Teachers' and Education Support Professionals' Perspectives on Bullying and Prevention: Findings From a National Education Association Study

Catherine P. Bradshaw,
Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence

Tracy E. Waasdorp,
Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence

Lindsey M. O'Brennan, and
Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence

Michaela Gulemetova
National Education Association

Abstract

Given growing concerns regarding the prevalence and seriousness of bullying, the National Education Association recently drew upon its membership to launch a national study of teachers' and education support professionals' perceptions of bullying, and need for additional training on bullying prevention efforts and school-wide policies. The data were collected from a representative sample of 5,064 National Education Association members (2,163 teachers and 2,901 education support professionals). Analyses indicated that compared to education support professionals, teachers were more likely to witness students being bullied, more likely to view bullying as a significant problem at their school, and were more likely to have students report bullying to them. Teachers were more likely to be involved in bullying policies at their school, yet both groups reported wanting more training related to cyberbullying and bullying related to students' sexual orientation, gender issues, and racial issues. Implications for school psychologists and the development of school-wide bullying prevention efforts are discussed.

Increasing national attention to bullying prevention has prompted many states and districts to develop bullying prevention initiatives. Although research suggests that collaborative school-wide programs tend to be most effective in preventing bullying (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011), few studies have examined how staff members' role (teacher or education support professionals [ESPs]) in the school might influence their perceptions of bullying and their involvement in prevention efforts. Perceptions of ESPs could be potentially important, given that ESPs have historically comprised approximately 33%–40% of the total education workforce (www.nea.org), and play an important but often overlooked role in creating safe and supportive learning environments for youth.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Catherine Bradshaw, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 624 N. Broadway, Room 839, Baltimore, MD 21205; cbradsha@jhsph.edu.

Emerging Issues in Bullying Prevention

Although bullying is a concern for all youth, special populations of students are particularly vulnerable to peer victimization (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, and those who are perceived as gender nonconforming, are more likely to be targeted for bullying as compared to their heterosexual peers (Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, & Austin, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010; Swearer et al., 2010). Students who are overweight, students with disabilities (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Zablotsky, Bradshaw, Anderson, & Law, 2012), and racial and ethnic minorities (Sawyer, Bradshaw, & O'Brennan, 2008) have an increased risk for bullying by peers. Yet little is known about how school staff members view bullying or harassment that is motivated by such student characteristics, as well as staff members' training and support needs related to intervening in and preventing bullying that targets these special populations of students.

There are also various types of bullying experienced by school-aged youth. Technology has ushered in new forms or modes of bullying, often referred to as cyberbullying, which involves threats, harassment, and psychologically harmful actions via cell phones and the Internet (Williams & Guerra, 2007). A related concern is sexting, which includes creating, sending, posting, or disseminating sexually suggestive text messages, pictures, or videos of oneself or others. These messages often include nude or partially nude photos or images of oneself, which may be transmitted consensually but could easily be used as material for cyberbullying (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2011). To date, there has been little systematic research on staff members' perceptions of cyberbullying. Taken to gether, these gaps in the extant research highlight the need for further examination into staff members' perceptions of bullying among special populations, as well as different forms of bullying (e.g., relational, physical, verbal, cyberbullying).

Another emerging issue related to bullying is staff members' own experience of bullying, either by superiors, other staff members, parents, and even students. Although there has been relatively limited research on staff victimization, a recent study suggests the rates of workplace victimization (e.g., theft, physical attacks, harassment) may be as high as 80% (Espelage et al., 2012). One such study of 1,547 school staff members (including a mix of teachers and ESPs) at 109 public schools (kindergarten through twelfth grade) found that over 22% of staff had been bullied at the school by either another staff member (9%), a student's parent(s) (8%), or a student (6%; Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007). Interestingly, staff who perceived that they had effective strategies for handling a bullying situation were nearly 40% less likely to report that they had been bullied at the school.

Variation in Perceptions of Bullying

Prior research suggests that perceptions of bullying and school-based prevention vary depending on the respondent (e.g., peer, self, teacher, administrator, parent), which makes it a challenge for researchers and educators to fully understand the prevalence and significance of bullying (Doll, Song, & Siemers, 2004; Swearer et al., 2010). For instance, one study that contrasted student and teacher perceptions found that a large portion of staff (87%) thought

that they had effective strategies for handling a bullying situation, and 97% of staff reported that they would have intervened if they had witnessed bullying, yet only 21% of students involved in bullying had reported the event to a school staff member (Bradshaw et al., 2007). In fact, students are generally more likely to report bullying events to their friends and families than to an adult at school (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011).

Like differences between students' and teachers' viewpoints, there may also be differences between how various school staff members view and respond to bullying. Staff have varying levels of interaction with students depending on their role in the school. For instance, a classroom teacher spends substantially more time with a core set of students as compared to a bus driver, who interacts with multiple students from different schools throughout the day. Most school-wide bullying prevention models emphasize the inclusion of all staff in prevention efforts (Olweus, 1993; Olweus et al., 2007), but this is rarely the case in practice. Moreover, a study of school nurses revealed that they perceived many barriers to dealing with bullying, such as a need for more information regarding policies and procedures for how to identify bullies and victims, and which behaviors to report to administrators (Hendershot, Dake, Price, & Lartey, 2006).

Nonteaching staff (e.g., paraprofessionals) are often drawn upon to supervise students in high-risk settings, which makes them candidates for witnessing bullying and intervening if a situation arises. Although students are likely turning to ESPs as a means of support, little information is available on ESPs' exposure to bullying or their involvement in bullying prevention efforts.

Teachers' and ESPs' likely vary in their training for dealing with bullying, and level of staff preparedness to handle incidents of peer victimization has been linked to frequency with which students directly report bullying incidents to them and their involvement in addressing bullying (Novick & Isaacs, 2010). Similarly, research on the social-ecological model for bully prevention (Swearer et al., 2010) has shown that perceptions of the school influence the way in which adults intervene in bullying situations (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009). The social-ecological model focuses on understanding factors that contribute to bullying, including school-wide factors such as staff perceptions of school climate and normative beliefs surrounding how and when staff should intervene in bullying situations (Swearer et al., 2010). These findings high light the importance of understanding school staff members' level of preparedness and training, as well as their perceptions of the school environment.

ESPs and Bullying Prevention

Nearly half of ESPs are paraeducators (e.g., teachers' aides, instructional assistants, playground monitors), whereas approximately 16% are in clerical services (e.g., secretaries, office assistants), 11% are in transportation (e.g., bus drivers), 10% in food services (e.g., cooks, cafeteria workers), and 15% in other services (e.g., maintenance, custodians; (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2011). Many ESPs work in the unstructured areas such as the cafeteria, playground, and school busses (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Leff, Power, Costigan, & Manz, 2003), where a significant portion of bullying occurs,

but few bullying efforts have included ESPs as part of their prevention programming. If ESPs are included, then they are rarely given a central role in prevention or intervention with bullying behaviors (DeLara, 2008; Hendershot et al., 2006), which is potentially concerning because it is possible that students who are involved in bullying would turn to ESPs for support and assistance because they are on the "frontline" when it comes to bullying in schools. Likewise, ESPs are more likely than teachers to come from the same communities as their students (Bradshaw, et al., 2011), and may be more connected to or similar to the student body than the teaching staff. As a result, students may be more inclined to turn to ESPs for support.

In addition to potentially coming from the same community as the students but a different one from the teachers, ESPs may have a different perception of bullying. ESPs have generally been perceived as lower status employees relative to teachers, because of the credentials typically required for the position, their salaries, and the relatively limited autonomy and control they have over their work (Bradshaw & Figiel, 2012). As a result of their lower status within the school, ESPs may be vulnerable to feeling bullied by other staff and possibly students. Perceived personal experiences with victimization are important to understand in light of staff roles within a school, as they may also influence staff members' willingness to intervene in bullying situations or engage in bullying prevention efforts.

Much of the research to date on ESPs has been small-scale studies of particular ESP groups. For example, one exploratory, qualitative study of transportation staff by DeLara (2008) revealed that ESPs witnessed a considerable amount of bullying, but most felt that they were not included in the district's school safety planning efforts. In fact, there are few bullying prevention programs that specifically encourage the inclusion of ESPs, and when ESPs are included, they are rarely given a central role in prevention or intervention with bullying behaviors. Approximately 25% of ESPs are part-time employees and may not always work on one school campus (Bradshaw et al., 2011), and therefore may not be able to attend school-wide meetings that discuss bullying prevention policies and procedures. Moreover, it appears that although the majority of ESPs do attend professional development trainings, the focus of these workshops is typically job-specific (e.g., records management for clerical staff, safety and sanitation for cafeteria workers) as opposed to school-wide prevention and intervention (National Education Association, 2003). Consequently, it is important for researchers to better understand the training needs and bullying-related experiences of ESPs, who often oversee the high-risk areas for bullying. We also consider how their professional needs may differ from teachers depending on the type of bullying witnessed or characteristics of the bullying.

Overview of Current Study

The current study aimed to examine variations between teachers and ESPs' exposure to bullying, personal experiences with bullying, perceived efficacy in handling bullying situations, involvement in prevention efforts, and needs for additional training. Given that most bullying prevention programs are administered by teachers, we hypothesized that teachers would be more comfortable handling bullying situations and be more involved in prevention efforts as compared to ESPs. We had a particular interest in staff members'

responses to different forms of student victimization, and hypothesized that both teachers and ESPs would feel less confident when responding to forms of cyberbullying and sexting given that these are newer phenomena; therefore, we anticipated that staff would have less training and policy support related to electronic forms of bullying. In terms of comfort intervening with special populations, we hypothesized that teachers and ESPs would report feeling less comfortable intervening with all special populations (e.g., bullying related race, sex, or religion). We also hypothesized that ESPs would report higher rates of personal victimization at school than their colleagues, given the historical status differences between teachers and ESPs (Bradshaw & Figiel, 2012).

The data for the current study are from the NEA's national study of school staff members' perceptions of bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2011). This is the first large-scale systematic study contrasting ESPs and teachers perceptions of bullying. Therefore, this study enables us to compare ESPs and teachers' needs and competencies related to bullying prevention, which in turn will inform professional development activities. Given the growing emphasis in school-wide prevention efforts that include all school staff (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011), this comparison is of particular importance.

Method

Participants

The data were collected in the spring of 2010. In an effort to survey a representative sample of NEA members, both a telephone (63%) and an electronic survey (37%) were used. Specifically, we used a web-based electronic survey because of growing concerns that individuals are less inclined to participate in and/or be reached by phone surveys (Holbrook, Krosnick, & Pfent, 2007). In total, 1,601 teachers and 2,142 ESPs completed the telephone survey, whereas 562 teachers and 759 ESPs completed the electronic survey. The data collection activities were conducted by an external professional research firm contracted by the NEA; the subcontractor made the phone calls and administered the survey on behalf of the NEA. With regard to incentives for participation, a lottery was used, whereby all participants were informed that 20 participants would be selected at random for $100. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to inform the NEA about members' concerns and needs related to bullying and school climate. A sampling procedure was used to select participants that accounted for role and select demographics (e.g., age, region), thereby allowing the data to be weighted up to reflect the entire population of NEA members. Weighting is possible because of the known population distributions in the overall NEA membership database. Given the substantive interest in ESPs, they were over-sampled; however, the weighting procedure accounts for this oversampling and allows us to generalize to the full population of the NEA membership. As described in greater detail later, two weighting procedures were utilized on the data: a propensity score was used to adjust for the mode of survey administration (i.e., Web vs. phone) and a rim weight to weight the entire data set to the national population of NEA members (Watts, 2010).

The sample included 5,064 adults who were members of the NEA at the time of the data collection and were actively employed by a school or school system, which represented a 31% return rate for the survey. Just over half of the sample were ESPs (*n* = 2,901) and the

remaining participants were "professional staff" as described next (*n* = 2,163). With regard to demographic characteristics of the weighted sample, the majority of professional staff were general education teachers (85%), followed by special educators (4%), remedial/ English as a second language teachers (2%), librarians (2%), counselors (3%), and other (4%). Thus, we refer to this group collectively as "teachers" in the current article. Of the ESPs, nearly half were paraprofessionals (49%), followed by maintenance (14%), clerical (10%), school transportation (10%), food service (7%), health and student services (2%), technical and skilled trades (2%), security (1%), and other nonteaching support staff (6%). Women comprised 80% of the sample, and 89% self-identified as White, with 5% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 2% other. The participants were employed in a variety of school locations (suburban 34%, small town 24%, urban 24%, and rural areas 18%). Approximately 39% worked with students in elementary schools, 19% in middle schools, and 27% in high schools, with the remaining 16% working across multiple grade levels (see Watts, 2010).

Measure

The NEA Bullying Survey (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & O'Brennan, 2010; see Appendix A) was developed by the research team in close collaboration with the NEA Research Department. The measure is an adapted version of a previously published, psychometrically sound measure of bullying (see Bradshaw et al., 2007). Consistent with previous research (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in press; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993), bullying was defined on the survey as "intentional and repeated aggressive acts that can be physical (such as hitting); verbal (such as threats or name calling); or relational (such as spreading rumors, or influencing social relationships). Bullying typically occurs in situations where there is a power or status difference."

Exposure to bullying was assessed through three items (Bradshaw et al., 2007): (a) Did students report bullying to you within the past month? (yes/no); (b) Did parents report bullying to you within the past month? (yes/no); and (c) How often have you seen students being bullied at the school where you work, on school grounds, or on the bus? (dichotomized into 2–3 times a month vs. 1 time or less; Solberg & Olweus, 2004). Participants' personal experiences with bullying were assessed through the question "Have you personally been bullied by someone else at the school where you work?" (yes/no). If they responded yes, they were asked by whom, with the response options being "students", "parents," "other staff," and "administration." This set of items is based on a previous study of staff members' victimization (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Participants' concerns about bullying were assessed through a question that read "How much of a problem is bullying at the school where you work?" (Bradshaw et al., 2007). For ease of interpretation, the response options were dichotomized into "not a problem or minor problem vs. moderate problem or major problem."

Perceptions of different forms of bullying were assessed by three items from Bradshaw et al. (2007): (a) Did a student report that he or she experienced this form of bullying to you within the past month? (yes/no); (b) How much of a problem is this form of bullying at the school where you work? (4-point scale, from [1] *not a problem* to [4] *major problem*); and (c) How comfortable would you feel intervening or reprimanding a student who engaged in

this form of bullying (4-point scale, from [1] *very uncomfortable* to [4] *very comfortable*). These three core items were asked for each specific form of bullying: physical (hitting, pushing, or kicking), verbal (general teasing or name calling), relational (rumor spreading or excluding someone from a group), cyberbullying (defined as "sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or other digital devices, such as mobile phones"), and sexting (defined as "sending or forwarding sexually explicit photos, videos or messages from a mobile phone or other electronic device"). Given the emerging concerns regarding sexting (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2011), it was specified separately from cyberbullying. The same three core items were utilized to assess the six special populations of students, including youth bullied because of their "perceived sexual orientation or gender-nonconformity," because they are overweight, have a disability, and because of their sex, race, or religion.

Perceptions of the school's bullying policy and programming were assessed through four yes/no questions: (a) Does the school district have a bullying policy? (b) Are bullying problems adequately addressed by the bullying policy? (c) Is the policy clear and easy to implement? (d) Did you receive training on how to implement the policy? Perceptions of bullying prevention efforts were assessed through six items: (a) Does the school you work in most frequently have a formal prevention efforts—such as school teams, a committee, or prevention program that deals with bullying? (yes/no); (b) Are you currently involved in bullying prevention activities at the school you work in most frequently? (yes/no); (c) I have resources available to help me learn how to effectively intervene with bullying situations? (4-point, [1] agree strongly to [4] disagree strongly); (d) I have effective strategies for handling a bullying situation ([1] agree strongly to [4] disagree strongly); (e) When you try to intervene in bullying situations, does the situation tend to get (4-point, [1] much better to [4] much worse)?; and (f) It is your job to intervene when you see bullying happen (4-point, [1] agree strongly to [4] disagree strongly). Finally, patterns of need for additional training for intervening with bullying related to the five forms and six special populations were assessed utilizing yes/no questions (i.e., Do you think you could benefit from additional training on when and how to intervene with...). These items were adapted from the previously developed, psychometrically sound measure by Bradshaw et al. (2007). All items had "not sure" as an option, which was coded as missing in these analyses. The survey employed a skip pattern, whereby if a participant responded "no" to particular question, he/she would not be asked follow-up questions regarding that particular issue.

Overview of Analyses

For the first set of analyses we utilized logistic regressions to compute odds ratios (OR) and multivariate analyses of variance, thereby comparing teachers and ESPs' perceptions of their exposure to and concerns regarding bullying. In addition, variations in participants' perceptions of the different forms of bullying (i.e., physical, verbal, relational, cyber, and sexting) were examined. We also contrasted teachers and ESPs' perceptions of bullying among special populations (e.g., students who are gender nonconforming, over-weight, have a disability). In the second set of analyses, chi-squares, logistic regressions, and analyses of covariance were utilized where appropriate to contrast teachers and ESPs' perceptions of bullying policies and involvement in programming efforts. Finally, we examined differences

in perceptions of bullying prevention. Given the number of tests conducted, we applied a more conservative *p* value of .01 for statistical significance.

A set of covariates were adjusted for in the analyses, including amount of interaction between students and participants (with higher scores indicating more interaction with students) as it differed significantly between EPSs and teachers (i.e., more teachers [80%] reported having "constant" interaction with students as compared to ESPs [42%]). We also included school level (elementary and high school, with middle school as the reference category), school location (urban vs. suburban/rural), and survey modality (Web vs. phone) as covariates, and applied sampling weights in all analyses (see next section). Missing data were generally not a concern, as 93% of the sample had no missing data, and each item had less than 2% missing. Given the low rate of missing data, individuals without a response on a particular item were excluded from that analysis.

Sample Weighting

Two types of weights were applied to the data. First, we applied a propensity score weight to adjust for the mode of survey administration (i.e., Web vs. phone; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983; Schonlau, van Soest, Kapteyn, & Couper, 2009). The purpose of the propensity score weights was to make the Web-based survey comparable to the phone-based survey. Each participant was assigned a weight based on his/her propensity score, which was constructed based on 16 different demographic variables (e.g., full- vs. part-time worker, region of the country). These methods are com monly used in large-scale surveys that employ both phone- and Web-based assessments (for additional details, see Schonlau et al., 2009, and Taylor, 2000). Our decision to apply this type of weight was based on preliminary analyses of the data, which suggested that there were some systematic differences in the responses to select survey items based on the mode of survey administration. For example, phone respondents had a tendency to report greater comfort intervening in the different types of bullying situations assessed; this is likely from a social desirability bias among phone participants (Kreuter, Presser, & Tourangeau, 2009; Watts, 2010). As a result, the propensity score weights, along with controlling for survey administration as a covariate in the analyses, allowed us to account for potential bias associated with those respondents who completed the Web survey as compared to those who completed the phone survey. The second weight applied was a rim weight, which is a common weighting approach that enabled us to weight the entire data set to the national population of NEA members (Watts, 2010). Specifically, rim weighting was utilized to weight the sample that participated in the survey to those in the known NEA population. Therefore, the weighted sample reflects the full NEA membership.

Results

Exposure to and Concerns About Bullying

Approximately 43% of participants reported that bullying was a moderate or major problem at their school, with teachers viewing bullying as a significantly greater problem than ESPs (OR [H11005] 1.38; *p* = .01). Participants reported witnessing bullying on their school campus quite frequently. In fact, 62% of the participants indicated that they witnessed two

or more incidents of bullying in the last month, with 41% of these respondents having witnessed bullying once a week or more. Roughly half of the participants said students would often report bullying incidents to them. Not surprisingly, the more time participants spent interacting with students the more likely students were to report incidents to them (OR [H11005] 1.35; $p < .01$). Sixteen percent of participants (16% teachers, 15% ESPs) indicated that parents had reported bullying to them.

The survey also revealed that some participants had been bullied. Approximately 18% of teachers and 14% of ESPs reported being bullied on the job. There were no significant differences in the rates of workplace bullying among teachers as compared to ESPs. The most commonly reported perpetrator was another staff member (45.5% ESPs; 45.2% teachers; $p > .01$), followed by administrators (28.8% ESPs; 39.1% teachers; OR = 1.88, $p > .01$), students (28.6% ESPs; 29.5% teachers, $p > .01$), and parents (10.3% ESPs; 31.8% teachers; OR = 3.62, $p < .01$).

Participant Perceptions of Different Forms of Bullying

Teachers were more likely than ESPs to have verbal (OR = 1.48, $p < .01$) or relational (OR = 1.70, $p < .01$) bullying reported to them within the past month. The most common form of bullying reported to both teachers and ESPs was verbal bullying, whereas cyber-bullying and sexting were the least likely to be reported to participants. An overall significant difference was observed between teachers and ESPs' perception of how problematic they viewed various forms of bullying, Wilks's $\Lambda = .98$, $F(5, 4337) = 19.02$, $p < .001$ $\eta^2 = .02$, $d = .29$. A follow-up analysis of covariance indicated that teachers viewed all five forms of bullying (physical, verbal, relational, cyberbullying, and sexting) to be more of a concern at their school than did ESPs ($p < .01$). However, teachers and ESPs both viewed verbal bullying as the most problematic form and cyberbullying and sexting as the least problematic forms (see Figure 1).

Teachers generally reported feeling more comfortable intervening with different forms of bullying (physical, verbal, relational, cyber, and sexting) than did ESPs, Wilks's $\Lambda = .99$, $F(5, 4515) = 11.08$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .012$, $d = .22$. The follow-up analysis of co variance indicated that teachers reported being more confident intervening with physical, verbal, and relational forms of bullying ($p < .01$), but not cyberbullying and sexting. Both teachers and ESPs reported that they would be most comfortable intervening with verbal bullying and least comfortable intervening with cyber-bullying and sexting (see Figure 2).

Participant Perceptions of Bullying Among Special Populations

A multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there were significant differences between ESPs and teachers in their perceptions that bullying among special populations was a problem at their school, $F(3, 4602) = 14.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$, $d = .20$. Teachers perceived bullying related to students' sexual orientation/gender nonconformity (referred to as sexual orientation; $F = 34.5$, $p < .01$) and weight ($F = 15.9$, $p < .01$) to be more of a problem than ESPs. Notably, both groups reported that bullying related to students' weight was the most problematic among the three special populations examined (see Figure 1). Yet, ESPs and teachers differed significantly in their perception of bullying regarding students' sex, race,

and religion, $F(3, 4599) = 16.7$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$, $d = .20$, such that teachers perceived sexist remarks ($F = 21.9$, $p < .01$), negative racial remarks ($F = 48.5$, $p < .01$), and negative religious remarks ($F = 12.6$, $p < .01$) to be more of a problem than did ESPs.

There were no significant differences between ESPs and teachers on students' reporting bullying related to being overweight to them in the past month. However, teachers were more likely to report having students disclose bullying related to sexual orientation to them ($OR = 1.54$, $p < .01$). Teachers also were more likely to have bullying via negative sexist ($OR = 1.40$, $p < .01$) and racial remarks ($OR = 1.54$, $p < .01$) reported to them. The most commonly reported forms of bullying among special populations were comments about the students' weight, followed by sexist remarks and comments about sexual orientation. The least common types of remarks were religious.

Similar to participants' comfort intervening across the forms of bullying, teachers tended to feel more comfortable than ESPs intervening when bullying occurred among special populations. Teachers were more comfortable intervening when bullying was related to race, sex, or religion, $F(3, 4641) = 14.1$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$, $d = .20$, and more comfortable intervening when bullying was related to sexual orientation, disability, or a students' weight, $F(3, 4641) = 10.04$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .006$, $d = .16$. Notably, both groups felt the most comfortable intervening with bullying among students with disabilities and the least comfortable intervening with bullying regarding sexual orientation (see Figure 2).

Perceptions of School District Bullying Policy and School Programming

More ESPs (96%) than teachers (92%) reported that their school district had a bullying policy, $\chi^2 = 15.0$, $p < .01$. Similarly, ESPs (88%) were more likely than teachers (80%) to report that the bullying problems are adequately addressed by policy, $\eta^2 = 28.1$, $p < .001$. More ESPs (87%) than teachers (75%) reported that their district's bullying policy is clear and easy to implement, $\eta^2 = 45.1$, $p < .01$. In fact, teachers were nearly 60% less likely than ESPs to report that the bullying policy is clear and easy to implement ($OR = 0.39$, $p < .01$). More teachers (55%) than ESPs (46%) reported that they had received training on how to implement the bullying policy, $\chi^2 = 22.5$, $p < .01$. Specifically, teachers were 23% more likely than ESPs to report that that they had received training on their school's bullying policy ($OR = 1.23$, $p < .01$; see Figure 3).

Perceptions of Bullying Prevention Efforts

ESPs (65%) were more likely than teachers (57%) to report that their school has formal prevention efforts, like program planning teams, committees, or programs, $\chi^2 = 16.8$, $p < .01$, with teachers being 33% less likely to report formal prevention efforts at their school ($OR = 0.67$, $p < .01$). Yet, compared to ESPs (27%), a greater number of teachers (42%) reported that they were involved in bullying prevention at their school, $\chi^2 = 36.3$, $p < .01$. Specifically, teachers were 65% more likely than ESPs to report that they were involved in bullying prevention ($OR = 1.65$, $p < .01$; see Figure 3).

An analysis of covariance indicated that ESPs were more likely than teachers to report that there are resources available to help them intervene with bullying, $F(5, 4597) = 11.4$, $p < .$

01. However, there was no significant difference between the groups in their reports of having effective strategies for handling bullying or in their perceptions that these tactics make the situation worse ($p > .05$), with 79% of ESPs and 75% of teachers reporting that they had access to resources to help them intervene. Teachers (90%) were more likely than ESPs (75%) to report that it was "their job" to intervene in bullying situations, $F(5, 4642) = 164.5$, $p < .01$.

Training Needs

There were significant differences in ESPs' and teachers' desire for additional training related to intervening in physical bullying (OR = 0.60, $p < .01$), verbal bullying (OR = 0.66, $p < .01$), and relational bullying (OR = 0.79, $p < .01$), with ESPs reporting a greater need than teachers (see Figure 4). Both ESPs and teachers equally were as likely to report needing additional training related to cyberbullying or sexting interventions. ESPs were significantly more likely to report need ing additional training in intervening in situations involving special populations examined: specifically, sexual orientation (OR = 0.70, $p < .01$), being overweight (OR = 0.57, $p < .01$), disability (OR = 0.58, $p < .01$), negative comments regarding sex (OR = 0.59, $p < .01$), race (OR = 0.61, $p < .01$), and religion (OR = 0.60, $p < .01$). Across the full sample, the areas of training identified as having the most need were interventions for bullying related to sexual orientation, gender issues, and racial issues (see Figure 5).

Discussion

Exposure to and Concern About Bullying

Although the research on bullying has increased over the past decade, there remain a number of gaps in the literature regarding potential differences in school staff members' perceptions of the problem (Bradshaw et al., 2007). The current study aimed to specifically examine ESPs, which is an often neglected sector of school staff, and to contrast their perceptions with those of teachers. Our analyses revealed that teachers and ESPs have different perceptions of and concerns about bullying as well as differing involvement in prevention efforts. For example, it appears that teachers are more likely than ESPs to witness bullying and have students report bullying to them. It is important to note that these analyses adjusted for time spent with students; therefore, there is something unique about the student–teacher relationship beyond the amount of time they spend together that likely accounts for these differences. Teachers are able to get to know their students through their classes and have regular, if not daily, contact throughout the year. In contrast, many ESPs interact with just a few students (e.g., paraprofessional working one-on-one) or students in large groups (e.g., lunch room, riding the bus).

The results suggested that parents were equally likely to report bullying issues to ESPs and teachers. ESPs may be the first point of contact for families when they enter the school (e.g., clerical staff, bus drivers); consequently, parents may be prone to communicate their needs to ESPs in addition to contacting their child's teacher when a bullying situation arises. Thus, ESPs could be a valuable resource to extend home–school communication. Although ESPs may serve as an accessible avenue for reporting peer victimization, educational case law

suggests the schools may only be held accountable if the bullying was reported by a full-time teacher or administrator as opposed to a paraprofessional (see Davis v. Monroe County (GA) Board of Education, 1999, and Rowinski v. Bryan (TX) Independent School District, 1996). Given the potential for liability in the case of a mishandled bullying incident, school districts are encouraged to clarify school-wide policies to all staff members (ESPs and teachers) regarding what to do when a parent and/or student reports bullying to them.

Participants' experience with work-place bullying—With regard to staff members' personal experience with bullying, contrary to expectations, we found that ESPs were as likely as teachers to be bullied at school. In the current study, participants' reports of personal bullying instances (18% for teachers and 14% for ESPs) were lower than the 22% reported in the Bradshaw et al. (2007) study, and the nearly 80% of teachers who reported ever being victimized (Espelage et al., 2012). It is quite possible the use of the term *bullying* in the current study did not capture the full range of victimization experiences covered in the Espelage et al. (2012) study (e.g., theft, physical attacks, verbal abuse). It is also possible that school personnel are only recently becoming aware of the bullying they may be experiencing within the workplace, as they may not have previously considered those experiences to be bullying (Bradshaw & Figiel, 2012). Nevertheless, these findings do highlight workplace bullying among educators as a significant concern; these experiences likely influence staff members' willingness to intervene in bullying situations (Bradshaw et al., 2007), as well as their overall perceived safety and productivity within the school setting (Bradshaw & Figiel, 2012).

Forms of student bullying—In terms of specific forms of student bullying witnessed, verbal bullying (e.g., name-calling, insults) continues to be the most common form witnessed and of greatest concern. Yet additional training was requested on handling sexting and cyberbullying, despite the low prevalence of these two forms. The empirical research on cyberbullying is still in its infancy— thus relatively little is known about how to effectively intervene and prevent electronic aggression. Recent research suggests that youth involved in cyberbullying, as either a victim or perpetrator, are as likely to experience psychosocial and behavioral difficulties as those victimized offline (Hay, Meldrum, & Mann, 2010). Given the paucity of research in this area, combined with the need for additional resources, further research should examine cyberbullying prevention programs that can be implemented by school staff.

In terms of bullying among special populations, teachers generally tended to report bullying across all special populations to be more concerning than ESPs. However, teachers were less likely than ESPs to hear about bullying related to a disability despite the fact both groups reported being equally comfortable intervening in these situations. Perhaps this is related to the large portion of ESPs who primarily worked with children in special education, specifically paraeducators who worked one-on-one with students with disabilities. This finding holds importance for school psychologists, who are trained in special education law and behavioral intervention, as they can provide additional support to ESPs intervening in these bullying situations and can help educate teachers on ways to increase student reports of bullying among youth with disabilities.

Another special population to highlight is lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, with both teachers and ESPs reporting a need for more information on how best to intervene. Prior research has found that sexual minority youth are at a reduced risk for symptoms of depression and drug use when they perceive their school and family to be supportive of their sexual orientation (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008). School psychologists can help foster a school environment that is open to all sexual orientations by tailoring antibullying strategies that reduce homophobic stereotypes, behaviors, and beliefs held by both staff and students. Additional research is needed to identify effective methods for intervening in bullying situations related to gender nonconformity or perceived sexual orientation.

Comfort Intervening and Prevention Efforts

The results revealed that teachers were more comfortable than ESPs intervening in bullying situations. Surprisingly, ESPs were more likely to report that they had effective strategies for handling bullying, yet they reported a greater need for additional training. ESPs should be included in school prevention programming efforts because they oversee high-risk areas (e.g., playgrounds, buses, cafeteria). The current finding is consistent with DeLara's (2008) results, which revealed that bus drivers not only witness a considerable amount of bullying, but most of them also felt that they were not included in the district's school safety planning efforts. Current and previous research highlights the importance of conducting school-wide needs assessments across all school personnel because there are varying levels of knowledge and perceived support provided regarding bullying prevention and intervention strategies. Through a systematic evaluation, schools can streamline programming efforts by developing modularized bullying trainings that effectively address subgroups of staff as opposed to creating a one-size-fits-all professional development.

Lastly, the current study's findings indicate that bullying policies exist in many districts, but there seems to be a lack of sufficient instruction on the implementation of those policies. Moreover, ESPs were less likely than teachers to report that they had received training on the district policy. With most states requiring bullying prevention training for school staff as part of antibullying laws (Furlong, Morrison, & Greif, 2003; Srabstein, Berkman, & Pyntikova, 2008), there is a growing need to involve all staff members in bullying prevention programming. Although there are few preventative intervention programs for bullying designed to address the specific needs of ESPs, schools may want to include ESPs by adopting school-wide programs (e.g., Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012), which have been shown to reduce bullying. Training materials could be developed specifically for different types of ESPs who are most likely to encounter bullying, such as school nurses, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and playground or hallway monitors.

Limitations and Strengths

It is important to note some limitations when interpreting these findings. For example, the data are all self-report, which includes some inherent limitations to their validity. Social desirability may play a role in participants' responses, and this may vary by the mode of survey (i.e., Web vs. phone). The participation rate was 31%, which is acceptable for survey

research, but suggests the potential for bias within the sample. For example, it is possible that staff more involved in bullying prevention efforts or were more concerned about the issue may have been more likely to agree to participate. Although telephone surveys remain the gold standard of surveys, fewer people are willing to take them than in years past (Holbrook et al., 2007), more households are able to block or screen their calls, and more households only have cell phones (Keeter, Kennedy, Clark, Tompson, & Mokrzycki, 2007). As a result, it is difficult and very costly to design a survey to reach a response rate over 50% (usually requiring incentives, prenotifications, 20 call backs, etc.), and it is not unusual for quality telephone surveys to have response rates below 20% (Holbrook et al., 2007). In fact, even after holding survey budget constant, telephone survey response rates have declined considerably in the past 30 years (Holbrook et al., 2007; Lavrakas, 1997).

Although the Internet does provide another venue to reach potential participants, spam blockers and time limitations are also barriers to reaching participants (Kreuter et al., 2009). Thus, we used both phone- and Web-based data collection procedures in the current study. Research does suggest, however, that a decline in response rate does not lead to tremendous error and the highly expensive efforts to achieve high response rates (e.g., 60%), such as continuous call backs and special interviewers trained to convert refusals into completes, do not produce better results than those that have lower response rates (e.g., 30%; Keeter, Miller, Kohut, Groves, & Presser, 2000). However, it is important to note that the weights employed in our analyses allow for us to adjust for some of the potential bias associated with the less than optimal response rate.

There are also several strengths of this study, most notably the nationally representative design, the large sample size, the linkage with the NEA population, the use of propensity scores to address potential sampling biases, and the inclusion of teaching and non-teaching school staff. The weights were derived based on the NEA population, rather than all educators nationally. We lack comparable demographic data from all teachers in the United States upon which to derive weights to weight up the data to all educators nationally. However, we believe the availability to weight the data up to the known NEA membership is a major strength, given the organization's overall presence as the largest teachers' union in the United States.

Because of the sampling strategy employed and use of self-report data, the respondents were not nested within schools; therefore, multilevel analysis was not warranted. There are several strengths of multilevel analyses and the integration of data on multiple aspects of the school (e.g., size, urbanicity, student population; Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2009)— thus future research should include additional school-level factors and student perspectives (e.g., school climate) to provide a more comprehensive view of staff perceptions and responses to bullying and possibly allow for exploration of school contextual factors. Additional research is also needed to examine other factors, such as teacher efficacy and burnout on teachers' willingness to intervene, or differences by school demographic factors, such as urban versus rural, or elementary versus secondary schools. Given the focus of the current article on contrasting ESPs and teachers, we split the sample into these two broad groups, but there may be more heterogeneity within these two groups than implied by the names. For example, there were some nonclassroom teachers (i.e., other professional staff)

in the teacher sample. Similarly, we did not further disaggregate the findings by the ESP roles, although there may be differences in perceptions among the subpopulations of EPSs (e.g., transportation workers vs. paraprofessionals). These subpopulation differences are potentially important, and thus warrant further investigation in future studies.

Conclusions and Implications

This study is the only large-scale nationwide study conducted to examine different staff members' perspectives on bullying intervention and prevention. As such, the findings provide insight into staff members' perceptions of bullying, including the unique perspectives of ESPs who are often overlooked in both the literature and prevention programming. As hypothesized, teachers generally reported higher levels of exposure to bullying and feeling more prepared to respond to different types of bullying. Although there were several statistically significant differences between EPSs and teachers, the pattern of findings regarding areas of need for professional development were generally the same for both groups. For example, cyberbullying and sexting were identified as areas where all staff needed additional training. More ESPs reported needing professional development on how to intervene in situations involving physical bullying, verbal bullying, relational bullying, and sexting than did teachers. With regard to special populations, areas of greatest need for additional training related to sexual orientation, gender issues, and racial issues, with ESPs reporting a greater need than teachers. Although ESPs are on the "frontlines," they are exposed to less bullying than teachers. The differences in contact hours could account for some of this, but there are other differences between ESPs and teachers. For example, it is unclear whether the ESPs are as able to recognize bullying when they see it, which may be from ESPs' reduced likelihood of involvement in school-wide prevention efforts that often focus on bullying identification and intervention techniques.

These findings have important implications for school psychologists with regard to school-wide bullying prevention efforts. Consistent with the National Association of School Psychologists (2012) position statement on bullying, school psychologists are encouraged to utilize their training in evidence-based practices and children's mental health to help educate the school community about bullying and mental health, as well as develop comprehensive antibullying policies. Given that school psychologists often collaborate with a multitude of professionals throughout the school day (e.g., teachers regarding students' behavior plans, paraprofessionals working with special education students, administrators developing school-wide initiatives), they are well suited to assist school personnel in broadening bullying prevention efforts. Specifically, school psychologists can help administer needs assessments to all school personnel, which in turn can help tailor professional development trainings on various forms of bullying and special populations (e.g., cyberbullying; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth). Taken together, these results also underscore the importance of collaboration between teaching and nonteaching staff in school-wide prevention efforts.

Acknowledgments

Appendix

Appendix A

NEA Bullying Survey Items

Category	Item Wording	Response Options[a]
Exposure to bullying	*I have seen students being bullied at the school or on school property during the last month. This includes on the bus, at the bus stop, and at school events.*	Not at all[b] 1× month 2–3× month Once a week Several times a week
	During the last month, a student has reported to me that he or she was bullied at this school.	Yes/No[b]
	During the last month, a parent reported to me that their child has been bullied at this school.	Yes/No[b]
Personal experiences with bullying	*Have you personally been bullied by someone else at the school where you work?*	Yes/No[b]
	Who has bullied you at your school?	Parent Student Other staff Administration Other
Concerns about bullying	*How much is bullying a problem at the school?*	Not a problem Minor problem Moderate problem Major problem
Different forms of bullying/ bullying among special populations	*During the last month at this school, a student has reported the following bullying behavior to me . . .[c]*	Yes/No[b]
	How much are the following bullying behaviors a problelm at your school?[c]	Not a problem Minor problem Moderate problem Major problem
	How comfortable would you feel intervening or reprimanding a student who engaged in this form of bullying/make these kinds of remarks?[c]	Very Comfortable Comfortable Somewhat Comfortable Uncomfortable
Bullying policy and procedures	*My school district has a bullying policy.*	Yes/No[b]
	Bullying problems adequately addressed by the bullying process.	Yes/No[b]
	My school's policies for dealing with bullying situations are clear and easy to implement	Yes/No[b]
	I received training on how to implement my school's bullying and safety policies.	Yes/No[b]
Bullying prevention efforts	*I have resources available to help me learn how to effectively intervene with bullying situations.*	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strong Disagree
	I have effective strategies for handling a bullying situation.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strong Disagree
	It is my job to intervene when you see bullying happen.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strong Disagree

Category	Item Wording	Response Options[a]
	Are you currently involved in bullying prevention activities at the school you work in most frequently?	Yes/No[b]
	Does the school you work in most frequently have a formal prevention efforts (teams, committee, or prevention program) that deals with bullying?	Yes/No[b]
	When you try to intervene in bullying situations, the situations tends to get . . .	Much better Better Worse Much worse
Additional training	*Do you think you could benefit from additional training on when and how to intervene with . . .[c]*	Yes/No[b]

[a]All items included the option "not sure"; on average, less than 2% of individuals utilized this response and was subsequently recoded as missing for analyses.

[b]Indicates the reference group.

[c]These questions were broken down into five individual items to assess distinct forms of bullying (i.e., physical; verbal; relational; cyberbullying; sexting) and six individual items assessing comments directed toward special poulations (homophobic; sexist; racist; negative religious; negative about a disability; weight related).

Biography

Catherine Bradshaw, PhD, MEd, is the deputy director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funded Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence and codirector of the National Institute of Mental Health funded Johns Hopkins Center for Prevention and Early Intervention. She is also is a professor and the associate dean for Research and Faculty Development at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. Her research focuses on bullying and school climate; the development of aggressive and problem behaviors; effects of exposure to violence, peer victimization, and environmental stress on children; and the design, evaluation, and implementation of evidence-based prevention programs in schools.

Tracy E. Waasdorp, PhD, MEd, is a research associate at the Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She also holds an appointment as a clinical research associate at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Her research focuses on bullying, relational aggression and school-based bullying prevention and intervention. She is particularly interested in person-centered analysis and longitudinal data analysis methods applied to prevention research.

Lindsey M. O'Brennan, PhD, is a postdoctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. She serves as a consultant on the Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence grant implementing evidence-based programs in Baltimore City Public Schools. Her doctoral training was in counseling, clinical, and school psychology at the University of California—Santa Barbara, and her research focuses on bullying, peer victimization, school climate, and school-based prevention programming.

Michaela Gulemetova, PhD, is an education policy and research analyst. She holds a doctorate in economics from University of Pennsylvania, and her research focuses on measuring impact evaluations of education interventions. She held positions of senior

researcher at the National Education Association and the American Institutes for Research, where she designed and implemented studies on bullying prevention, teacher salaries and performance evaluations, and impact evaluations of girls' education programs in developing countries. She is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University.

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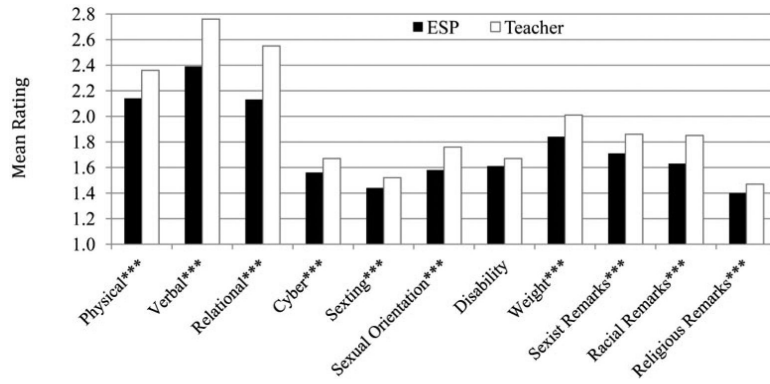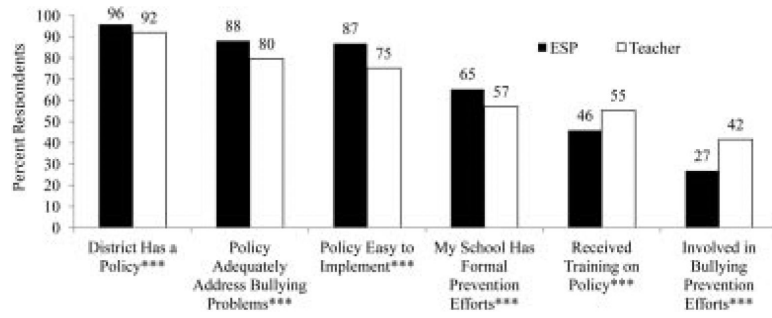
Figure 1.
ESPs' and teachers' average reports of different forms of bullying and bullying among special populations being a problem. *Note.* Response options ranged from 1 (*not a problem*) to 4 (*major problem*). Asterisks indicate significant differences between ESPs and teachers on that item. ESPs [H11549] education support professionals. ******p* < .01. The full response scale ranged from 1 to 4.
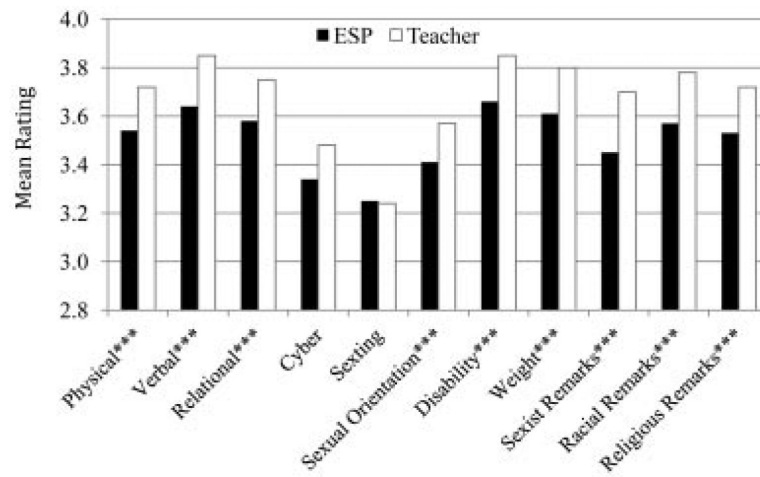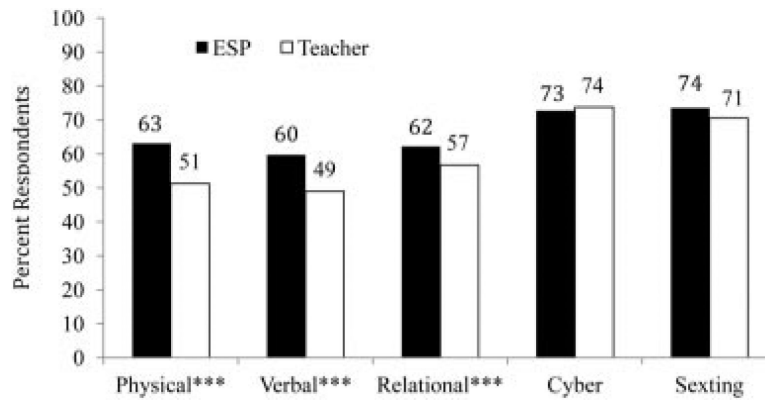
Figure 2.
ESPs' and teachers' average reports of comfort intervening with different forms of bullying and bullying among special populations. *Note.* Response options ranged from 1 (*very uncomfortable*) to 4 (*very comfortable*). Asterisks indicate significant differences between ESPs and teachers on that item. ESPs = education support professionals. ***$p < .01$. The full response scale ranged from 1 to 4.
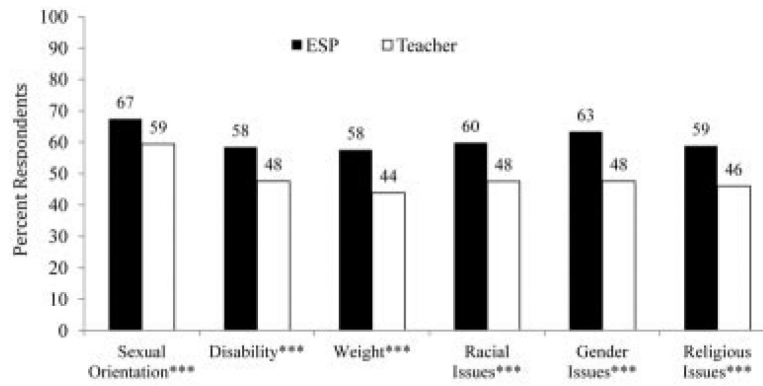
Figure 3.
Percentage of staff who responded "yes" regarding bullying policies and prevention activities. *Note.* Asterisks indicate significant differences between ESPs and teachers on that item. ESPs = education support professionals. *** $p < .01$

Figure 4.
Percentage of staff who reported a need for additional training in intervening with different forms of bullying. *Note.* Asterisks indicate significant differences between ESPs and teachers on that item. ESPs = education support professionals. ***$p < .01$.

Figure 5.
Percentage of staff who reported a need for additional training in intervening in bullying situations involving special populations, race, gender, and religion. *Note.* Asterisks indicate significant differences between ESPs and teachers on that item. ESPs = education support professionals. *** $p < .01$