

**DEERING HIGH SCHOOL
REPORT SUMMARIZING
STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS ON HARASSMENT**

**Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence
March 3, 2006**

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

On October 20, 21, and 24, 2005, the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence conducted focus groups with students in ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades at Deering High School.

The purpose of these focus groups was to collect student perceptions of bias, stereotyping and harassment at the high school. At the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence, we have found that focus groups are an effective method for gathering information about a school climate. The information collected in these groups provides an important working foundation for understanding the dynamics of bias and harassment in schools.

It is important to note that the participants in the focus groups were not drawn from a statistically significant sample of the school population. Rather, the students selected to participate in these meetings represent a simple, cultural cross-section of the school's population. As a result, this report, which summarizes our findings from these focus groups, is intended to provide a series of snap shots of the perceptions and experiences of these students. It offers a rich, detailed, and compelling view of aspects of the cultural climate at Deering High School.

Focus Group Purpose and Structure

At Deering High School, the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence met with eight groups composed of a total of seventy students. The groups were structured as follows: one group of African immigrant students from various countries (male and female); two groups of Asian students, both immigrants from various countries and American born students (male and female); one group of African American students (male and female); one group of Latino students (male and female); one group of female students (mixed race and ethnicity); one group of male and female students (all White); one group of students in the Alternative Education Program (mixed

race and ethnicity, male and female). We structured the groups in this manner because we have found that some students are often more comfortable and therefore may respond more candidly when they meet in groups with students who share certain characteristics (gender, race, ethnicity, or minority status). We found that all of the participants in the eight focus groups which met at Deering High School were friendly and responsive. These students described incidents of harassment in detail and in a respectful manner.

Each focus group met for approximately one hour. We began each of the focus groups with an explanation that these meetings are intended to collect the perspectives of participants on issues relating to bias, stereotyping and harassment in school. We also explained that the comments of participants would remain anonymous in a summarizing report that will be sent to the school administration.

Following this introduction, we opened a discussion among the participants about harassment at school. We ask several questions related to harassment and bias, including questions about the kinds of students or characteristics which are common targets of harassment and about the language commonly used at Deering High School.

In addition to these discussions, we asked the students who participated in the focus groups to write anonymous responses to the following:

- 1) Describe one or two incidents of bias or harassment that you witnessed or experienced
- 2) Describe the impact of an incident of bias or harassment had on you or someone you know
- 3) Describe a positive response that you witnessed by a faculty member or student in dealing with teasing or harassment.

We have included a selection of the written responses to these questions as well as the verbal comments made during our focus group meetings in the body of this report.

The Use of Degrading Language in this Report and at Deering High School

In this report, we use the actual descriptions of incidents provided to the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence by students participating in the focus groups. Many of these descriptions contain highly degrading language, jokes and slurs.

We recognize that many persons who read this report will find these descriptions extremely disturbing and upsetting and we apologize to those readers. We have chosen to include these descriptions in this report because we believe that it is very difficult to understand school climate by talking *about* or *around* the issue. That is, merely telling readers that students use degrading language does not inform them about the dehumanizing and often violent nature of the words and jokes spoken in hallways. Consequently, we have included descriptions given to us by students, which have not been edited to remove graphic, degrading or other disturbing language.

Finally, it is important to recognize that while student use of degrading language is pervasive at Deering High School, many students do not use these words. Moreover, many of these students and many faculty and staff consistently speak up to interrupt the use of slurs, jokes, and other disparaging words.

A National Perspective on Harassment and Bias in Schools

That Deering High School experiences bias, stereotypes and harassment focused on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion and other issues is not surprising. These same issues exist at every high school the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence has worked with across the United States, and even outside the country. We have found that high schools are distinguished less by the severity of the bias, stereotyping and harassment than they are by the willingness of school leaders to address these issues with honesty, creativity and boldness. By this latter measurement Deering High School is poised to become a very positive example of leadership in confronting, responding to and preventing prejudice and harassment.

SECTION II: STUDENT RESPONSES

All of the students who participated in the focus groups reported that they have seen or heard harassment at school; many stated that they see harassment as often as every day. They identified a broad range of subjects for which students may be targets of harassment, including race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as body size, clothing, and hobbies. Students described the general climate of the school in regard to harassment as ranging from malicious gossip and degrading jokes to direct taunts and even physical harassment. Students also described Deering High School as having significant segregation, with rigid cliques composed of students with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, social interests and grade. According to students, most of the harassment at Deering High School occurs in the hallways between classes, with some harassment occurring classrooms and the cafeteria. Below are some examples of descriptions students gave of the general climate:

- There is all kinds of harassment here: how you dress; if you don't wear the name brands; who your friends are; the way you talk; sexual orientation.
- People get harassed here because of what they wear, what they look like, their weight.
- There are comments and phrases made all the time, but mostly it's playing around.
- People here are really narrow-minded. People who are different in any way get harassed.
- People talk trash here all the time.
- Some people say you're a 'scrub' because you wear the same clothes every day.
- There's a lot of harassment between upper classmen and freshmen. Freshmen get made fun of a lot.
- There are lots of stereotypes used in this school and there's no mixing. Everyone is segregated. You have the Jocks and preps on the third floor, the gangstas on the second and the Goths on the first.

TYPES OF HARASSMENT

In the focus groups, students identified harassment targeting students specifically because of their race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender, and sexual orientation as being very serious problems at school. They also identified significant harassment related to religion.

RACE, ETHNICITY, AND IMMIGRATION STATUS

In all of the groups that we met with, students described significant bias and harassment related to race, ethnicity and immigration status. Students reported that they frequently hear degrading racist comments and slurs. All of the students of color we met with described a climate at Deering as one which is rife with prejudice, stereotyping and harassment. These students described varying degrees of discomfort at the school.

Black Students

Students in the focus groups reported that the use of anti-Black racial slurs is an issue at school. Students reported hearing the word “nigger” used by White students to refer to Black students from “a couple of times a week” to “multiple times per day”. The students said that some White students use the word as a greeting, such as in the phrase “What’s up, Nigga?”, while others use the term in a derogatory way. All of the African and African American students that we met with reported being upset when they hear the word “nigger” or “nigga” used by students.

- White kids use the word ‘nigger’ too much.
- I see a lot of White kids make fun of the Black kids by saying things like ‘Yo yo yo, what’s up my nigs?’ or just a lot of things like that and the Black kids get really mad.
- I’ve heard people calling Black people names like ‘nigger’, ‘over burned biscuit’ and pulling Muslim girls’ scarf from their hair.
- I hear the ‘N word’ a lot. Black and White students use it a lot.
- I got called a cotton picker.
- People call me Nigger.
- You hear ‘Nigga this’ and ‘nigga that’, especially from the White kids and the Asian kids.

Some White students explained that the term “nigger” or “nigga” is never used in a derogatory way at Deering High School.

- People just use the word ‘Nigga’ as my brother. It isn’t hateful.
- Some black kid will say ‘that’s my White nigger’ to other people about me. It’s okay. You never hear people using Nigger in a bad way.

Both the African and African American students that met in focus groups described being the target of this language, and other forms of race related harassment. These students also reported that degrading stereotypes of Black people are common at school. They described being seen as “poor”, “dumb” and “ghetto”, because they are Black, regardless of their behavior or their academic success. According to these students, when they challenge these stereotypes, they face insulting comments about their racial identity, or are accused of “acting White”.

- People here stereotype Blacks as dumb. If you’re smart, they say that you’re a White wash. I may be smart but I’m Black. They’ll say, ‘Oh you’re not really black’. Just because I’m smart doesn’t mean that I’m a White wash. I work hard.
- I heard White people saying Black people are stupid.
- Some of the White kids here are pretty snotty. You can tell that they don’t like us Black students. They treat us like we’re lower than them.
- Some groups in this school don’t welcome Black students.

The African students described being targeted with these stereotypes of Blacks in general, as well as degrading comments about being African and immigrants in particular.

- I heard someone say that I might be ‘White washed’ when I answered a question in class. When I asked him why, he said ‘because Blacks are dumb.’
- In the class, most students treat Africans like they were low and stuff.
- When Whites hear about something in Africa, they consider it poor.
- Some kids think that they’re better or smarter than us because we’re African. They assume that you don’t know as much, that you’re stupid.
- When I answer questions in class they are surprised because I’m from Africa. They expect me not to know anything.
- I don’t think that White people here know about African people. They say things in class like ‘In your country do you wear clothes? Do you have cows in Africa?’ They’re so ignorant, they’re better off not talking. People are so ignorant about Africa.
- Lots of people here put us Africans down. They think that African kids are stupid
- I heard some people called a Black guy ‘nigger’ and that he should ‘go back to Africa.’
- I’ve heard people say, ‘African people should all go back down to Africa because they don’t belong here.’
- If you’re smart and can express yourself intellectually then you’re ‘White washed.’

Many of the students in other groups also hear stereotypes about Black students. These students suggested that Somali students in particular are the target of significant racial and immigration related harassment at Deering High School.

- I've heard a lot of hate towards Somalians. 'Dirty Somalians' and 'Smelly Somalians' and 'Smellians'
- Someone ran down the hall yelling 'BBSS Bring Back Somalian Slaves!'
- I've heard 'I hate Somalians'.
- I've heard Somalians called raghead here.
- People always say Somalians stink. They call them Somellians
- I heard some people told some Somalians to take showers because of their smell.
- People make fun of Somalians because they say that they smell. They'll say to a Somalian, 'Go take a shower!'
- It's not cool to be Somalian that's why they get picked on.

Latino Students

While most of the students in all of the focus groups reported that anti-Black harassment is more prevalent than other types of harassment, they also reported that Latino students are targeted. Many of the Latino students in the focus group expressed frustration, anger and angst over being called Mexicans. They explained that they are upset that members of the Deering community, students, faculty and staff, do not understand that they are not all Mexicans, but rather are from a number of Latin American countries. Like the African students, these students were also upset about harassment that targets them particularly because they are immigrants and harassment based on stereotypes and the slurs they frequently hear.

- Everyone here thinks that every Latino is a Mexican. They will tell us to go eat a taco. They know it pisses us off. I don't eat tacos. I am not Mexican.
- People call people burrito, beaner, spic licker, spigger.
- Everyone thinks that you're illegal. They call you wetback, Spic.
- White people calling Spanish people all Mexican or saying 'Isn't it about low tide? Go get your family.'
- Because of how you dress everybody thinks you're a 'wetback'.
- People say 'Go back across the border or I will call immigration.'

- Once I saw this girl who said that she doesn't hang out with Hispanics.
- I hear that someone was called a slur for being Dominican.
- Students call Hispanic student burritos
- I heard of someone calling a Mexican a 'BIG NOSE dirty Mexican!!!'
- I heard someone called a dirty Mexican

Asian Students

Students in the focus groups also described harassment targeting Asian and Asian American students. These degrading comments include anti-Asian slurs, as well as comments about being "White washed" when Asian students do well in school or socialize with students who are not White.

- Some Asian students feel they have to hang out strictly with Asian students. If you hang out with White students they call you White wash.
- This girl got jumped by two White girls. They were calling her a 'gook' and 'fucking bitch'.
- Someone called me a 'rice picker'.
- Last year a kid was walking behind me and he said, 'You're an Asian. You can't wear Abercrombie.'
- I heard this guy say, 'Hey, dude you gotta cigarette?' 'Nah, I got this one from the dumb chinks over there.'

Racist Jokes

All of the students of color that we met with reported that they frequently hear racist jokes, with Blacks being the most commonly targeted group. They described some of these jokes:

- Why do black people like playing basketball? Because they can shoot, steal, and run at the same time.
- Why are black people so tall? Because they're knee- grows.
- I heard a person say 'what do you call Black people in water? A bunch of cocoa puffs in milk.'
- What do you call a bunch of White people running down a hill? Avalanche. What do you call a bunch of Black people running down a hill? A mudslide. What do you call a bunch of Mexicans running down a hill? A jail break.
- I heard someone say to a Spanish person 'Do you know where Spanish people sit at a baseball game?' And that person said they sit in Section 8.

- Last year a White girl here made a lot of jokes. I remember she wrote that if she ran over a pregnant black lady, she would reverse so that she could do it again.
- I heard that a guy told a joke to a person from Afghanistan to ‘go get Osama’ or would say ‘don’t bomb my house.’
- My friends make fun of me by saying I eat cats and dogs, even though it’s jokingly, it’s still offensive.

White Students

Students who participated in the mixed gender, White focus group spoke at length about race related issues at Deering High School. These students also reported that there is limited interaction across racial and ethnic group boundaries at Deering High School. Many of these students view students of color as the source of problems at Deering High School.

- This school is very disappointing. Black people and Asians in the main hall. They won’t move and if you ask them to they won’t. I always see teachers yelling at them. They’re the big problem.
- There is a group of minorities that hang out in front of the office and they cause so much congestion. Then if you just nudge them they’ll say obscene things to you. They always expect racism.
- The immigrants are the main problem in the hallways. The freshmen move in packs but they’re not the problem. If you tell them to move, they’re afraid of you so they do, but the minorities they won’t.
- I found that the ones with low income, the immigrants and colored students, tend to be more hostile.
- I think that in part it is a defense mechanism. The ESL students feel defensive and then everyone else just feeds the fire and the language barriers and the cultural differences just reinforce it.
- If you’re with your friends and someone Black walks by, they’ll call them nigger quietly and can get away with it. If they say it loudly then someone in the group will probably say don’t say that. But you know that if it wasn’t heard outside the group then they would be fine with it.

Impact on Students

The impact of these patterns of racial and ethnic bias on students is significant. Most of the students of color described feeling angry, isolated at school, looked down upon, and unwelcome. Several Black students reported that they sometimes felt hesitant to participate in class, and other described frequently feeling angry or defensive. Many of the African, Latino and Asian students expressed reluctance to interact with White students for fear for being put down, or alienated. These students also described feeling scapegoated at the school, that they are seen as the source of problems and are the subject of unfair suspicions. They explained that they must “stick together” with other students like them because other students or White students feel so hostile towards them.

- It’s really uncomfortable here.
- I don’t feel accepted by White kids.
- Most Black Africans don’t want to answer questions in class because when they do so they are teased.
- When people talk trash about students who take ESL classes it makes the students feel worthless. It weakens them and makes them feel unwanted.
- It makes me very angry when a White or anyone in that case says the ‘N word’. I always answer them back so they seem to say it when I’m not around. It pisses me off.
- I can’t take it when a White person calls me a ‘nigger.’ I always end up getting either suspended or late night detention.
- When someone calls Black people ‘nigger’ they feel sad and they hate color.
- Some people, they build up a wall, too afraid to be themselves.
- You just want to knock them out or bitch-slap them across the face.
- In class, you don’t want to answer all the time, because then they’ll call you a White wash.
- People feel left out.
- Sometimes people don’t like the color they are because people are like ‘that Black kid over there.’
- Harassment can cause a kid to do badly in school. If they aren’t happy then a kid won’t want to come to school and that may affect his whole future.
- How they react to it is with sadness. At first they act like it doesn’t hurt, but later on it hurts them so they go through depression.
- I feel that if you’re Black or Latino that you wouldn’t get a good job or people look at you and say ‘nigga’.

- It pisses me off and if another White person calls me something like that again I'm gonna fuck them up real quick.
- It makes you stereotype people and later you hate them.
- It makes people feel like shit, and not wanna come to school.
- Some people don't want to come to school because they're being bullied.

White students also described the impact of racial and ethnic bias and stereotyping on them.

These students expressed significant fear of students of color, and/or discomfort interacting with them.

- I won't walk up to Black people. Personally, they scare me. Because I know at some point I'll talk to the wrong person and get my ass kicked.
- I think that there are a lot of scary groups here. I don't feel safe here. It's okay if the immigrants say that, but not us.
- I think that as individuals, black students are not intimidating, but when in groups, then it is extremely intimidating for me. I would not walk up to them.
- On the cat walk, the minorities, they will bump into you. You have to walk between them and it is very intimidating. They're talking another language and you know that they're talking about you.
- A lot of White kids if they have Somalians in their class they feel uncomfortable because you feel like you're going to get into something with them.

GENDER

Students in all of the focus groups reported hearing the words "bitch," "whore," "ho," "slut," "skank" and "cunt," multiple times per day. According to students, these words are said by boys directly to girls, used as jokes, and by girls to insult other girls.

- I hear girls get called slut, whore, ho, jump off, hootchie mamma, skank.
- I hear guys say things about girls all the time. They'll say that girls are sluts, bitches, cunts, dumb cunts, and dumb bitches.
- You hear about girls hooking up with guys and then they're called a slut.
- We have 'Slut by association' here. That's if you hang out with a girl who is a slut, then you're a slut too.
- I've seen girls walking by in the halls get called skank, whore, slut, and no one does anything about it.
- I was called a 'slut' because I broke up with my boyfriend and went out with another guy a week later.

- I heard a group of guys call a girl a ‘whore’ because of the number of guys she’s slept with.
- Last year two girls got into a fight and they called each other ‘bitches’ and ‘sluts’ the whole time.
- I hear people talking about others saying things like ‘whore’, ‘slut’, ‘bitch’, etc.
- People talk trash about girls all the time.
- I heard one girl was told to hook because she wasn’t going to make it in the real world.

Girls in all of the focus groups reported that in addition to being frequently subjected to degrading language and slurs, they commonly encounter significant harassment about their body size or body parts from both boys and other girls. Girls also described feeling degraded by the ways that boys talk to and about them. They reported that boys will state openly that they want to have sex with or “bang” particular girls, or harass girls with obscene comments or “compliments”. Students also reported that both boys and girls will spread rumors about what girls have done sexually with boys, and that boys talk openly about “how far” they have gotten sexually with girls. Several students talked about girls having sex with groups of guys or being part of a “train.”

- I’ve heard boys tell girls they don’t know they ‘wanna piece of that ass’ and grab them.
- I’ve heard kids say things like ‘You see that girl? She’s a slut. She got trained last weekend.’
- If guys think that you’re pretty they don’t say so. Instead they say that you’re hot or banging.
- There were rumors going around about a girl doing four guys on her own. She gets called slut all the time.
 - My friend is being harassed all the time by this guy. It’s obscene. He is persistent, and says things like ‘I want to do you’. There’s a fine line between giving compliments and harassment. It’s obvious but some people don’t get it.
- A lot of guys think that it is a turn on to say, ‘I want to do you’. It’s disgusting.
- There was another rumor going around about me that actually still is. One of my ex boyfriends told the school that I have sex with everyone I see as long as they’re male.
- Guys here are all about getting ass, and then they treat girls like shit. Guys want girls who are sluts. They don’t respect girls here.

Students in the focus groups also reported seeing boys grab girls' breasts or slap girls' buttocks in the hallways every day. They described these incidents as usually occurring between boys and girls who are "friends", but sometimes also between boys and girls who don't know each other well. Some students explained that for the most part this touching is "not a problem" that girls like it and see it as a sign that boys like them.

- Boys will walk by and grab your titty or your butt.
- The other day I got my skirt lifted. Usually the boys do it to their friends. Some girls think it's funny. Some girls like it; they'll be like 'oh he likes me'. Or they'll get mad like me. It happens daily.
- Kids (guys) would come up to me and grab my breast and I can't stand that. They think I'm good only for my body.
- I see girls hating on themselves always. There are some boys who walk the halls grabbing butts. Some girls just let it go.
- I always see guys grabbing girls.
- Girls get grabbed by their friends. It's not a bad thing. It's all in fun, just joking. Nobody minds.

Impact on Students

Girls in the focus groups expressed frustration about the climate for girls at Deering, suggesting that it is highly stressful and depressing. They stated that many girls feel pressure to 'fit in' physically, and to do whatever they can to *not* stand out intellectually. For example, some students explained that girls often "dumb down" to better fit in, and that many girls respond to this pressure and harassment with destructive behaviors such as self-mutilation or excessive dieting and exercise.

- My friend was so overwhelmed by how she was being judged in school that she ran over to my house in tears because of the things they say.
- A girl in school was so depressed by how she was treated that she cut herself on her wrist almost every weekend.
- If someone was called a slut between my friends, they would just 'walk it off,' although when someone is called 'fat' they will probably try to lose weight to look good and that is a lot of pressure.
- Girls are really mean to each other here. You're either anorexic or fat. They're always on about being too fat or too skinny. There's a lot of back stabbing.
- Girls who are trying to be 'popular' say stupid things so guys will make fun of them in a flirtatious way. They continue to say those so guys will keep giving them attention.

- This girl was like not eating and was working out all the time and she had in her head that she had to be a certain size or her boyfriend will not like her.
- I think that girls here get treated as though they're lower. So the girls go after each other because they can't even go after the guys, because guys are seen as so much better.
- Girls here dumb themselves down. They think that they have to.
- There are always girls crying here. I already saw two today. Because it is so mean here.
- It's so hard because everything that we worked so hard for we're losing and girls are just doing it to themselves. They feel like they have to be out there in order to be noticed. They think that guys need to see girls with things hanging out to notice them or like them.
- If someone was to walk by and call me a 'slut' or something without thinking I would knock that person out. One of these days someone will think they're tough but there's always someone bigger.
- Casually throwing out jokes hasn't hurt anyone from what I've seen but it does make people think it's all right to tell jokes all the time.
- If you call girls 'slut' then people start calling them sluts but then they start acting like one.

It is important to note however, that several students, both boys and girls, did not view the language or behavior directed at girls as problematic. These students described sexually degrading words as acceptable, and explained that sexual touching in the halls is "not a problem" because it occurs among friends. This suggests that sexually harassing behavior has become normalized for these students, and that escalating sexual harassment may be seen as inevitable.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

According to students in the focus groups, anti-gay language is also very common in school. Students explained that some students are constantly called anti-gay slurs like, "fag" and "homo". There are two general patterns of use for these terms. First, students commonly use anti-gay slurs to express disdain for objects and activities. Second, students use degrading anti-gay slurs to specifically target students who are perceived to be gay or who are disliked for other reasons.

- I hear the word 'gay' being used as a synonym for stupid at least 10 times a day.
- I hear people say gay, like its stupid or retarded, or they'll say 'gay gay' to mean the same thing.

- I hear queer, homo fag, fruity pebble, fruit cake, all the time. They say it to people's faces and behind their backs.
- People will say that's so gay and don't be a fag.
- People use the word Gay as a put down all the time.
- Things that aren't desirable are labeled as 'gay'!
- When someone does something that is against the current they always say, 'Kid, why are you so gay?'

While the students in the focus groups said that they knew of openly gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual students at school, none of the participants in the focus groups themselves self-identified as being homosexual. Two students in the group said that they are often thought to be gay by other students, and are subjected to anti-gay harassment. A number of students openly expressed their dislike of gay students and described participating in harassment of them. The students were all in agreement that Deering High School was a "hard place to be gay". They offered many descriptions of harassment directed at gay students, such as those listed below:

- Once I heard that some kid was gay and then everyone was making fun of him so at lunch they threw food at him.
- I hear lots of stuff about gay students. I don't care if you're gay; just don't make me see it. We call them fruit cup, butt pirate, fudge packer, stink dink, sausage smuggler, and fag.
- Kids make fun of people who are gay here all the time.
- A girl who dresses more skater, she got called a lesbian, even though she has a boyfriend.
- Just because I don't wear tight clothes, and I'm a girl, I get called gay.
- They call people gay all the time. I feel bad for the gay kids. Everyone talks about them all the time and makes fun of them.
- Everyone makes fun of gay kids.
- I heard someone say 'Wow, I hate gay kids.' Then a gay person walked by and he said 'I'm going to beat that fag up.'
- People will make fun of gay people. They will point to gay kids and say 'Don't look at him'.
- Gay students get made fun of, not to their face but in a sneaky way behind their backs.
- Most people who are gay here aren't liked because they're too flamboyant or they're retarded, not just because they're gay.

Impact on Students

Students describe the following incidents in which homosexual students and those perceived to be homosexual were the targets of degrading language and harassment and the impact that this treatment has on these students:

- I know guys that make fun of gay guys all the time. Some guys won't even talk to me if I'm talking to my gay friend.
- If there was a gay guy on the football team they would beat him up. Even the coaches would beat them up because people here hate gays.

JEWISH STUDENTS

Students in the focus groups also reported that they frequently witness harassment of an anti-Semitic nature. Students reported that there are two forms of this harassment. First, students described hearing students talk about Jews in degrading ways or reference Nazi symbolism. Second, and more commonly, students will use the term Jew like anti-gay slurs to express disdain or to put down other students. Students who participated in the focus groups described incidents that exemplify both of these forms.

- Someone wrote Nazi Pride and somebody drew a swastika. I saw them do it.
- In my Spanish class, people talk about Jews. They do these hand gestures and make fun of Jews all the time.
- People will say that's so Jewish, when they mean something is stupid.
- People will say 'You're a Jew' when they hear you say something that they don't like or think is weird or something.
- I've heard people say that's so Jewish.
- I've been called a 'dirty Jew'.

STUDENT VIEWS ON FACULTY RESPONSES TO HARASSMENT

During the focus groups, we asked all of the students to discuss the response of teachers to student targeted harassment. In all of the focus groups, students reported that they believed that teachers did not respond to harassment consistently. Students stated that some teachers may be aware of harassment, but unwilling to address it. Students also described some teachers as tolerant of harassment, and others as finding some forms of harassment funny.

- Teachers never speak up.

- Teachers treat students who are different as not normal. We see it all the time. They get picked on all the time.
- We don't always feel comfortable going to teachers. Some teachers will intervene, but some won't.
- Teachers need to support students in class to make it feel safe for us.
- With some teachers, some of them care, but others are like 'whatever!' and they just ignore everything.
- Teachers here don't care. They don't say anything, if White kids say bad things. Some do, but a lot don't.
- Some teachers don't do anything about racism here. They hear it and ignore it.
- Teachers just don't want to get involved.
- Teachers don't say anything. Most of them will watch and then pretended that they didn't hear anything and just walk away.
- If you said something softly, like Nigger or a word like that, teachers won't say anything. If you yell something, then they'll say something.

The students of color who participated in the focus groups expressed very strong feelings about the role of faculty and staff in harassment and harassment prevention at school. In all of the group meetings with these students, they described feeling that many teachers in the school were racist or ethnically biased themselves. There were two general patterns to students' complaints in this regard: 1) students described teachers and staff as unfairly targeting students of color with disciplinary action because of this bias, especially in the halls; 2) students described situations in the classroom in which teachers behaved in a way that suggested that they were biased, which impacted students learning.

- Some teachers don't do anything about racism here. They hear it and ignore it.
- Hallway monitors are racist. They always tell us to move. They will walk past a group of White people to go tell the Black kids to move.
- Some teachers, especially the hall monitors, think that Black people are all bad
- I was in a class and the teacher said that Black means evil. She was talking about color symbolism, but the way she said it, she didn't explain it. I was so angry. I couldn't believe she would say something like that. The Black kids in the class were so mad.
- I had a teacher that wouldn't let me pick my topic in class. I wanted to do a project on something different but she kept giving me immigration and Black cases, because I'm an immigrant and Black. I can learn about other stuff. Why should it be me that has to do that?

- There's a teacher that I have. I think she's racist. There is a White kid in the class that does stuff all the time. He throws things, hits people. She don't say anything to him, but as soon as something goes wrong or he does something, she looks at me. Then I get in trouble. She don't even look at him.
- Teachers think that we're all Mexican. They need to know that we're not all the same.
- They always think that we're too noisy. That we make the noise. They don't like the Hispanics here. It's always, 'Move! You don't belong here'. They always blame us, not the White kids.
- Some of the teachers are racists. The kids were cursing and they took all the colored kids, the Hispanic, and black kids. They didn't take any of the White kids and they were just as involved and it was obvious!
- You should talk to teachers. Tell them what's up about Latinos and not to be racist.

Students did identify some staff and teachers as being reliably consistent in addressing and interrupting harassment. Both Mr. Gomez and Mr. Kunin were specifically mentioned by both students of color and White students as being outstanding in this regard.

POSITIVE RESPONSES

Finally, we asked the students to describe one positive thing that they have seen a teacher or student do to stop harassment. Most students described interventions that they themselves have tried, while a few reported incidents in which they witnessed another student or a teacher intervene.

- I was being bullied one day and three of my friends intervened and the period of harassment stopped.
- One day three of my friends called a girl a 'hoochie' and I was like 'Bro, that's fucked up, don't talk shit'.
- I have told some of my friends to stop harassing people behind their backs.
- A rap song came on the radio with the 'N word' and a Black friend of mine told us that he didn't agree with using that word, with any definition.
- I defended my bisexual friend, even when he was being made fun of by my other friends. I kept my response low-key so as not to make a huge deal of it, but it also got the message across that I didn't approve.
- Someone said I was cool because I was Latino.
- There was a fight that was going to go on but someone heard about it so the teachers stopped it.

- A student I knew stood up for an Asian lady who was being harassed on the bus for the way she looked.
- I know a teacher who is someone who really cares about the students and when she sees harassment going on she stops it and disciplines them.
- I've seen a teacher take a kid aside because the kid said 'that's gay.' And it was surprising because usually teachers don't even say anything.
- I saw a teacher help a girl who was harassed and make her and the person who harassed make amends.

SECTION III ANALYSIS

It is important to state one caveat before discussing our analysis of the information we received in the focus groups. The Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence has had the opportunity to work with a variety of schools across the country. We have worked closely with small rural schools with homogeneous populations as well as large very diverse urban schools, public schools as well as private and parochial schools. Despite this variety of experiences, we have never visited or worked in a school which has completely eliminated harassment. We believe, therefore, the fact that Deering High School students experience harassment is to be expected. Furthermore, it is important to note that the information about harassment that we have collected from the focus groups we conducted at Deering High School falls well within the range of harassment we have found in the schools in which we have worked.

The students who participated in these focus groups did so with openness, honesty and sincerity. The information that they have provided provides a valuable framework by which to understand the dynamics of harassment at Deering High School. Please remember also, that while a considerable number of students participated in these focus group meetings these perspectives do not represent the perspectives of all students.

CONCERNS:

The information reported by both students in the focus groups raised issues involving harassment that are commonly faced by schools across the United States. However, the students described four areas that are of considerable concern.

Racial Harassment: The extent of racial harassment by White students directed at students of color appears to be significant. We are especially concerned about the impact that such harassment is having on students, especially Black students and other students of color. We are also concerned about the level of race related fear and discomfort expressed by White students.

Sexual Harassment: The frequency of the sexual comments and slurs is of concern not only for the impact on girls but for the danger of escalation of sexual harassment to even more serious and destructive conduct.

Anti-Gay Harassment: The use of anti-gay slurs as insults appears to be prevalent, directed both at gay students and those perceived to be gay, as well as other students.

Religious Harassment: The level of anti-Jewish comments casually made by students is a matter of concern and gives rise to the concern of whether a Jewish student would be safe at the school.

SECTION IV CONCLUSION

We are very optimistic about the ability of Deering High School to create a climate in which every student is physically and emotionally safe. Our optimism arises from the perceptiveness and awareness of the students in the focus groups, their willingness to participate and their concern for their fellow students. Our options also arise from the strong commitment of Deering High School administrators, faculty and staff to create a school in which every single student feels safe and respected.