

## **TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS A PART OF LIFE FOR TEENS**

The hallways of America's high schools and junior high schools--the highways and byways between classrooms, locker rooms, and the outside world--are daunting, sexually-charged terrain where most girls and many boys can routinely expect to be grabbed, poked, pinched, or put down in explicitly sexual ways. In a poll taken by the American Association of University Women, 81% of the students in the 8th through the 11th grade had experienced sexual harassment in school.

Parents, teachers, and administrators must acknowledge that sexual harassment in schools is creating a hostile environment that compromises the education of America's children. Sexual harassment is clearly and measurably taking a toll on a significant percentage of students' education and their emotional and behavioral lives. Some facts:

- More than 75% of all girls and 56% of boys say they have been the target of unwanted sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks, while 66% of girls and 42% of boys have been touched, grabbed, or pinched.
- About 80% of the unwelcome sexual behavior is by students and directed at other students; the rest comes from teachers, custodians, coaches, and other adults.
- Nearly 50% of the students surveyed said they were "very upset" or "somewhat upset" when harassment was directed toward them; but while 70% of the girls reported these reactions, only 24% of the boys did. About 1/3 of the girls reported that the activity made them want to avoid school and reduced their willingness to talk in class.
- Nearly 25% of the boys had been called homosexual--the form of harassment the boys reported as most upsetting--while 10% of the girls had been called lesbian.
- Nearly 25% of the girls have been forced to kiss someone, while one in ten students, boys and girls, reported being forced to do something sexual other than kissing.
- Sixty-six percent (66%) of the boys surveyed and 52% of the girls said they had harassed other students. Of those, 41% of the boys said they believed this was "just a part of school life; it's no big deal", compared to 31% of the girls.

Source: Felicity Barringer, New York Times News Service