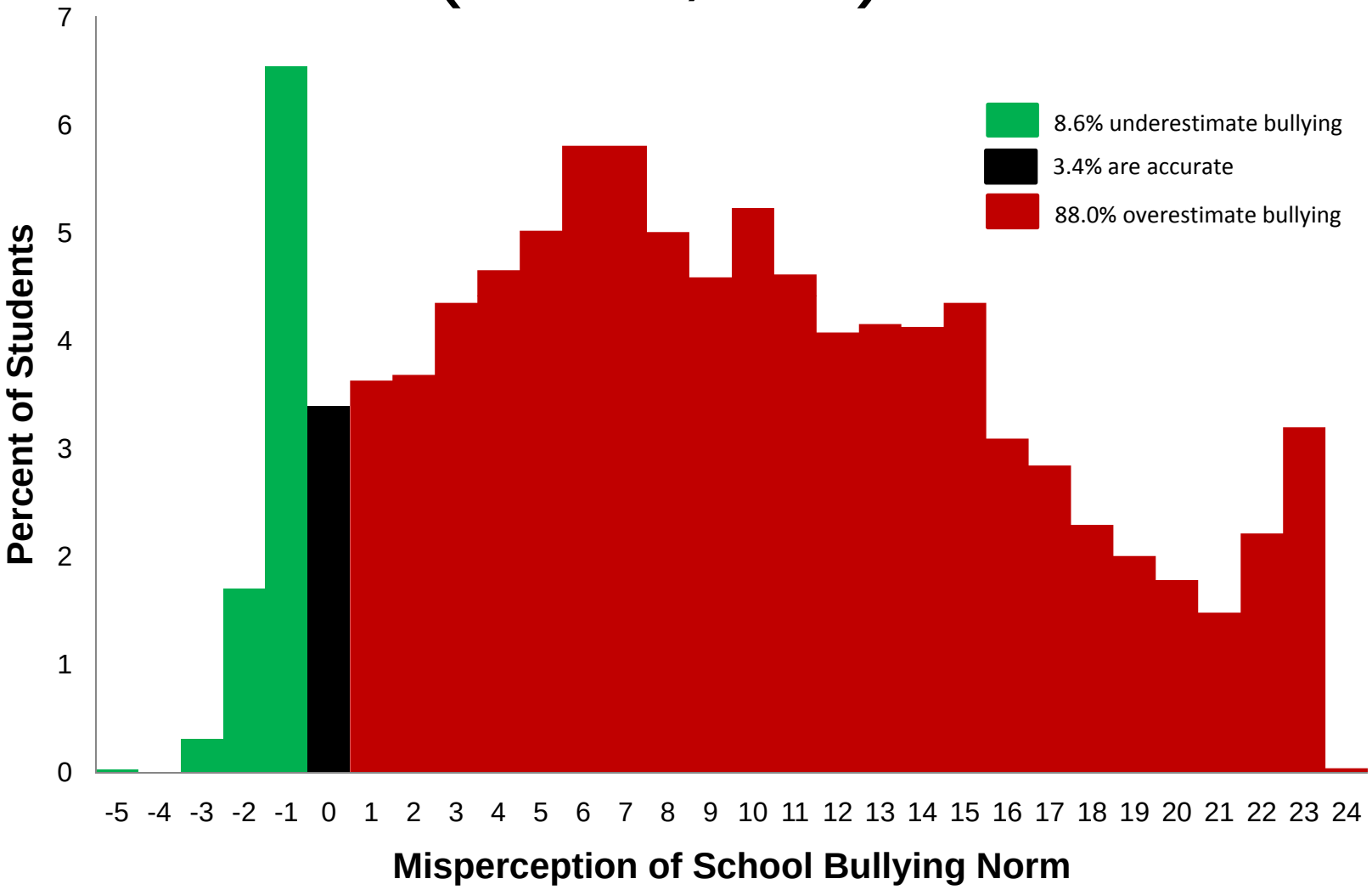
Distribution of Bullying Misperception (N = 7,632)*



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Standardized regression coefficients predicting bullying behavior in the last 30 days (N=7,175 [a])

Independent Variables	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	
Perception of bullying (index)	.42	*
Actual bullying norm at school (index median)	.09	*
Gender (male vs. female)	.10	*
Age	.10	*
Race (white vs minority)	-.05	*
School population size	.01	ns
Race (% white at school)	.03	ns
Students with free lunch (%)	-.00	ns
Student/teacher ratio at school	-.03	ns

Perception of bullying is strongest predictor of whether an individual will bully!

[a]Includes only schools where at least 50% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.
*Coefficient is significant at p < .001.
ns Coefficient is not significant, p > .05.

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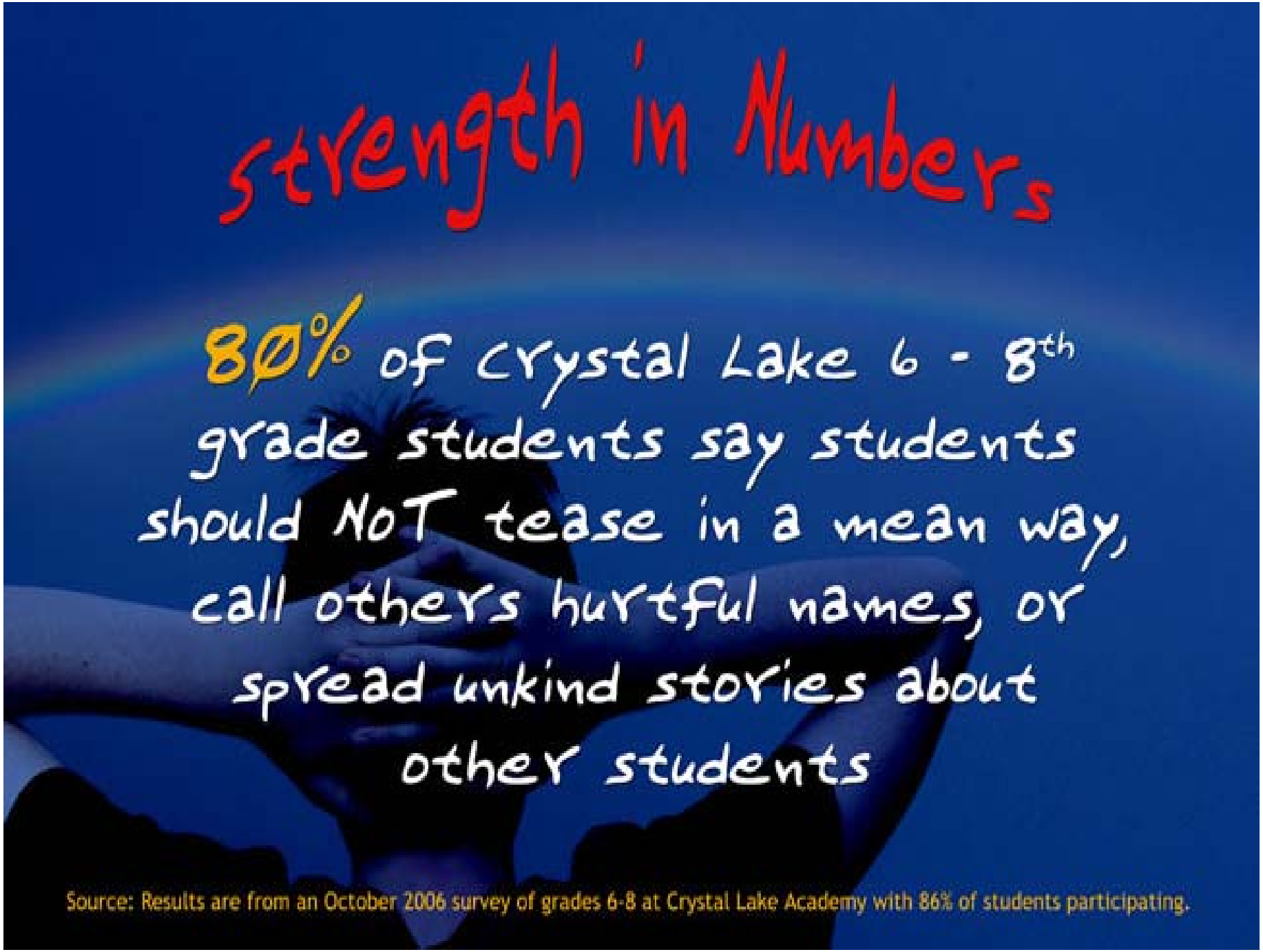
Sample Social Norms Posters

(school names have been changed)


Strength in Numbers
80% of Crystal Lake 6 - 8th grade students say students should NOT tease in a mean way, call others hurtful names, or spread unkind stories about other students
Source: Results are from an October 2006 survey of grades 6-8 at Crystal Lake Academy with 86% of students participating.

JUST THE FACTS

Did you know that...

Most Cooper Middle School students (9 out of 10) do NOT take or damage others' belongings.

Results are from a June 2006 survey of 484 Cooper Middle School boys and girls in all grades.

Did You Know That...

Most Cooper Middle School students (8 out of 10) think that students should tell a teacher or counselor if they or someone else are being bullied at school.

Results are from a June 2006 survey of 484 Cooper Middle School boys and girls in all grades.

Cooper Middle School students make GREAT CHOICES!

Most Cooper Middle School students (3 out of 4) DO NOT exclude someone from a group to make them feel bad.

Results are from a June 2006 survey of
484 Cooper Middle School boys and girls in all grades.

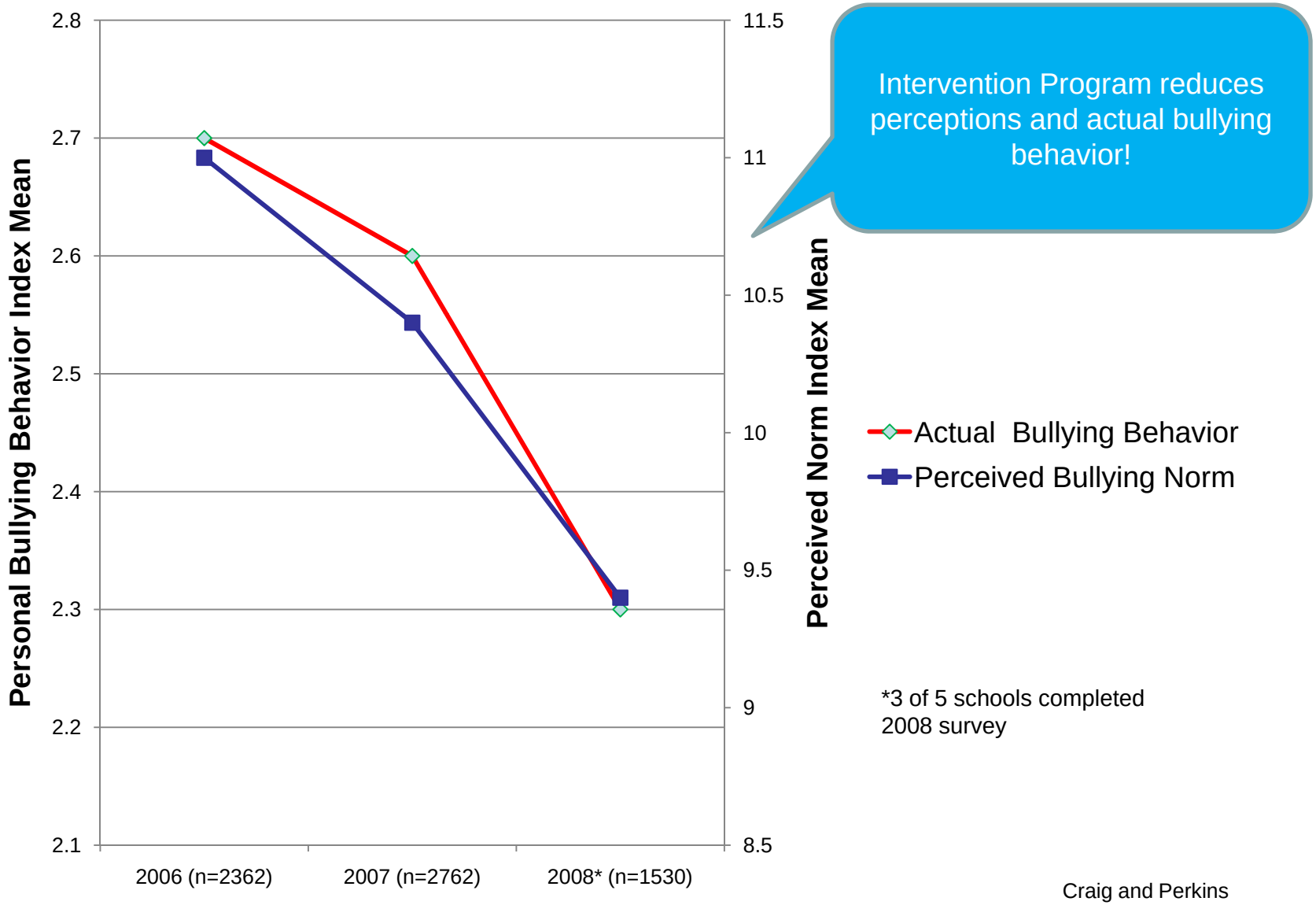
DID YOU KNOW THAT . . .

JUST THE FACTS

Most Crystal Lake 6-8th grade students (3 out of 5) think that students should tell a principal if they or someone else are being bullied at school.

Results are from an October 2006 survey of grades 6-8 at Crystal Lake Academy with 86% of students participating.

Impact of Social Norms Intervention at Five New Jersey Schools



*3 of 5 schools completed 2008 survey

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Raw Impact Data

Perceived Norm

	2006	2007	2008
School A	13	12.6	10.7
School B	10.6	10.3	8.1
School C	11.5	9.2	
School D	9.4	9.4	
School E	10.7	10.2	8.4
All Schools	11	10.4	9.4

Personal Behavior

	2006 (n=2362)	2007 (n=2762)	2008* (n=1530)
School A		3.1	2.4
School B	2.3	2.4	1.5
School C	3	2	
School D	2.4	2.3	
School E	2.9	3.2	2.5
All Schools	2.7	2.6	2.3

*3 of 5 schools completed 2008 survey

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