



EDUCATION WEEK  
RESEARCH CENTER

# Sexual Harassment and Assault in the K-12 Workplace

Results of a National Survey



## About Editorial Projects In Education

Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization based in Bethesda, Md. Its primary mission is to help raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education. EPE covers local, state, national, and international news and issues from preschool through the 12th grade. Editorial Projects in Education publishes *Education Week*, America's newspaper of record for precollegiate education, the online *Teacher*, *EdWeek Market Brief*, and the TopSchoolJobs employment resource. It also produces periodic special reports on issues ranging from technology to textbooks, as well as books of special interest to educators.

The Education Week Research Center conducts surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in *Education Week* and special reports such as *Quality Counts*, and *Technology Counts*. The center also conducts independent research studies and maintains the Education Counts online data resource.

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## Executive Summary

Sexual harassment and assault have been in the spotlight in recent months as the result of a series of allegations of misconduct against high-profile men such as Hollywood icon Harvey Weinstein and comedian Louis C.K.

Yet little is known about the prevalence of such misconduct in K-12 education.

In January and February of 2018, the Education Week Research Center set out to explore this issue by administering an online survey about sexual harassment and assault. The 524 respondents included teachers as well as school and district leaders.

Ninety-one percent of respondents who have worked in other settings perceive that sexual harassment or assault is less common in K-12 education.

Half of educators report that sexual assault or harassment is not at all common in their workplace. Just 1 percent say it is very or extremely common. Sexual assault and harassment are perceived to be more common among secondary than elementary educators.

One in five educators have personally experienced sexual assault or harassment during their careers. Females are more likely to experience assault or harassment (25 percent) than are males (6 percent).

Additionally, nearly 1 in 3 educators have observed sexual assault or harassment between co-workers. And 15 percent have observed educators sexually assaulting or harassing students.

Unwanted flirting is the most frequent type of sexual harassment observed or experienced by educators. More than 40 percent of respondents who have observed or experienced harassment or assault perceived that the misconduct created an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Most educators who experience or observe sexual assault or harassment do not report it. The most common reason for failing to report such misconduct is the perception that the incident was not serious enough.

Males are more likely to report harassment or assault than are females.

Educators who do report assault or harassment are most likely to tell their direct supervisor or administrators. Close to 1 in 3 school and district leaders have received at least one report of sexual harassment or assault over the course of their administrative careers.

When educators do report harassment or assault, they perceive that the most common outcome is that the matter is referred to supervisors but that no action is taken by administration.

Just 21 percent of educators say that they are extremely knowledgeable about what to do if they or someone else experiences sexual harassment or assault at work. And less than 1 in 4 are extremely knowledgeable about their district's definition of sexual harassment and assault.

Two-thirds of educators have received training in their current workplace on responding to sexual harassment or assault. Just 13 percent say the training was extremely useful.

## Introduction

In the fall of 2017, *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* helped to spark a movement when they reported on multiple women's allegations of sexual assault and harassment against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. The revelations released in their coverage unleashed an avalanche of additional accusations against high-profile men including comedian Louis C.K., chef Mario Batali, U.S. Senator Al Franken, and TV journalist Matt Lauer.

As these allegations flooded the news, [2017 survey by YouGov](#) found that roughly half of U.S. women had experienced sexual harassment either inside or outside the workplace. What was less clear was how experiences might differ by workplace. Specifically, even though K-12 districts are among the nation's biggest employers, little if any information existed on educators' experiences with sexual misconduct.

In the winter of 2018, the Education Week Research Center set out to address this information gap by surveying teachers and administrators about workplace sexual harassment and assault. For the most part, the survey focused on adult-on-adult harassment, as opposed to harassment among or by students.

This report contains the complete results of the survey. Although the vast majority of respondents perceive that sexual harassment and assault are less common in K-12 education than in other workplace settings, the results still suggest troubling trends. For instance, 1 in 5 educators have personally experienced sexual harassment or assault at work. And only a minority who have observed or experienced such misconduct actually end up reporting it.

As accusations against high-profile men continue to flood the news media, the survey summarized in this report suggests that the lower-profile world of K-12 education may face some related challenges of its own.

## SURVEY AREAS

EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

REPORTING EXPERIENCES WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

TRAINING ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

## Methodology

This nationally-representative, online survey included responses from 524 educators including 244 teachers, 137 school leaders, 108 district leaders, and 35 respondents with “other” roles. The survey was administered in January and February 2018. The questionnaire offered respondents a definition of sexual harassment and assault.

## Survey Details

Survey Administered: January and February 2018

Sample: Nationally-representative sample of educators

Professional Roles of Respondents: Teachers, school- and district-leaders, and other educators

Total Respondents: 524

## Description of “Sexual Harassment and Assault” Provided at the Start of Survey

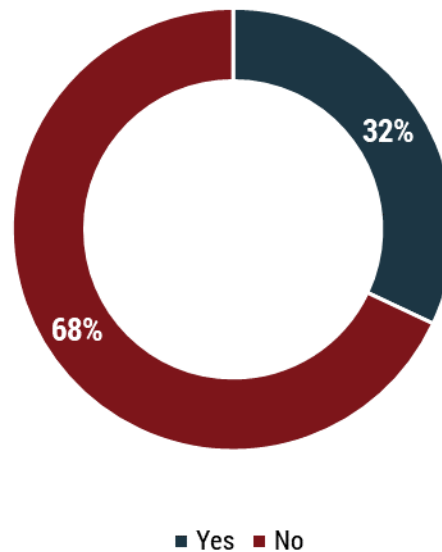
“Sexual assault” and “sexual harassment” refer to a range of behaviors that are nonconsensual or unwanted. These behaviors could include remarks about physical appearance or persistent sexual advances as well as jokes about sex. They also could include threats of force to get someone to engage in sexual behavior, as well as threats to their professional standing or job status if they don't engage in the behavior. These behaviors could be initiated by people who do or do not know each other, including those who are or have been in a relationship.

## Educators' Experiences with Sexual Harassment and Assault

### Administrator Experiences

Roughly 1 in 3 school and district leaders surveyed have had an employee report a case of sexual harassment or assault to them.

In your career as an educational administrator, has an employee ever reported a case of sexual harassment or sexual assault to you?

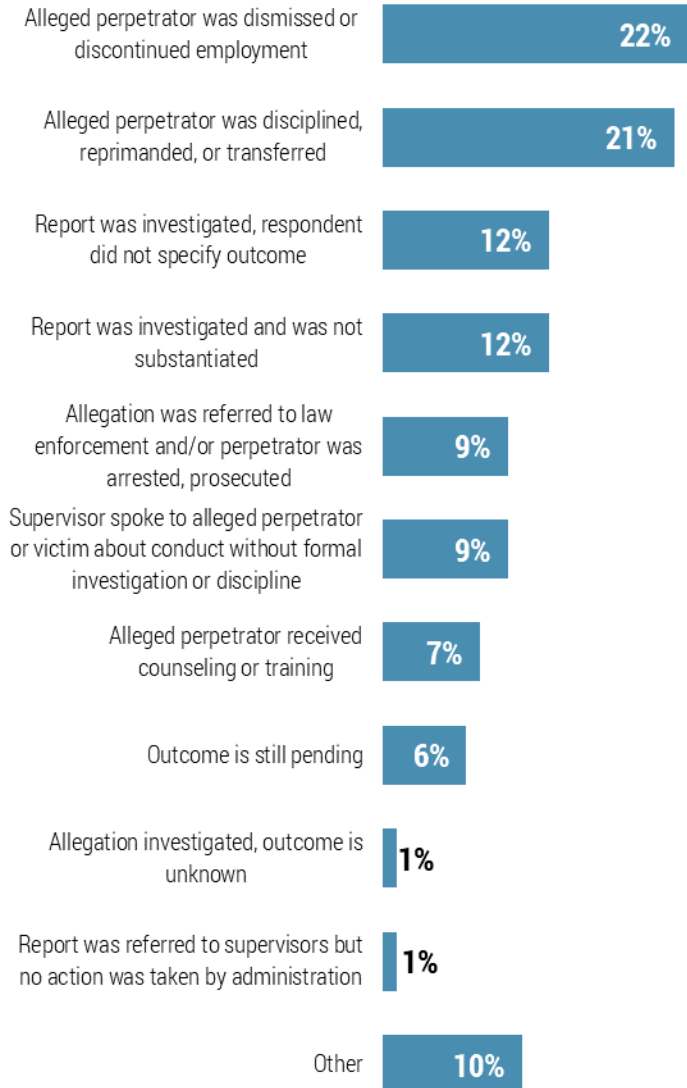


## Outcomes Reported by Administrators

In an open-ended question, administrators were asked: What was the outcome of the sexual harassment or sexual assault report made to you?

The most common response was that the alleged perpetrator was dismissed or discontinued from employment.

### What was the outcome of the sexual harassment or sexual assault report made to you?

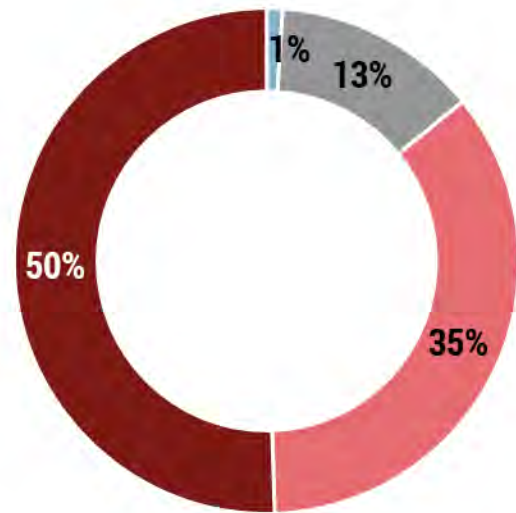


Note: Chart only includes administrators who had a case of sexual harassment or assault reported to them. Totals do not add up to 100 percent because responses could be coded to more than one category.

## Prevalence of Sexual Harassment and Assault in The Education Workplace

Half of educators perceive that sexual assault or harassment is not at all common in the workplace.

In your opinion, how common is sexual assault or sexual harassment in your workplace?

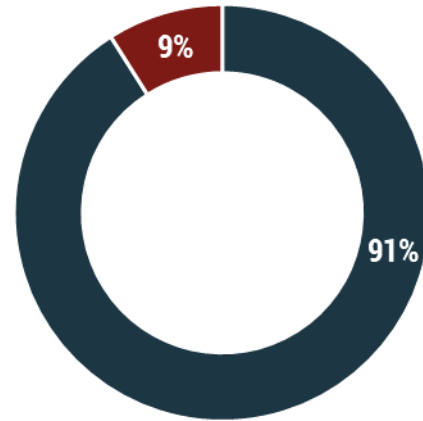


■ Extremely ■ Very ■ Somewhat ■ A little ■ Not at all

## Assault and Harassment Inside and Outside K-12 Education

Eighty-five percent of survey respondents have worked in settings outside K-12 education. Of that 85 percent, 91 percent perceive that sexual assault and harassment are more prevalent outside of K-12 education.

Compared to K-12 education, how prevalent was sexual assault or harassment in other workplaces you have experienced?

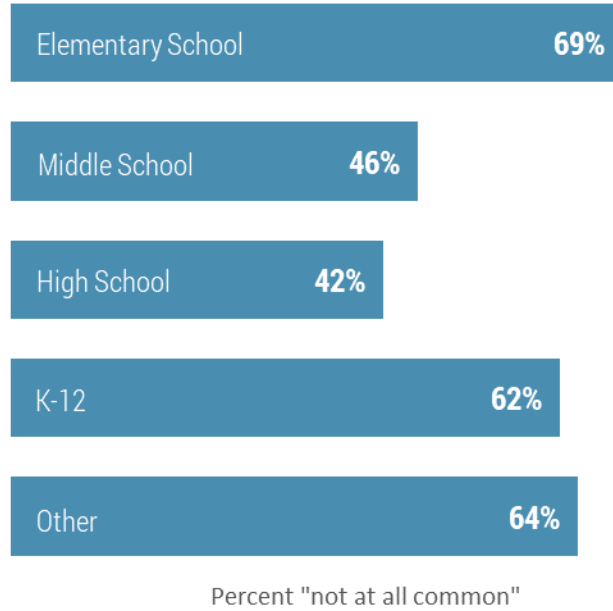


- Sexual assault or harassment is more common in settings outside K-12 education
- Sexual assault or harassment is more common in K-12 educational settings

## Reports of Sexual Harassment and Assault by Grade Level

Teachers and school leaders at elementary schools report the lowest levels of sexual assault and harassment.

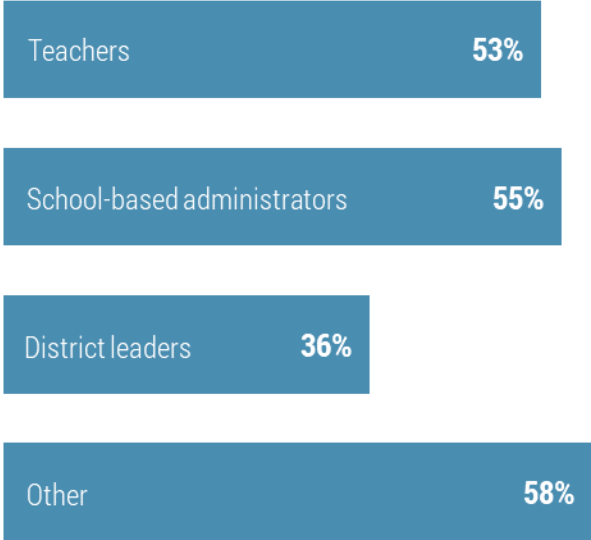
**Sexual assault or harassment is not at all common in my workplace.**



### Reports of Sexual Harassment and Assault by Role

Compared to school leaders and teachers, district administrators perceive sexual assault or harassment as more prevalent in the workplace.

### Sexual assault or harassment is not at all common in my workplace.

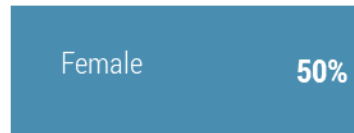


Percent "not at all common"

## Reports of Sexual Harassment and Assault by Gender

Males and females are about equally likely to report that sexual assault or harassment is not at all common in their workplace. (Fifty-five percent of males and 50 percent of females report it's not at all common.)

**Sexual assault or harassment is not at all common in my workplace.**

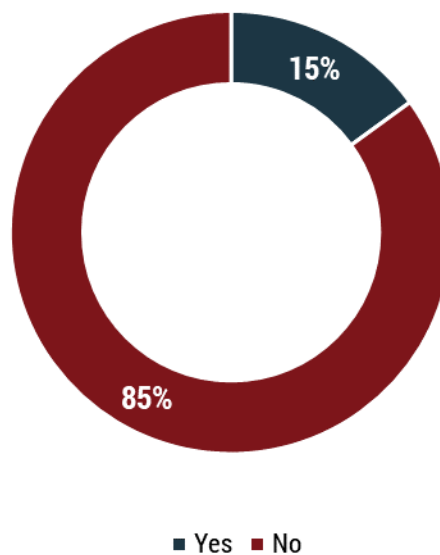


Percent "not at all common"

## Educators Sexually Assaulting or Harassing Students

Fifteen percent of respondents have observed educators assaulting or harassing students.

In your career as an educator, have you ever observed educators sexually assaulting or harassing students?

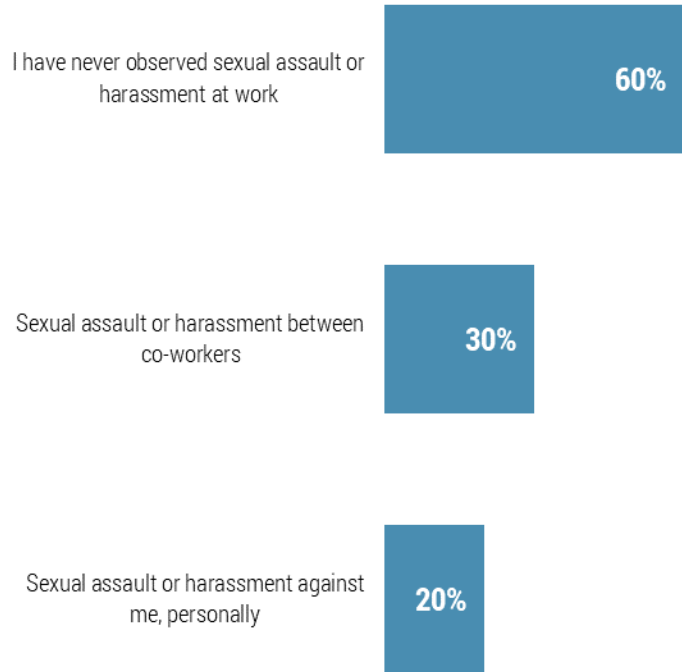


## Personal Experience With Sexual Harassment and Assault

Twenty percent of educators have personally experienced sexual assault or harassment during their careers.

Teachers, school-based administrators, district leaders, and other employees are all about equally likely to have personally experienced sexual assault or harassment.

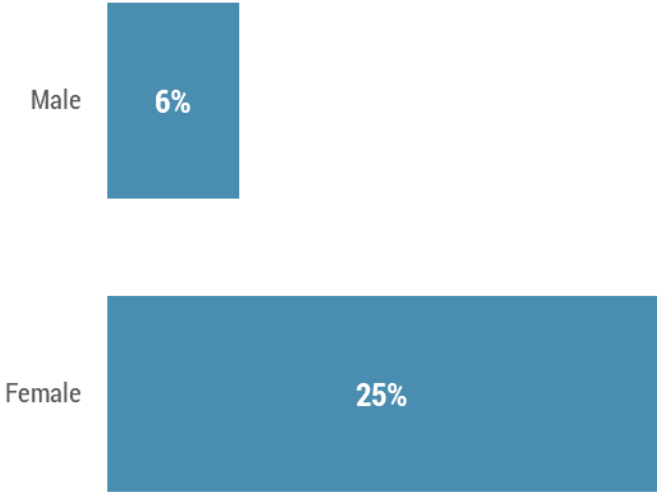
**In your career as an educator, which of the following have you observed or experienced? Select all that apply.**



### Personal Experience With Harassment and Assault by Gender

Females are more likely than males to report that they have personally experienced sexual assault or harassment.

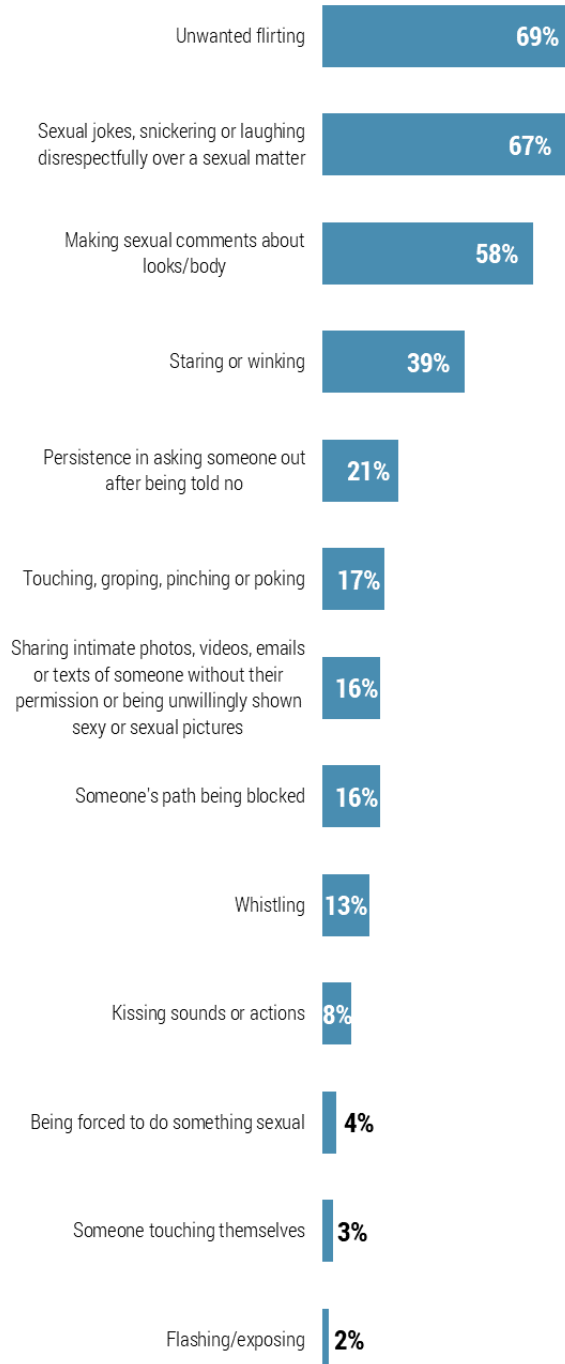
I have observed or experienced sexual assault or harassment against me, personally.



## Types of Sexual Assault or Harassment

The survey asked respondents who had experienced or observed sexual assault or harassment if they had encountered 13 different types of harassment/assault. Of these 13 types, the most common was unwanted flirting, followed by sexual jokes, snickering or laughing disrespectfully over a sexual matter.

**Which of the following types of sexual assault or harassment did you observe or experience between adults in your school building? Select all that apply.**

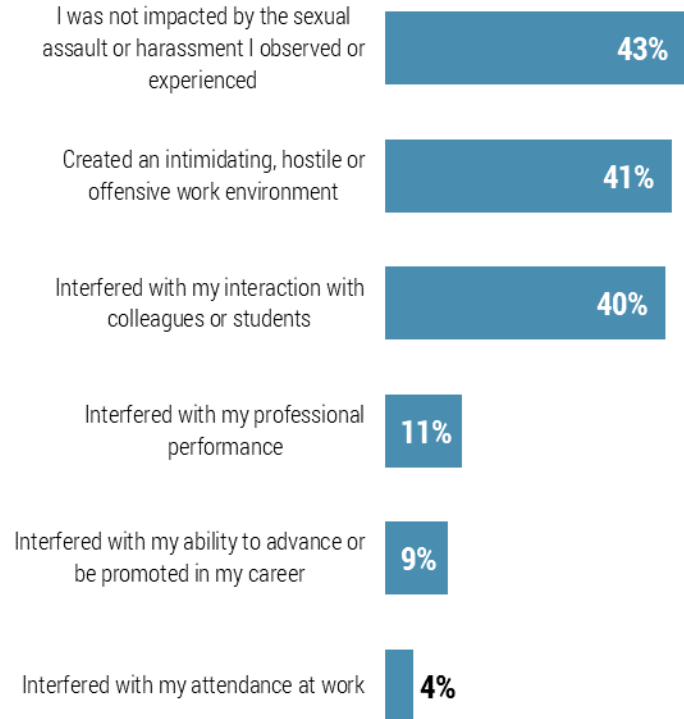


Note: Only respondents who had experienced or observed sexual harassment were asked to answer this survey question.

## Impact of Sexual Assault and Harassment

Survey respondents who had experienced or observed sexual assault or harassment were asked whether they had been affected by five different impacts. The most frequent impact was the creation of an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

**Did any of the sexual assault or harassment you observed or experienced affect you in the following ways? Select all that apply.**



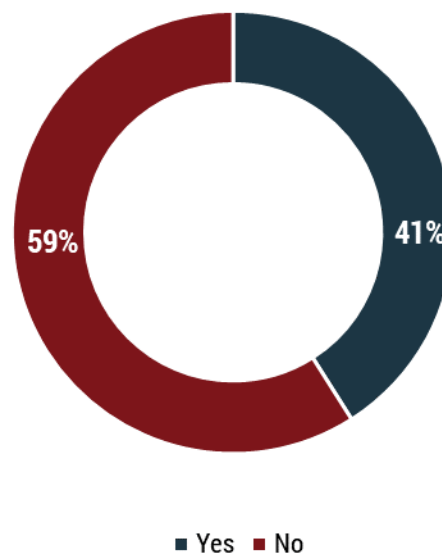
Note: Only respondents who had experienced or observed sexual harassment were asked to answer this survey question.

## Reporting Experiences with Sexual Harassment and Assault

### Reporting Harassment and Assault

Most educators who observe or experience sexual harassment do not report it. Males are more likely than females to report the sexual assault or harassment they observe or experience. Half of males who experienced assault/harassment reported it as compared to 38 percent of females.

Did you report the sexual assault or harassment you observed or experienced?

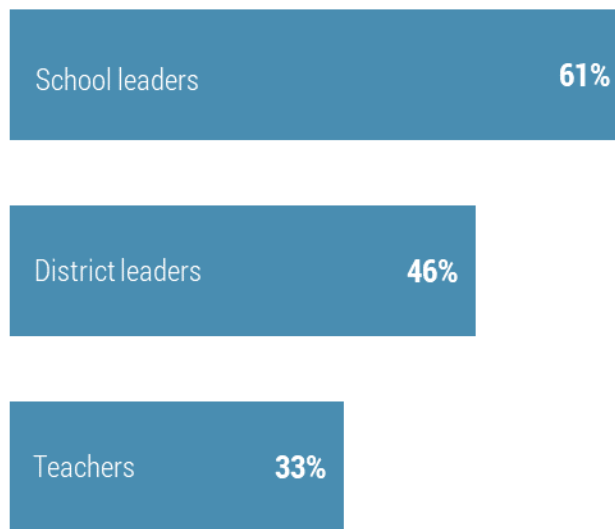


Note: Only respondents who had experienced or observed sexual harassment were asked to answer this survey question.

## Reporting Harassment and Assault by Role

Among survey respondents who have observed or experienced sexual assault or harassment, school-based administrators are most likely to report it.

### Percent reporting sexual assault or harassment they observed or experienced.



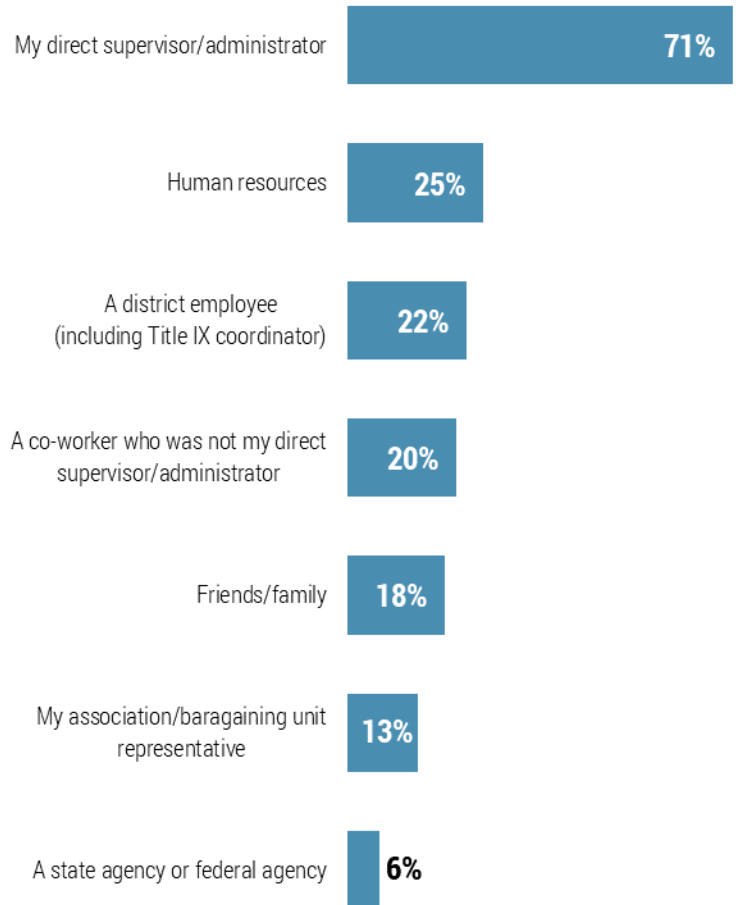
Percent reporting harassment or assault

Note: Only respondents who had experienced or observed sexual harassment were asked to answer this survey question.

## Who do Educators Report Sexual Assault or Harassment to?

Educators were most likely to report sexual harassment or assault to their direct supervisors/administrators. Educators in the Northeast were most likely to report assault or harassment to associations/union bargaining unit representatives (31 percent) followed by those from the Midwest (24 percent). Just four percent of Western educators and no Southern respondents reported to associations or unions.

## Who did you report the sexual assault or harassment to? Select all that apply.



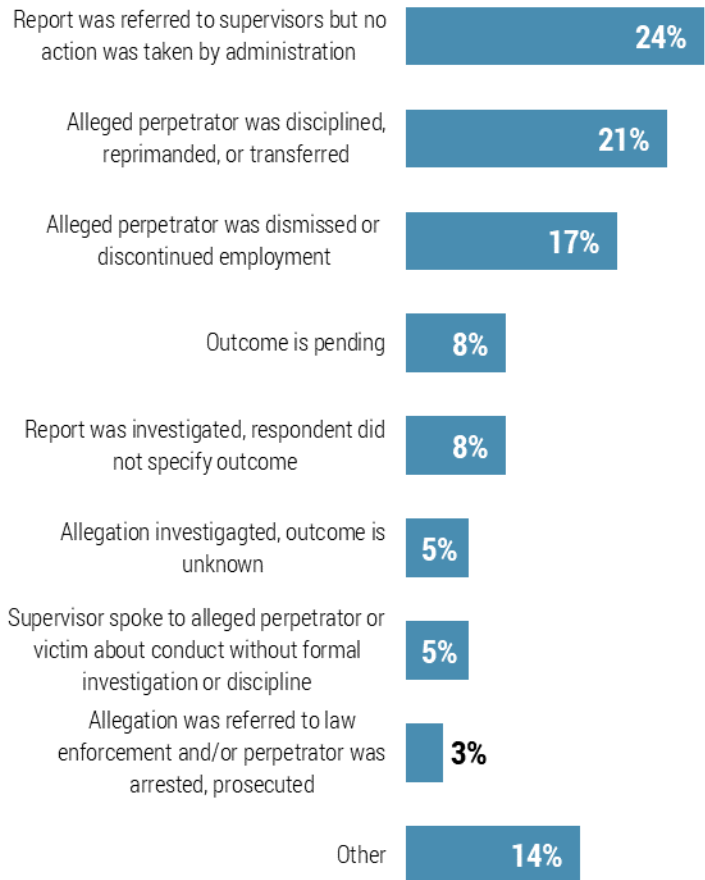
Note: Only respondents who had experienced or observed sexual harassment and reported it were asked to answer this survey question.

## Reporting Outcomes

In an open-ended question, educators who had reported sexual harassment were asked: What was the outcome when you reported the sexual assault or harassment you observed or experienced? The most frequently-mentioned outcomes were:

- The report was referred to supervisors but no action was taken by administration
- The alleged perpetrator was disciplined, reprimanded, or transferred
- The alleged perpetrator was dismissed or discontinued employment

## What was the outcome when you reported the sexual assault or harassment you observed or experienced?

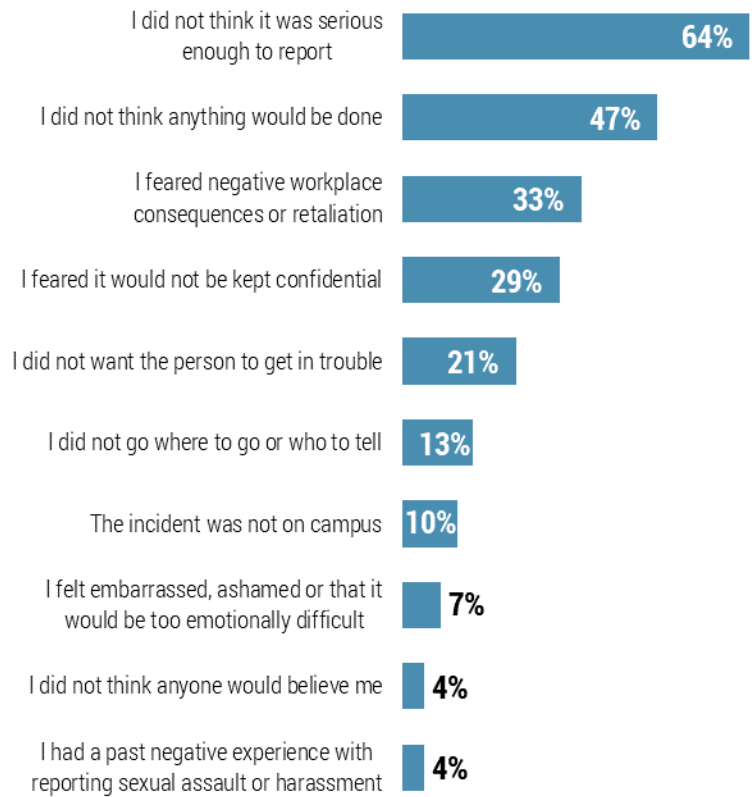


Note: Only respondents who had experienced or observed sexual harassment and reported it were asked to answer this survey question. Totals do not add up to 100 percent because responses could be coded to more than one category.

## Reasons for Not Reporting Harassment or Assault

The most common reason for not reporting harassment or assault was a concern that the incident was not serious enough to report.

### Why didn't you report the sexual assault or harassment you observed or experienced? Select all that apply.

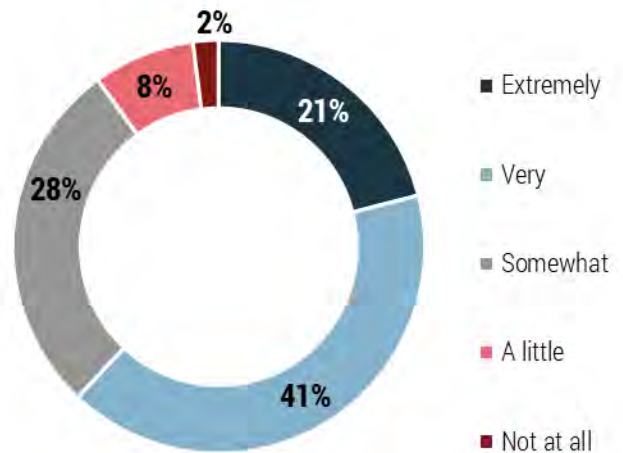


Note: Only respondents who had experienced or observed sexual harassment and did not report it were asked to answer this survey question.

## Knowledge of Reporting Procedures

Just 21 percent of educators report that they are extremely knowledgeable about what to do if they or someone else experiences sexual harassment or assault at work.

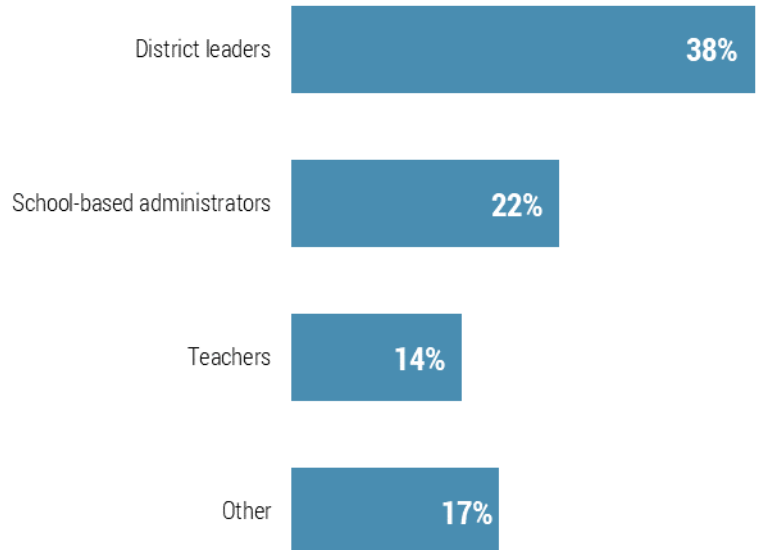
**How knowledgeable are you about what to do if you or someone else experiences sexual harassment or sexual assault at work?**



## Knowledge of Reporting Procedures By Role

District leaders are more likely than teachers or school-based leaders to rate themselves extremely knowledgeable about reporting procedures. Still, less than half of district leaders rate themselves as extremely knowledgeable.

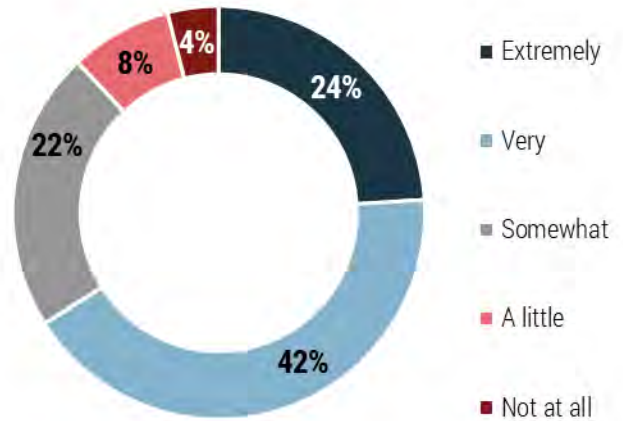
## Percent saying I am knowledgeable about what to do if I or someone else experiences sexual harassment or assault at work



## Knowledge of The Definition of Sexual Harassment, Assault

Less than a quarter of educators say they are extremely knowledgeable about the way in which their districts define sexual assault or harassment.

How knowledgeable are you about how sexual assault and sexual harassment are defined in your school district?

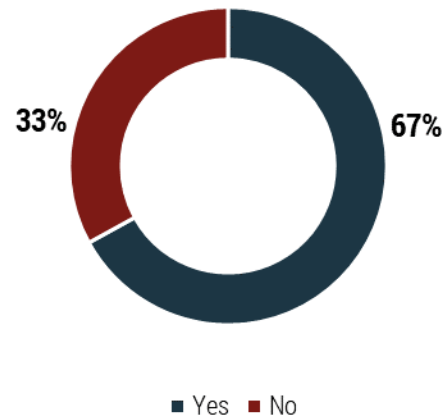


## Training About Sexual Harassment or Assault

### Training on Preventing or Responding to Sexual Harassment or Assault

One in three educators have yet to receive training in preventing or responding to sexual harassment or assault in their current workplace.

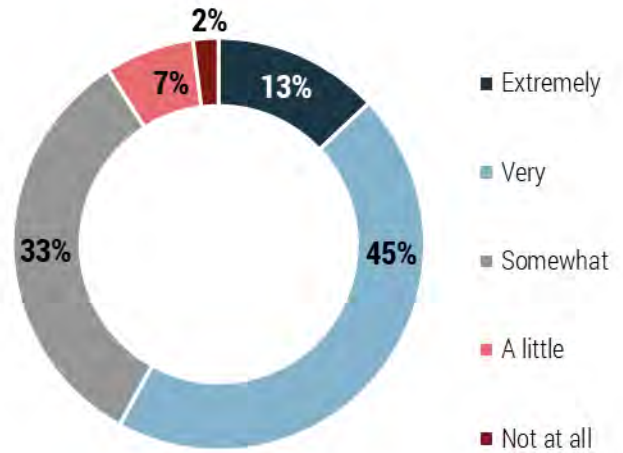
In your current workplace, have you ever received any training on preventing or responding to sexual harassment or assault?



## Value of Training

Among educators who have received training, just 13 percent found it extremely useful.

### How useful was the training you received on sexual harassment or assault?



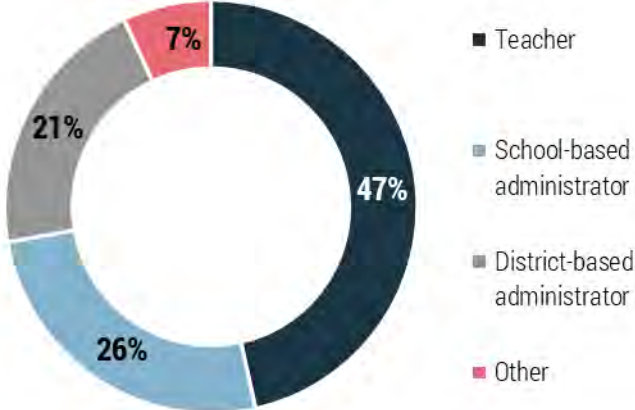
Note: Only respondents who reported receiving training responded to this survey question.

# Respondent Demographics

## Professional Roles

Close to half of survey respondents are teachers.

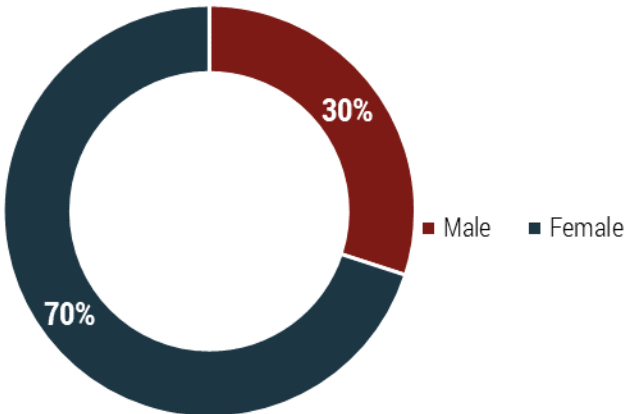
Which title most closely describes your role?



**Gender**

Seventy percent of survey respondents are female.

**What is your gender?**



## Locale

Survey respondents hail from every state in the nation, with the exception of Montana. More than half of respondents work in districts in rural areas or towns.

### Which of the following best describes your school district?

