

INTRODUCTION

In March of 2017, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) received a Letter of Findings from the Department of Education detailing their violations of Title IX (a law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex), including failure to provide “a prompt and equitable response to notice of peer sexual harassment” (ED, 2017). A survey was administered to high school students in the spring of 2017, 2018, and 2019 as part of a resolution agreement with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). In 2019, 15.8% of students reported they “experienced sexual harassment in a school setting during the previous 12 months” (Kolar & Kuhbach, 2019). While the survey-reported rate of harassment increased from 10.5% in 2017 to 15.8% in 2019, the rate of reporting incidents to school officials has decreased, from 12.1% in 2017 to 7.8% in 2019.

How might Palo Alto High School improve their Title IX reporting process and address discrepancies in reporting?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

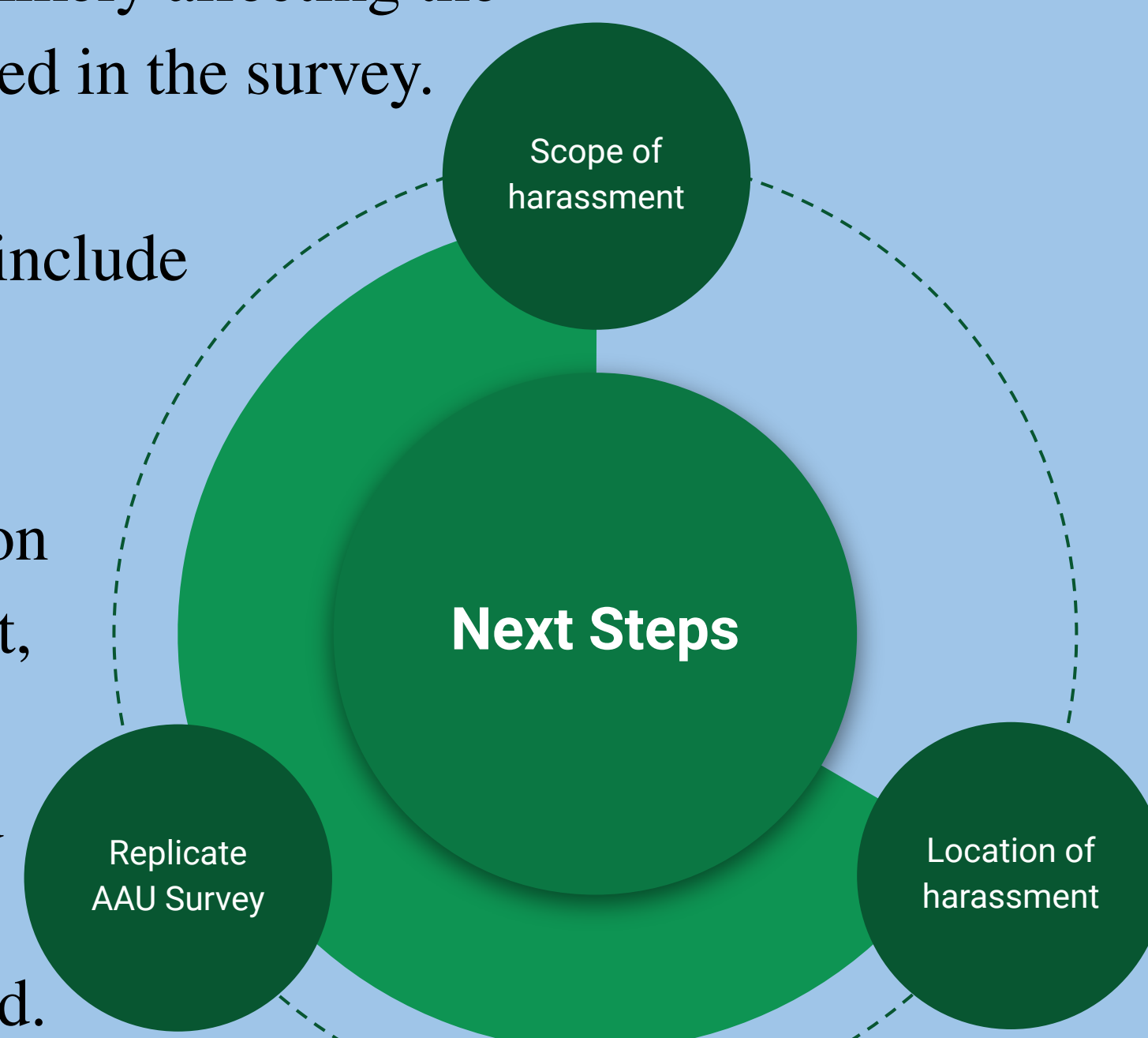
The purpose of the survey was to identify discrepancies in reporting; why survey-reported rate of harassment increased while the the rate of reporting incidents to school officials decreased. The Official OCR survey was disseminated in the second half of February 2020 to Paly students through their sixth period teachers. Once data collection was complete (the survey **1593 respondents**), Kolar and Kuhbach (2019) redacted sensitive information. The data are qualitative, as students are describing their experience reporting. I coded the data, identifying perceived barriers to reporting.

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Resolution Agreement Survey **did not address incidences of sexual assault** because of restrictions by the Department of Education.

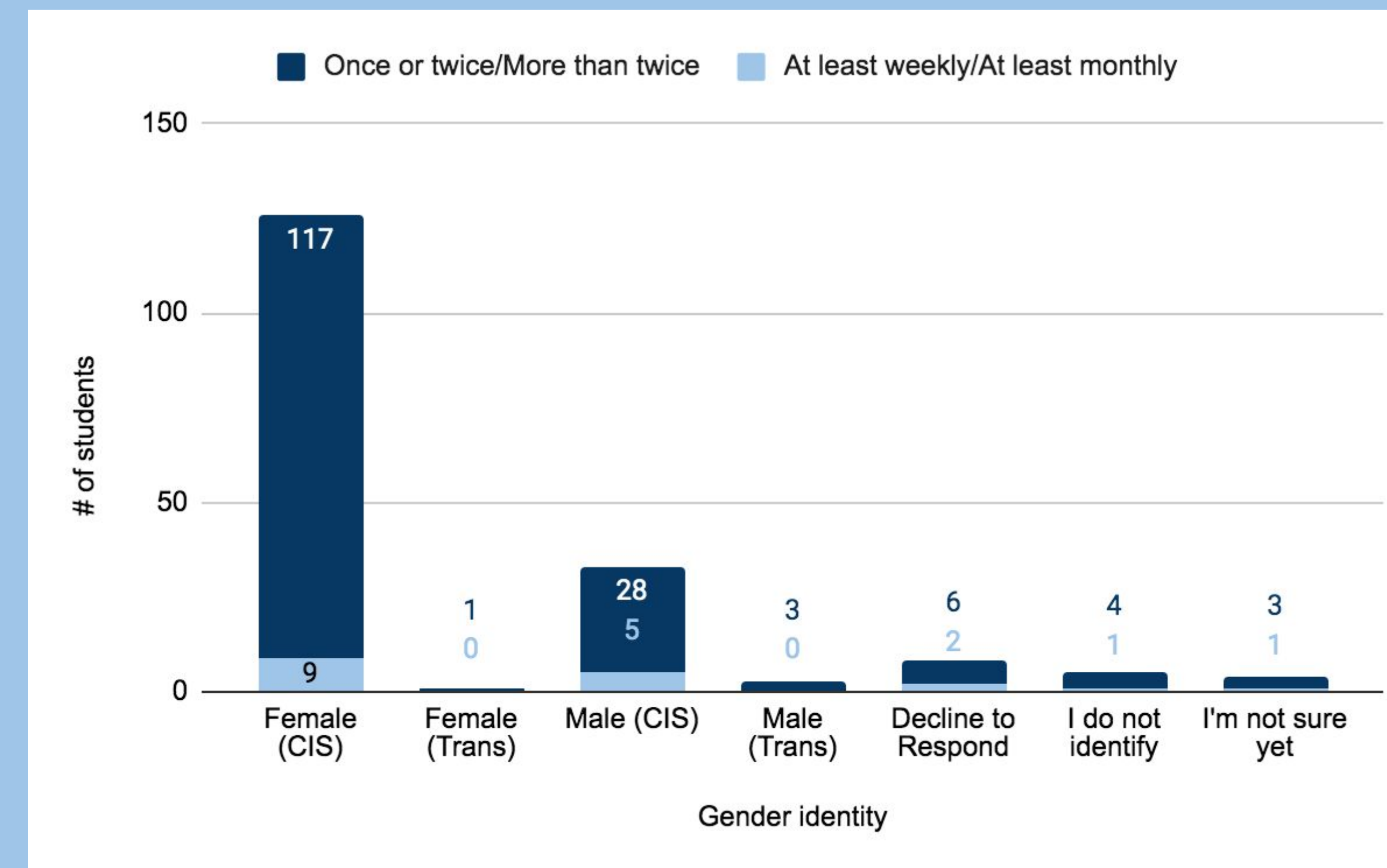
The Resolution Agreement Survey **did not address incidences of sexual harassment beyond a school setting**, likely affecting the frequency of sexual harassment reported in the survey.

A recommended future survey would include incidents of assault. The district could replicate the American Association of Universities Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct, a comprehensive survey evaluating sexual assault, sexual misconduct, and the campus climate of 27 institutions of higher education, including Stanford.



DATA AND FINDINGS

Occurrence of Sexual Harassment in a School Setting



Top Three Reasons for Not Reporting

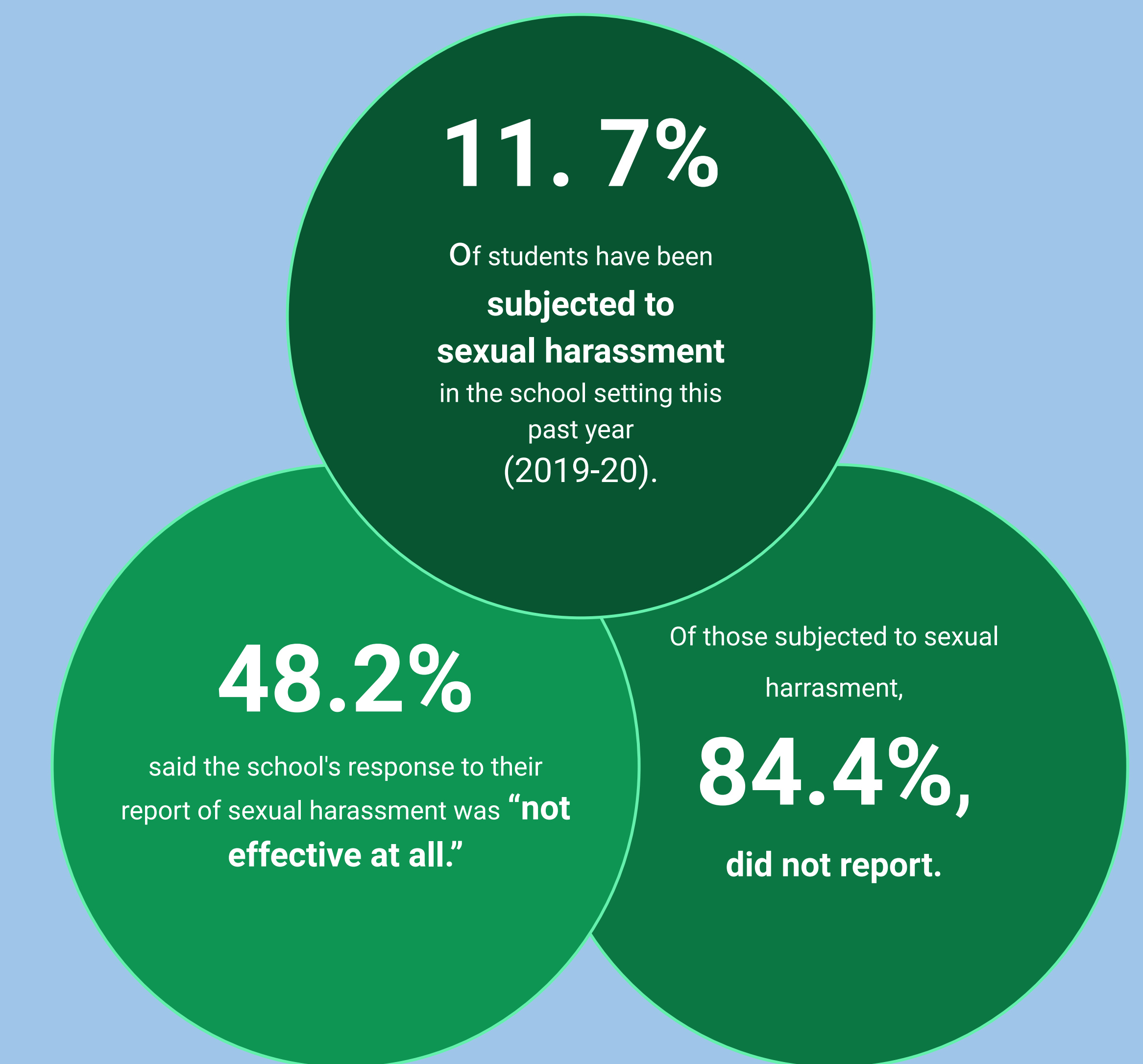


Reasons for not Reporting

Reason for not reporting incident	#	%
I didn't need help	71	44.94%
I didn't want attention or publicity	56	35.44%
I didn't want to make things worse or be retaliated against	47	29.75%
It is just normal behavior	41	25.95%
The reporting process is a pain	35	22.15%
I feared it would not be kept confidential	35	22.15%
It was all in good fun, playful	35	22.15%
I did not want the person to get into trouble	34	21.52%
Other	34	21.52%
The process doesn't work/isn't effective	32	20.25%
I felt embarrassed, ashamed, or that it would be too emotionally difficult	28	17.72%
The incident occurred while school was not in session	24	15.19%
I did not think anyone would believe me	21	13.29%
I did not know where to go or who to tell	13	8.23%
I was afraid of my cultural/gender/other identity being revealed	11	6.96%

CONCLUSION AND ANALYSES

The following graphic depicts findings from the 2019-20 Resolution Agreement Survey. By categorizing the 1593 responses, I posit three reasons for the barriers to reporting incidents of sexual harassment and thus areas for improvement.



Top 3 Barriers to Reporting Sexual Harassment at Palo Alto High School

1. Students perceive Paly as **unresponsive** (“The process doesn't work/isn't effective”/“The reporting process is a pain”)
2. The **process is re-victimizing** (“I didn't want attention or publicity”/“I did not think anyone would believe me”/“I felt embarrassed, ashamed, or that it would be too emotionally difficult”)
3. The **harassment is unacknowledged** (“It was all in good fun/playful”/“It is just normal behavior”)

NOTE: Reasons for not reporting were reinforced by proceeding short answer questions.

Based on survey responses, harassment is underreported at Palo Alto High School due in part to a perceived **unresponsive process that can be re-victimizing compounded by a prevailing culture or socialization that minimizes and normalizes harassment**. Aside from recommending a more comprehensive survey, the findings show a need for related process and educational improvements at Palo Alto High School.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Harps, S., Townsend, R., Thomas, G., ... Madden, K. (2019, October). *Report on the AAU campus climate survey on sexual assault and misconduct*. Retrieved from American Association of Universities website: https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/Key-Issues/Campus-Safety/FULL_2019_Campus_Climate_Survey.pdf

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