



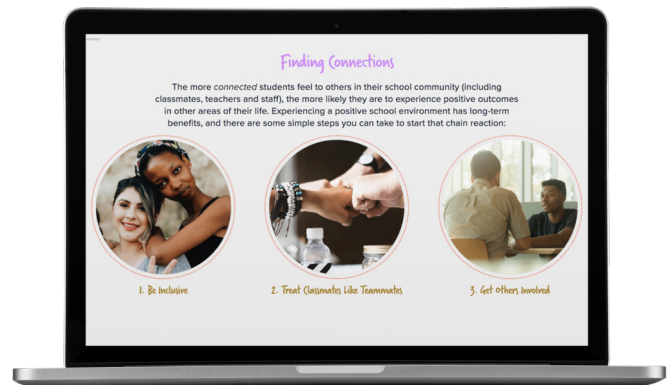
## Impact Research

# Honor Code Bullying Prevention

## Executive Summary

- This research was designed to meet ESSA Tier 3 standards for “Promising” evidence of impact<sup>1</sup> and examine if *Honor Code* improved knowledge related to the effects of bullying, prevention, as well as students’ attitudes towards bullying prevention.
- Bullying in adolescence is common and can have serious, long-term consequences.<sup>2,3</sup>
- *Honor Code* was designed to empower students with the knowledge and attitudes needed to cultivate a positive school environment.
- Students who started and completed *Honor Code* in the Fall of 2021 showed significant increases in knowledge on the effects of bullying and how to prevent it, as well as attitudes towards preventative behaviors (such as asking a trusted adult for help or helping resolve conflicts among friends).
- For bystanders, *Honor Code* helped increase their knowledge towards preventing bullying.
- For students who bully, *Honor Code* helped them understand risk factors associated with bullying, as well as emotion regulation techniques to help them stop bullying.

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**Grade Level:** 8 - 10

**Total Lessons:** 1 intro video (2 min.),  
5 digital lessons (15 min. each)

**Curriculum Fit:** Health, Physical Education,  
Technology, Homeroom, CTE or Advisory

**Standards Alignment:** NHES (National Health Education Standards) and CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) Competencies

“I love the way that the course allowed people to express their feelings and create a good example to those who may not take bullying prevention into consideration.”

**-Honor Code Student**

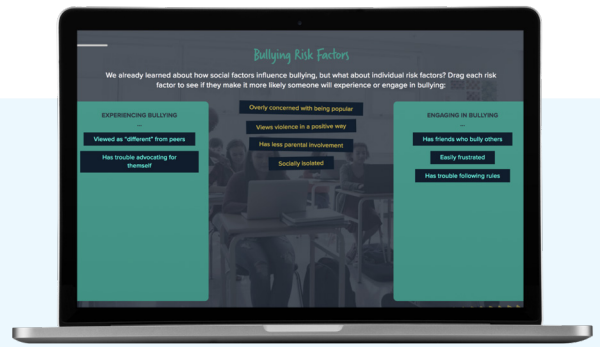
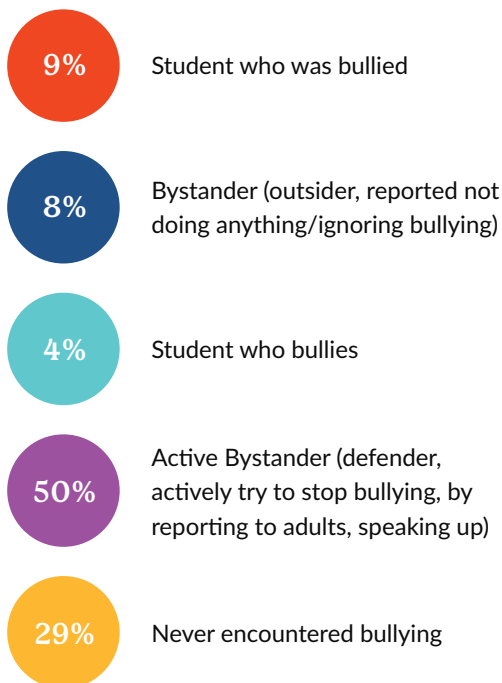
## Background

For many students, school bullying is unfortunately a common experience. Self-reported rates of bullying range from 11% to 30% and more than 70% of students report witnessing bullying.<sup>2,3</sup> Research shows the effects of being bullied are detrimental on the physical and mental health, as well as academic performance of students.<sup>2</sup>

To combat bullying, anti-bullying programs in schools are vital. These programs have been shown to not only decrease rates of bullying, but also improve student mental health and school climate.<sup>2</sup>

*Honor Code* is a digital program developed to empower students to create change, whether they're engaging in bullying, on the receiving end of it, or witnessing it in their school. *Honor Code* modules are aligned to NHES (National Health Education Standards) and CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) Competencies to support effective and meaningful instruction. *Honor Code* helps students identify and use skills to discourage bullying in their schools today, in order to help them become the influential leaders of tomorrow. In *Honor Code*, students are encouraged to apply what they learned in the course and take the lead in building a positive community in their school.

### Before *Honor Code*, students self-identified as the following...



## Lessons

### Relationships

Students learn to identify the different types of bullying and learn the potential consequences of bullying, to individuals and communities.

### Leadership

Students learn the social reasons bullying happens. They'll explore how best to treat themselves and others with respect and lead by example, by breaking negative social norms around bullying and building positive norms.

### Resilience

Students will be able to identify potential risk factors that may make them more likely to perpetrate or be a target of bullying. Then, they'll learn specific emotional management techniques to help them stop bullying or handle/prevent being victimized.

### Courage

Students will learn tactics and reasons to go from bystander to upstander while maintaining their own safety and gaining self-efficacy.

### Community

Students will reflect on why community matters, learn how to be part of an inclusive team and identify their own unique role in their school community.

## Method

Data was collected from students who completed all 5 *Honor Code* lessons on the EVERFI K-12 Platform during the Fall of 2021. Secondary analyses were conducted on student data collected from course quizzes and surveys.

## Participants

Only students in Grades 8 - 10 who completed all lessons, quizzes, and surveys in the Fall 2021 semester (n = 10,117) were included in this research.

The student sample identified as the following: 1% American Indian or Alaska Native; 5% Asian; 15% Black or African American; 17% Hispanic or Latino/a/x; 1% Middle Eastern or North African; 47% White; 13% Multiracial. A total of 49.46% identified as male, 48.70% identified as female, and 1.84% identified as other. Of the students in the sample, 38.31% attended low-to-moderate (LMI) income status schools.

## Measurement

### Quizzes

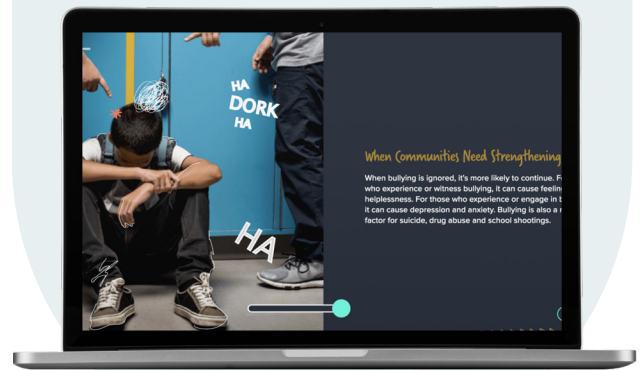
Quizzes were provided before and after each module to assess knowledge acquisition. Quiz items were determined to have a high internal consistency.<sup>4</sup> First attempt quiz scores were averaged and used for data analysis.

Before and after each module, student answered 10 questions to assess knowledge acquisition. In total, students answered 50 different questions related to the concepts targeted in *Honor Code*: definitions of bullying, bullying risk factors, tools to improve how they treat themselves and others through emotion management, appropriate responses to bullying, and the importance of a healthy school community.

### Surveys

Students were given optional pre- and post-course surveys to assess attitudes. Survey information was collected from a national sample of students in Grades 8 – 10, who self-reported being at least 13 years old at the time of course enrollment. Pre-course surveys also included demographics questions, while post-course surveys included questions regarding course-related feedback.

Students rated a series of 4-point Likert scale items on how strongly they agreed with, or how likely they were to engage in, leadership and bullying prevention behaviors.<sup>5</sup> Survey responses were summed for data analysis.



### Example Question

### Quiz

Thea sends a group message online to a several classmates telling them not to be friends with Mari. What kind of bullying is this?

- ☐ A Verbal
- ☐ B Social
- ☐ C Verbal and Cyber
- ☒ D Social and Cyber

### Survey

On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

It is my responsibility to prevent bullying at my school.

## Results

### Knowledge

Students took an average of 5 days to complete the course, suggesting that they completed one module per day.

Results indicate that students increased their knowledge and understanding related to bullying effects and prevention, even after controlling for gender, race, grade level, and school LMI status.<sup>6</sup>

On average, students scored 68.46% on pre-module quizzes. After taking *Honor Code*, students scored an average of 83.02% on post-quizzes, an almost 15 points (over a letter grade difference), or 21% increase.

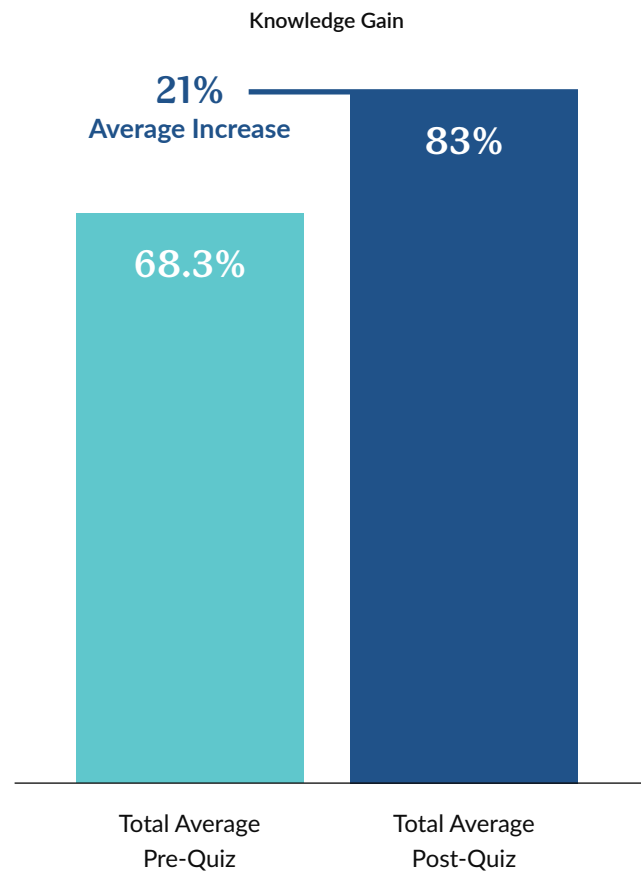
Students can have varying relationships with bullying: They may bully, be bullied, or be witnesses to bullying. To address this, *Honor Code* lessons focus on different aspects of the bullying experience, like how to respond when others are being bullied (for bystanders) and emotion management techniques (for those who bully). After taking *Honor Code*, knowledge of how to appropriately respond to bullying increased for all students. In particular, knowledge for those who reported being passive bystanders increased by over 26 points (a 48% increase).<sup>7</sup> For bystanders, understanding how to appropriately respond to bullying is crucial to stopping passive behaviors.<sup>8</sup>

Emotion management techniques are important to decreasing aggressive behavior in students who bully, who tend to be impulsive and follow immediate emotional needs rather than premeditate their emotional responses.<sup>9</sup> All students increased their knowledge about emotional management techniques to handle issues that can lead to being targeted by or perpetrating bullying, but students who bully saw a larger increase: Their scores increased by nearly 20 points (a 33.6% increase), helping to close the emotion management gap between them and their peers.<sup>10</sup>

### Attitudes

Students play a crucial role in creating a school climate that inhibits bullying behaviors. Because attitudes toward a behavior can influence how likely a student is to engage in that behavior in the future,<sup>11</sup> it is important to support the development of positive attitudes towards promoting a healthy school climate.

Students demonstrated significant improvements in their overall attitudes, even after controlling for key demographic variables like gender, race, grade level, and school LMI status.<sup>12</sup> After *Honor Code*, students felt more personally responsible for preventing bullying in their schools, with agreement positively shifting by over 10%.<sup>13</sup>



## Conclusions

After taking *Honor Code*, percent of students that...

60%

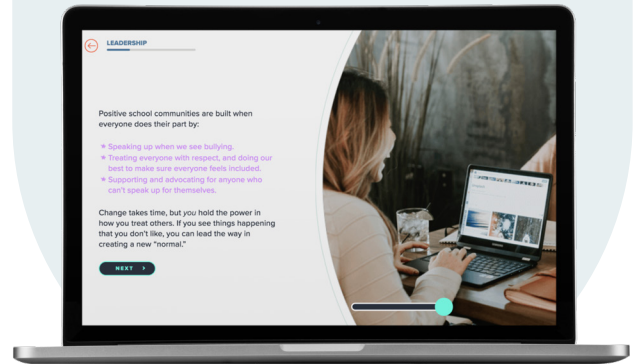
**Agreed or Strongly Agreed** that *Honor Code* gave them the tools to combat bullying

63%

**Agree or Strongly Agree** that *Honor Code* gave them the techniques to manage difficult situations, such as experiencing or perpetrating bullying.

The study illustrates the positive impact of *Honor Code* on student knowledge and attitudes related to bullying prevention. Many students do not recognize aggressive behaviors as bullying<sup>14</sup>, which may contribute to why student self-report rates in *Honor Code* were low, as well as the wide range of self-reported bullying in the broader literature.<sup>2,3</sup> After taking *Honor Code*, students demonstrated significant improvements in both their knowledge of bullying effects and how to prevent it, as well as their attitudes towards conducting preventative behaviors. Both educators and students reported positive experiences with *Honor Code*. Educators who used the program in Fall 2021 overwhelmingly reported that the course was easy to incorporate into their curriculum and that the course was interesting for their students. Students also reported favorable learning experiences, with 66% rating their experience with *Honor Code* as either 'Good' or 'Very Good.'

This study presents promising evidence for *Honor Code* and its ability, even as a brief digital course, to prepare students with the information needed to create a positive school environment, as well as the mindset necessary to act upon their new knowledge. Addressing all students, even those not directly involved in bullying, is vital to encouraging an anti-bullying culture within schools.



## Percent of Educators who said *Honor Code*...

95%

was interesting to their students.

92%

enhanced the material they taught.

95%

was easy to incorporate into their curriculum.

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## References

1. US Department of Education. (2016). *Non-regulatory guidance: Using evidence to strengthen education investments*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceuseininvestment.pdf>
2. Fraguas, D., Díaz-Caneja, C. M., Ayora, M., Durán-Cutilla, M., Abregú-Crespo, R., Ezquiaga-Bravo, I., ... & Arango, C. (2021). Assessment of school anti-bullying interventions: a meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials. *JAMA pediatrics*, 175(1), 44-55.
3. Bradshaw, C. P., Sawyer, A. L., & O'Brennan, L. M. (2007). Bullying and peer victimization at school: Perceptual differences between students and school staff. *School psychology review*, 36(3), 361-382.
4. A non-standardized measurement was used to assess knowledge. Therefore, the reliability of the quiz items were collectively assessed and determined to have high level of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .82$ ).
5. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was run on a 15-item survey ( $\alpha = .85$ ) that measured attitudes and intended behaviors related to digital wellness and safety. KMO = .92, which is 'marvelous' according to Kaiser. Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that the data was likely factorizable. EFA revealed one factor that had an eigenvalue greater than one and which explained 96.87% of the total variance. Visual inspection of the scree plot indicated that one factor should be retained. The measure was deemed likely unidimensional.
6. A multilevel mixed-effects generalized linear model was used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in quiz scores before and after the students were exposed to Honor Code content. This model was chosen to control for the nested nature of this data (in this case, the random effects at the participant- and class-level). Based on AIC and BIC values, time was not included as a random intercept. After controlling for gender identity, race/ethnicity, and school LMI status, results indicated that the course elicited statistically significant changes in knowledge over time,  $b = 14.55$ ,  $p < .001$ .
7. Based on survey responses regarding their personal experiences with bullying, students' bully status was coded as a categorical variable (bully, bullied, passive bystander, active bystander, bullying partner, and those who have not seen bullying). Passive bystanders were coded as students who had seen bullying, did not report being bullied or being a bully, and reported that they would ignore or do nothing in bullying situations. Multilevel mixed-effects generalized linear models were used to assess whether there were significant differences in module scores before and after students were exposed to Honor Code. The model incorporated random effects at the participant- and class-level. Based on AIC and BIC values, time was not included as a random intercept. For the Courage module, results indicated that knowledge increased over time and that this was moderated by bully status [ $\chi^2(6) = p < .001$ ]. Knowledge scores in the Courage module increased for students who identified as passive bystanders (from 54.90 to 81.10;  $\chi^2(1)=580.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Tests of marginal effects showed that knowledge gains after taking Honor Code were greater for students who identified as passive bystanders compared to those who reported being bullied ( $b = 6.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Passive bystanders' knowledge gain was greater than, though not significantly different from, students who bully ( $b = 1.93$ ,  $p = 0.297$ ).
8. Padgett, S., & Notar, C. E. (2013). Bystanders Are the Key to Stopping Bullying. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 1(2), 33-41.
9. Oberle, E., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Lawlor, M. S., & Thomson, K. C. (2012). Mindfulness and inhibitory control in early adolescence. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 32(4), 565-588.
10. A multilevel mixed-effects generalized linear model was used to assess whether there were significant differences in the Resilience module scores before and after students were exposed to Honor Code content. Results indicated that knowledge increased over time and that this was moderated by bully status [ $\chi^2(5) = 54.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. Knowledge scores in the Resilience module significantly increased for students who bully (from 58.68 to 78.39;  $\chi^2(1)=193.16$   $p < .001$ ). Tests of marginal effects showed that knowledge gains after taking Honor Code were greater for students who bully compared to those who reported being bullied ( $b = 5.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Knowledge gain was not significantly different between students who bully and bystanders ( $b = .24$ ,  $p = .789$ ).
11. Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 50(2), 179-211.
12. A multilevel mixed-effects generalized linear model was used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in survey scores before and after the students were exposed to Honor Code content. Based on AIC and BIC levels, time was not included as a random intercept. After controlling for gender identity, race/ethnicity, and school LMI status, results indicated that the course was associated with statistically significant changes in attitudes over time,  $b = 0.88$ ,  $p < .001$ .
13. To assess for specific attitude score increases from before and after Honor Code exposure, a multilevel mixed-effects generalized linear model was used. The model used random intercepts at the participant- and class-level. Time was not included as a random intercept based on AIC and BIC values. Agreement scores for the item, "It is my responsibility to prevent bullying at my school" increased after taking Honor Code,  $b = 0.26$ ,  $p < .001$ .
14. Gordillo, I. C. (2011). Divergence in aggressors' and victims' perceptions of bullying: A decisive factor for differential psychosocial intervention. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(9), 1608-1615.