



Evaluative assessment of the MARC Bullying and Cyberbullying Student Assembly in Blanchard Middle School, October-November, 2013

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The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center provides **student assembly program for K-12 schools**. The assembly is held as a single 45-minute interactive presentation provided by graduate students trained by MARC, for multiple classes at a time. The presentation is “designed to help children develop the appropriate vocabulary to understand and deal with bullying issues in schools. Children are introduced to roles and emotional responses associated with bullying. Appropriate ways to deal with bullying are discussed and there is also a discussion of the difference between accidents that may happen and bullying.”²

The current analysis is based on assemblies held by program coordinator Meghan McCoy in **Blanchard Middle School** for 6-8 graders, Westford, Massachusetts, who volunteered to participate in a survey set up to find out how effectively the material is communicated to students. The analysis provides a brief overview of how familiar students are with problems that may occur when communicating online.

We applied the **method** of self-report pre- and post questionnaires. The tests were voluntary and anonymous, and because they were conducted by the school administration, within the school, they did not require additional parental consent other than the one already given to the schools.

In the **pretest** phase, we tested 380 students, of the 6th and the 7th grades. The **second (post) test** was conducted within 2-3 weeks after the assembly was held, and included 543 students of the 6-8th grades. The grade and the gender distribution were almost equal. (Table 1)

¹The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) offers aggression management programs for preschools, elementary, middle and high schools (for students in years 5 to 12). The

² For more information on student assemblies, please consult the website: <http://marccenter.webs.com/assembly%20descriptions.pdf>

Table 1

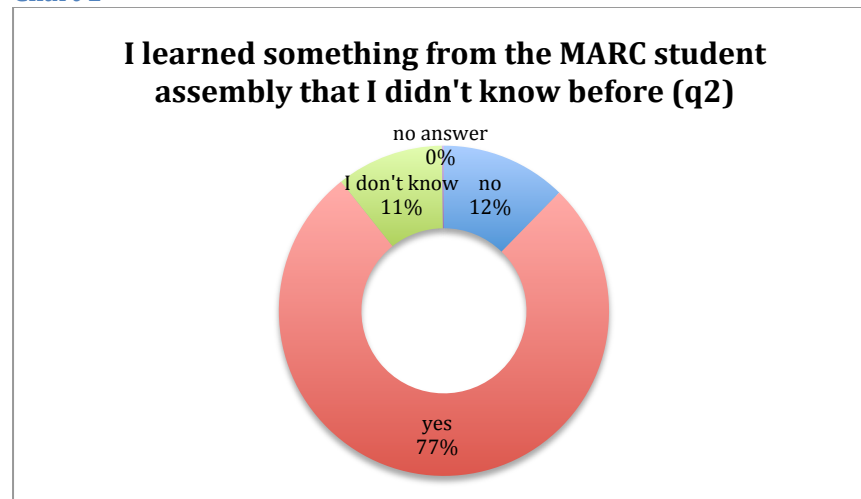
Blanchard students participating in both test phases

	Grade			Gender		
	6 th grade	7 th grade	8 th grade	Boys	Girls	N.A.
PRE test phase	188 (49.5%)	192 (50.5%)	0 (0.0%)	199 (52.4%)	178 (46.8%)	3 (0.8%)
POST test phase	181 (33.3%)	187 (34.4%)	175 (32.2%)	261 (48.1%)	281 (51.7%)	1 (0.2%)

The general evaluation of MARC's student assembly

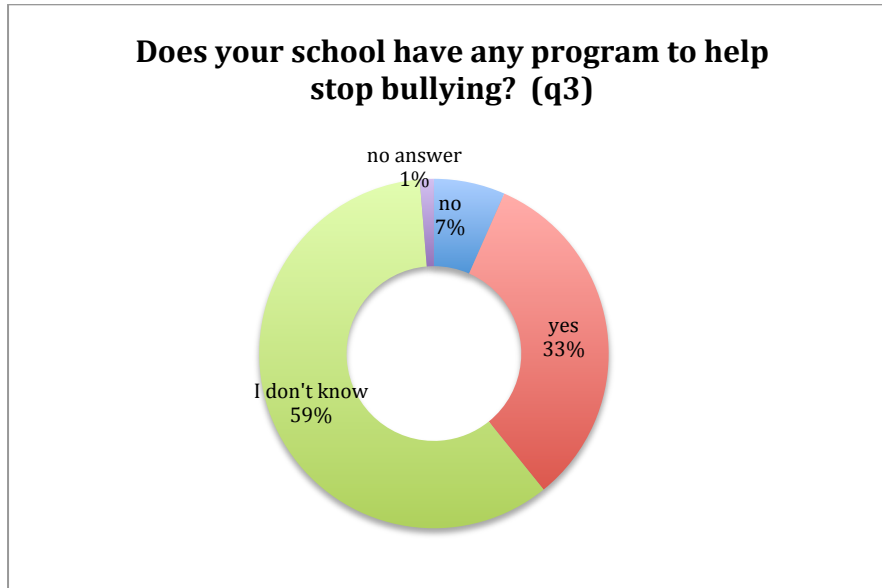
Most were of the opinion that they learned something new at the MARC student assembly in relation to the topic bullying and cyberbullying that they did not know before. (Chart 1)

Chart 1



Despite the fact that the respondents participated in person at the MARC student assembly, more than two thirds of them were not aware whether their school has introduced any anti-bullying program. (Chart 2)

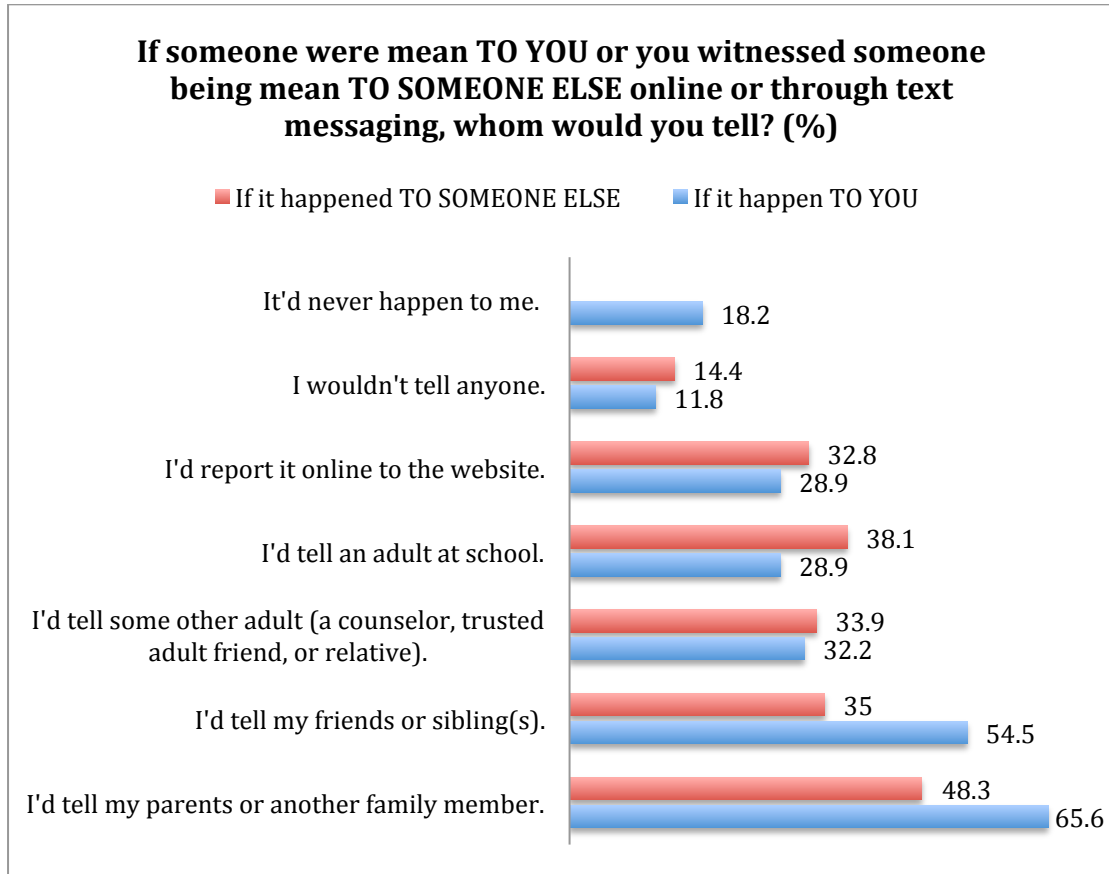
Chart 2



Whom would they ask for help?

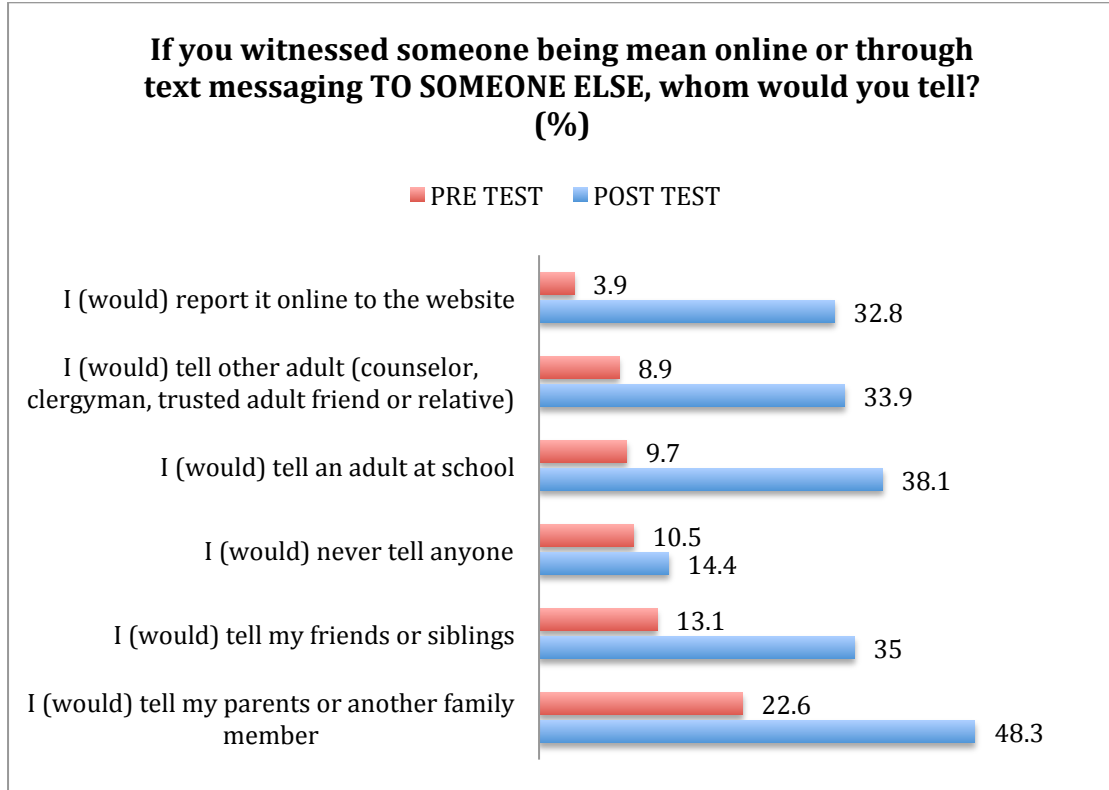
Students would most characteristically talk about bullying and cyberbullying incidents with their parents – no matter if the incident happened to the answerer or someone else – (if it happened to you: 65.6%, if it happened to someone else: 48.3%), followed by friends or siblings (if it happened to you: 54.5%, if it happened to someone else: 35.0%), then other trusted adults (counselor, relative etc.) (if it happened to you: 32.2%, if it happened to someone else: 33.9%), and finally the school (if it happened to you: 28.9%, if it happened to someone else: 38.1%). (Chart 3) It is obvious that if the incident does not happen directly to the respondent, and he/she is only a witness to it, then next to family, friends and siblings, the external circles of the person such as the school, another trusted adult or a website become more preferred when turning for help. If the incident did not happen directly to the respondent, they would rather keep it to themselves (I wouldn't tell anyone: If it happened to you: 11.8%, If it happened to someone else: 14.4%), while if the answerer suffered it, they would prefer to tell someone (mostly to parents or peers/friends/siblings).

Chart 3



We can say that compared to the pretest, the set of preferences of respondents has changed slightly. **In the second survey, the respondents would rather tell an adult at school after their parents and not friends and siblings.** (Chart 4) This may be a result of the fact that the children come to the assembly together with teachers, and assume that not only they, but also their teachers learn from what they hear – while their parents are left out. It may however also be the result of the fact that MARC's trainer stresses the importance of school climate and how significant an effect a bullying / cyberbullying incident may have on the community – despite that it only affects a few persons *directly*. **The students my have therefore likely understood the significance of involving teachers or other school staff in the management of conflicts.** It is also due to this, that the likelihood of telling an “other trusted adult” (counselor, clergyman, etc.) grew drastically, and also many more would report the incident on the website too.

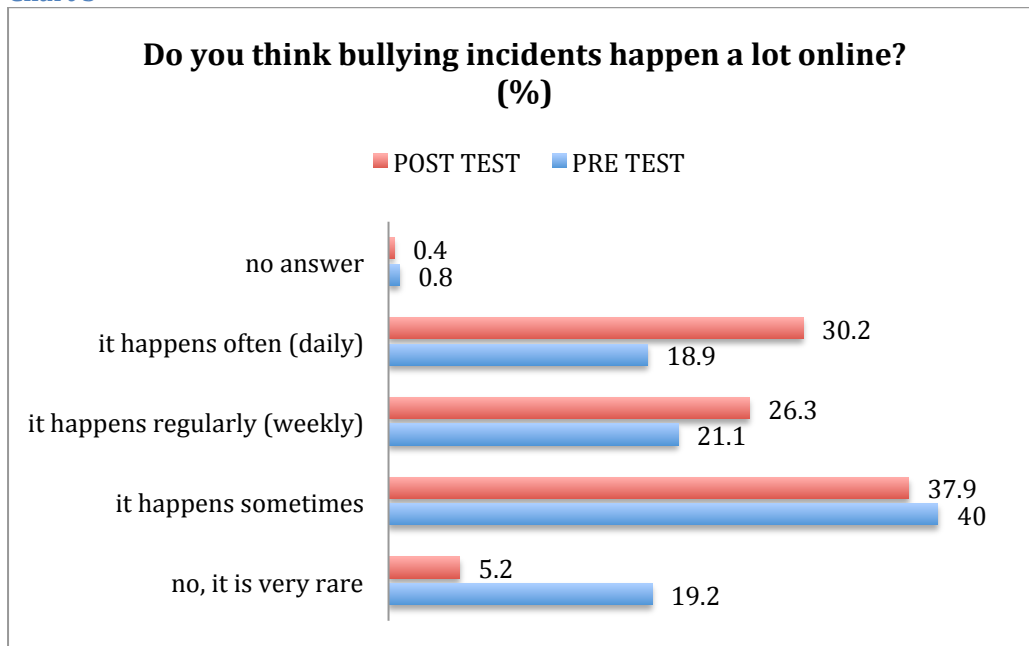
Chart 4



The frequency of bullying/cyberbullying incidents

It may be due to what they heard at the student assembly, that the estimate of students on the frequency of online bullying incidents has changed: at the time of the second survey the ratio of those who thought that online bullying is rare was smaller, while the ratio of those who estimated a weekly or even daily frequency of online bullying grew. (Chart 5)

Chart 5



How successful was the assembly in conveying new knowledge?

According to the tests, essential and correct information in most topics discussed at the student assembly could be conveyed to the students: **there was development in the evaluation of almost all questions in the test** compared to the status before the assembly. (Chart 6) **Especially as regards the significance of online privacy** (Passwords should be kept private: +38.2%), **and the loss of control over contents posted online** (Once we post something online, it could be there online forever, even if we 'delete' it: +12.2%), there was a dramatic improvement. (Table 2) **There was also a significant, positive change in the appreciation of the criminal law gravity of bullying** (Bullying is sometimes criminal harassment or a civil rights violation: 24.7%). We have also achieved that **less students believe that only because of the infringement of rights happens in an online space, sanctions are less likely** (We are less likely to be punished due to violation of law in cyberspace: +5.5%). The understanding of the conceptual elements of bullying are approximately identical in the pre- and post-test, so there is no special development in this field. However, we have to see that the respondents largely guessed the conceptual elements of bullying right already in the pretest (Bullying is when a person / group uses power to hurt another person repeatedly: -1.0%). **The only question, where no development could be established and there was even a slight drop and uncertainty, was the understanding of the role of texting or sending online message out of being offended in the escalation of the conflict.** In the second test phase students rather disagreed with this statement, so the message that you should not text your friends when you are mad at them, as it only worsens the situation could not be conveyed by the lecturer during the assembly. **It is necessary to deal with this using more examples and more interactive exercises in the future.**

Chart 6

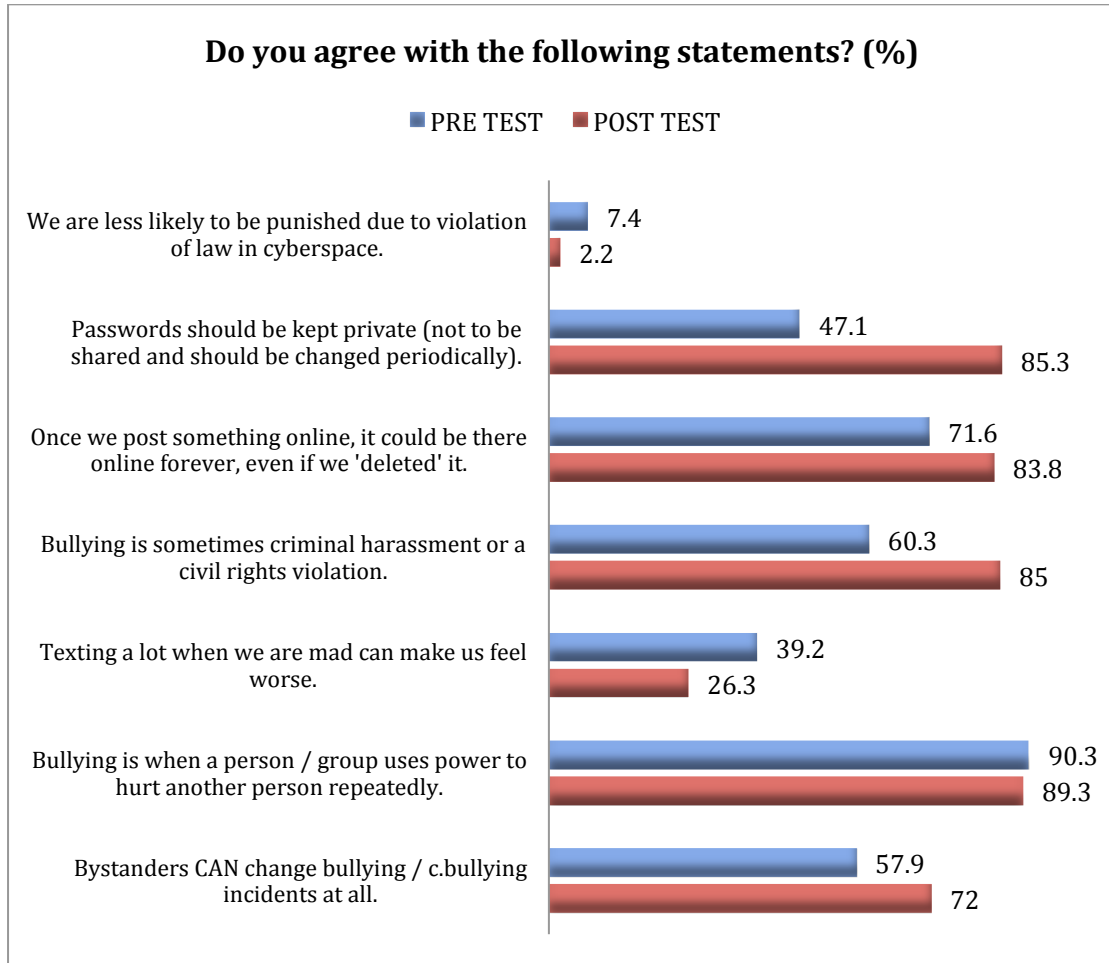


Table 2

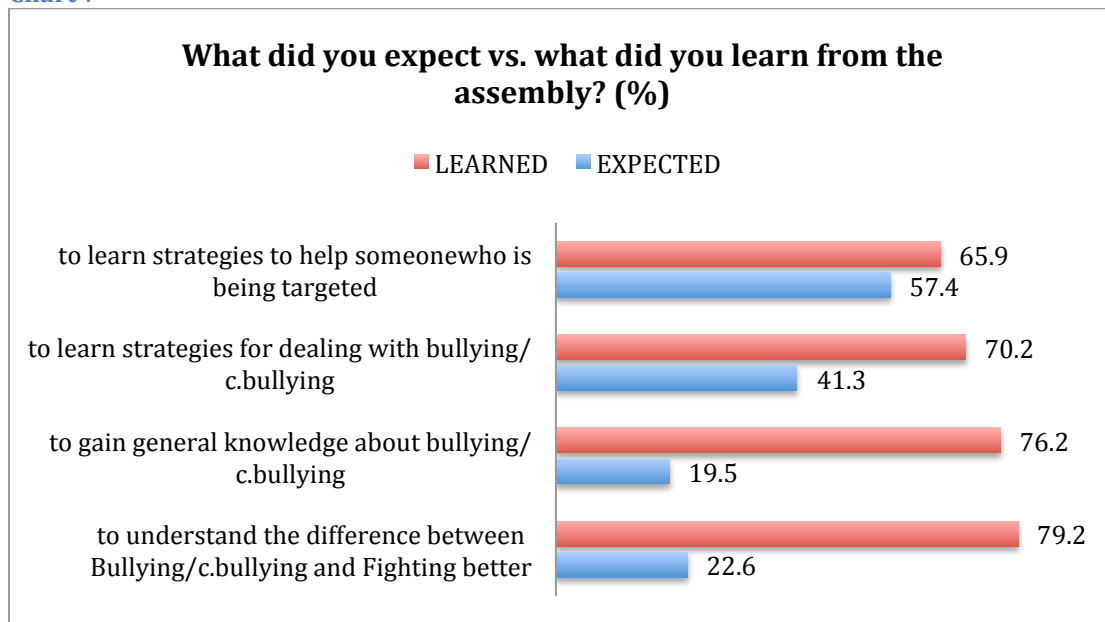
How much development is detected in the POST TEST compared to the PRE TEST phase?

Statement	Development of students' understanding
We are less likely to be punished due to violation of law in cyberspace.	+5.5%
Passwords should be kept private (not to be shared and should be changed periodically).	+38.2%
Once we post something online, it could be there online forever, even if we 'deleted' it.	+12.2%
Bullying is sometimes criminal harassment or a civil rights violation.	+24.7%
Texting a lot when we are mad can make us feel worse.	-12.9%
Bullying is when a person / group uses power to hurt another person repeatedly.	-1.0%
Bystanders CAN change bullying / c.bullying incidents at all.	+14.1%

What did students expect from the assembly and what did they get?

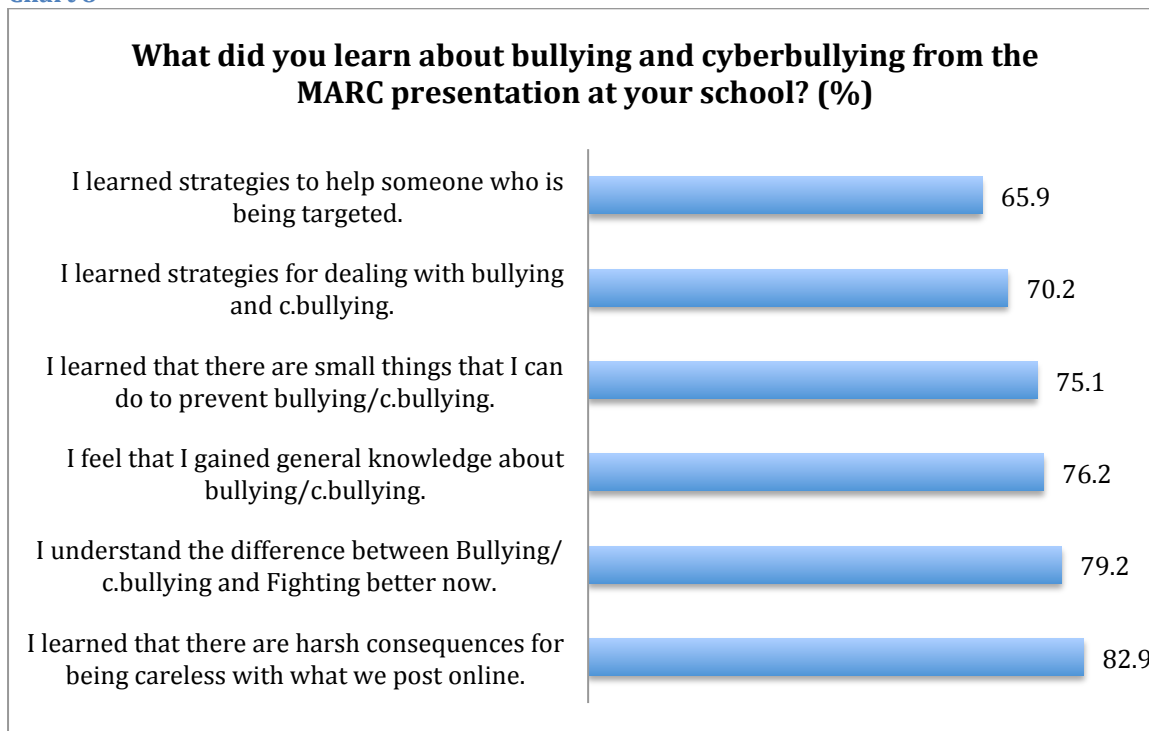
In the 4 most important questions, which involved (1) the more general, better understanding of bullying/cyberbullying, (2) the identification of its characteristic elements of bullying, (3) the learning of strategies that can be used for the prevention and management of bullying, and (4) the understanding the difference between Bullying/Cyberbullying and Fighting, the new knowledge learnt at the assembly greatly exceeded the expectations of students. (Chart 7) According to this, **even though the students had the least hope to learn more about the general understanding of the phenomenon, and of separating it from other conflict situations** (expectations: 22.6%, 19.5%), **they heard the most new information about these questions** (gains: 79.2%, 76.2%). **The students already at the beginning wanted to hear about the management strategies of bullying and cyberbullying that they may use to help others** (expectations: 41.3%, 57.4%), **but the MARC lecture proved satisfactory or even exceeded expectations on these questions** (gains: 70.2%, 65.9%).

Chart 7



When evaluating the MARC lecture, the students learned most about the topic of online privacy and posting, namely: There are harsh consequences for being careless with what we post online (82.9%). (Chart 8, see also Chart 6, Table 2) The next greatest impact is the knowledge in the field of distinguishing between bullying and other conflict situations (79.2%), and the more detailed overall idea about the phenomenon (76.2%). As regards finding the right response to bullying / cyberbullying situations (self-help) (70.2%), for helping others (helping the target) (65.9%), and the learning of small things as prevention strategies (75.1%) the students also learned much, but not nearly as much as in the case of the above-mentioned online privacy and the dangers of posting. **In the future therefore, the focus in the development of MARC's programs should be on communicating practical advice, self-help and peer-support strategies.**

Chart 8



Other suggestions

Based on the answers to the open-ended questions, **the lecture was met with a mainly positive response.** (Table 3) It is apparent from the answers that the students did not only acquire new knowledge, but they were also inspired and mobilized for this topic: on the one hand, the lecturer raised their interest in the matter, and on the other, she gave inspiring advice. **The students mainly highlighted a more detailed general image of the phenomenon and the easy-to-follow, practical advice.**

In relation to the topic of **general mobilization**, the students learned from the lecture what they can do to prevent bullying and how they can handle an existing situation. They thought it was positive that the lecturer pointed out specific roles, such as the bully, the target, the bystander or the egger. **They learned that they might also play a role in the escalation of the situation if they are not active participants. It was also explained, how they can act preventively, yet almost invisibly, with small gestures for the improvement of the situation.**

Of the **topics** discussed at the lecture, they highlighted cyberbullying, sexting, online privacy, online posting, the confidentiality of information, and ambiguous comments (which are therefore suitable for spreading bad reputation).

They mentioned as **negative aspects** the methodological shortcomings of the student assembly, such as **the shortage of interactivity or group work, and that they wanted to hear more about how to stop bullying.**

Table 3

Suggestions of the answerers (open ended question: What did you learn about bullying and cyberbullying from the MARC presentation at your school? q10.7)

POSITIVE critique	DEFICIENCIES	I've LEARNED...
<p>"I am glad I learned about this. I don't think there is a lot of bullying in this school, but I am more prepared."</p>	<p>"I think you should include more examples and group activities."</p>	<p>"... more on what to do when someone is being bullied."</p>
<p>"I find this a refreshment from all those dumb strategies that only work in musicals."</p>	<p>"It was a very good presentation, but a lot of what we have already learned with some new information."</p>	<p>"... a lot about what the consequences are when you bully online and what you can do to stop bullying."</p>
<p>"I found the courage from the presentation to help stop a bullying situation that is happening. I feel that I learned what to do from it."</p>	<p>"I wish this presentation would have talked more about how to stop bullying."</p>	<p>"... a target can become an aggressor."</p> <p>"... about sexting."</p>
<p>"I think the MARC presentation has really opened our eyes to the dangers of cyberbullying and the internet."</p>		<p>"... how not to be a bystander."</p>
<p>"I think we definitely learned more about bullying but I am still not convinced that people are trying to stop it very efficiently."</p>		<p>"... how to help stop bullying."</p>
<p>"It was more interesting than the regular bullying presentations - good job!"</p>		<p>"... how to stop bullying if I see it."</p>
<p>"She [the presenter] made this session so easy to understand. I clearly know what to do."</p>		<p>"... if you do something online that is bad, you will get caught with an IP address."</p>
		<p>"... strategies how to stop bullying and when I see them I will be sure to use them."</p>
		<p>"... that schools/jobs can make their decisions based on your online activity, and that the privacy settings aren't really 'private'."</p>
		<p>"... to never post things that people don't know like the lady who was giving her smoothie online, she wrote cocktail - no one else has proof it was a smoothie."</p>
		<p>"... to think before I post anything online."</p>
		<p>"... to understand better how other kids feel."</p>
		<p>"... to realize that you are never private when you are online and to always be safe."</p>

Summary of the findings, and suggestions for future students assemblies

The survey confirmed research according to which most students would talk about sensitive situations with their parents and/or their peers or siblings. The school and the teaching staff only have a secondary role, yet it can be observed that *if the incident did not happen to the person directly, and he was only a witness*, the school and teaching staff and “other trusted adults” are more preferred among the possible sources of help. As a result of the lecture and the two to three weeks of “consolidation” however, the trust of students in the teaching staff has demonstrably grown: according to the second survey, significantly more students would turn to school staff in relation to cases of bullying/cyberbullying. The preparation of the school and the teaching staff is therefore necessary both for a peaceful school environment and for creating a trusting atmosphere. As regards sharing cases with school staff, **the student assembly likely already achieves its goal by the fact that the teaching staff may participate at the lecture, and therefore the students may justifiably assume that their teachers are getting closer to understanding the phenomenon, so that they may become more competent in the management of these than their parents.**

During the second survey (post-test), the students in general **attribute a greater significance** to dealing with bullying/cyberbullying. This is also shown by the fact that less of them underestimated the frequency of bullying incidents.

In most topics discussed at the student assembly, decisive and correct information could be communicated to the students: **In the correct appreciation of almost all questions mentioned in the test, there was development** compared to the situation before the assembly. A dramatic development can be observed especially as regards online privacy and the loss of control over contents posted online. However, **the lecture failed to communicate the message that you should not text (or send online messages) your friends when you are mad, because it will only make things worse.** It is necessary to deal with this issue using more examples and more interactive exercises in the future.

In the 4 most important questions, which involved (1) the more general, better understanding of bullying/cyberbullying, (2) the identification of its characteristic elements, (3) the learning of strategies that can be used for the prevention and management of bullying, and (4) the learning to differentiate between bullying/cyberbullying and fighting, **the new knowledge learnt at the assembly greatly exceeded the previous expectations of students. The development of MARC’s programs should concentrate on providing palpable, practical advice, self-help, and communicating peer support strategies in the future**, as students received less information in these issues.

Based on the answers to open-ended questions, the lecture was met with a mainly **positive response**. Not only did the students receive **new knowledge but they were also successfully mobilized**: On the one hand, the lecturer raised their interest for the topic, and on the other, she gave inspiring advice. The

students **mainly highlighted a more detailed general image of the phenomenon and the easy-to-follow, practical advice, though they would like to hear more about that in the future.**

Annex I: Student pretest

The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center - SURVEY

Questionnaire for students at Stony Brook and Blanchard Middle Schools

This survey is voluntary and confidential. No personal data will be collected or processed. By completing the survey you can help Westford Public Schools refine their curricula and also help Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center to evaluate their programs. Thank you for participating.

1. Your gender?

Female	
Male	

2. Do you have your own cell phone?

Yes, but I can't use it go to online	
Yes, and I CAN use it to go online	
No, I do not have a cell phone	

3. Do you ever...	Yes	Some-times	No
Play games online with Xbox, PS3 or another console?			
Use Facebook, Twitter or a similar website?			
Use Ask.fm?			
InstaGram or Snapchat?			
Send messages or text messages?			
Chat with people you already know online?			
Chat with people you DON'T know online?			

4. Do you feel your school is responsive in helping to stop bullying (physically or emotionally)?

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

5. Do you feel your school is responsive in helping to stop CYBER-bullying (over internet or through text messaging)?

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

6. Have you ever read or seen something written on-line or in a text message that may have been embarrassing to someone else?

Perhaps once or twice	
Yes, more than once	
No, never	

7. Have you ever spoken to someone about an incident of bullying or cyberbullying? If yes, indicate who you decided to speak with below. (Check as many checkboxes as you wish)

I never told anyone		I told some other adult (a counselor, clergyman, trusted adult friend or relative)	
I told my friends or sibling(s)		I reported it online to the website	
I told my parents, or another family member		This never happened to me	
I told an adult at school			

8. Do you think bullying happens a lot at school?

9. Do you think bullying happens a lot online?

No, it is very rare	
It happens sometimes, but not often	
It happens regularly (like each week)	
It happens often (like every day)	

No, it is very rare	
It happens sometimes, but not often	
It happens regularly (like each week)	
It happens often (like every day)	

10. Which of the topics below have you discussed with an adult?	At school	At home	I have never discussed this.
Texting while driving			
Being private online			
Being careful with who I “friend” or “follow” online			
Predators online			
Sending or posting photos online			

11. Rate whether you agree or disagree with the statements below...	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	I don't know
Bystanders can really change bullying or cyberbullying incidents.						
Bullying is when someone is intentionally, and repeatedly harassed.						
When you fight with your friends, it can be very helpful to send other friends a text to talk about it.						
You don't need someone's permission to video- and audio-tape them legally.						
Once I post something online, it will stay forever online.						

Bullying is sometimes criminal harassment or a civil rights violation.						
Once a good password is set, there is no need to change it.						
We are less likely to be punished due to violation of law in cyberspace						

12. What would you personally like to see, in a school program that deals with bullying and cyberbullying? (Check as many boxes as you wish)

I'd like to learn more bullying and cyberbullying	
I'd like to learn how to respond to bullying and cyberbullying incidents that may occur	
I'd like to learn how to help stop the situation in time	
I'd like to learn how to help someone who is being targeted	
I'd like to learn what a teacher/school should do when bullying is happening	
I'd like to learn what I can do when confronting such incidents	
In general, I am interested in this topic	
I do not know exactly why, but I am interested	

13. What bullying and cyberbullying-related questions you would like to discuss at the assembly? (What you write here will be anonymous – no names and personal identification will be mentioned when discussing the question.)

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Appendix II: Student Post test

The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center – POST TEST

Questionnaire for students at Stony Brook and Blanchard Middle Schools

This survey is voluntary and confidential. No personal data will be collected or processed. By completing the survey you can help Westford Public Schools refine their curricula and also help Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center to evaluate their programs. Thank you for participating.

1. Your gender

Female	
Male	

2. I learned some things from Tuesday's presentation that that I didn't know before

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

3. Does your school have any programs to help stop bullying?

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

4. If someone were mean to you online or through text messaging, whom would you tell? (Check as many checkboxes as you wish)

I probably won't tell anyone	
I would tell my friends or sibling(s)	
I would tell my parents, or another family member	
I would tell an adult at school	
I would tell some other adult (a counselor, trusted adult friend, or relative)	
I would report it online to the website	
It would never happen to me	

5. If you witnessed someone being mean online or through text messaging to someone else, whom would you tell? (Check as many checkboxes as you wish)

I probably won't tell anyone	
I would tell my friends or sibling(s)	
I would tell my parents, or another family member	
I would tell an adult at school	
I would tell some other adult (a counselor, trusted adult friend, or relative)	
I would report it online to the website	

6. While it doesn't happen to everyone, anyone *could* experience serious legal consequences if they bully someone online, even if it's meant as a joke.

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

7. Do you think bullying incidents happen a lot online?

No, it is very rare	
It happens sometimes, but not often	
It happens regularly (like each week)	
It happens often (like every day)	

8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
It is okay to spread rumor if it's true.					
Bystanders cannot change bullying or cyberbullying incidents at all.					
An Egger is someone who helps a bully by laughing or encouraging.					
"Sexting" is sending or posting sexually inappropriate photos of yourself or someone else online and is illegal.					
Bullying is when a person/group uses power to hurt another person over and over again.					
Texting a lot when we are mad can make us feel worse.					
WWW stands for World Wide Web.					
It is illegal to threaten someone online.					
Privacy settings never change and always hide our stuff from those we don't want					

seeing our online activity.					
Once we post something online, it could be there online forever, even if we've "deleted" it.					
Bullying is sometimes criminal harassment or a civil rights violation.					
Colleges/private schools can and do make decisions about their applicants based on their online activity.					
A manager or boss could choose not to hire us based on our pictures or online activity.					
Passwords should not be shared and they should be changed periodically.					

9. Please check the response based on the statement regarding internet below!

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
It is OK to violate the law online because we probably won't get caught.					
It's easy to hurt or confuse others online depending on how they interpret our message.					
Sometimes people who harass others online are caught and punished.					
Sometimes students around the country are doing positive things in their school to combat bullying that are having a huge impact.					

10. What did you learn about bullying and cyberbullying from the MARC presentation your school? (Check as many checkboxes as you wish)

I understand the difference between bullying/cyberbullying and fighting better now.	
I learned strategies for dealing with bullying and cyberbullying.	
I learned that there are small things I can do to prevent bullying/cyberbullying.	
I learned there are harsh consequences for being careless with what we post online.	
I learned strategies to help someone who is being targeted.	
I feel that I gained general knowledge about bullying/cyberbullying.	
Other/comments:	