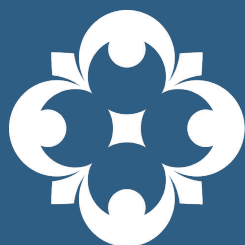


SINGLED OUT:

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE CLASSROOM AND THE IMPACT OF DISCRIMINATION ON MUSLIMS



FIRST BULLYING SURVEY & REPORT OF AMERICAN MUSLIM STUDENTS IN DALLAS FORT-WORTH



CAIR
TEXAS
DALLAS/FORT WORTH CHAPTER

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The Council on American-Islamic Relations is the largest American Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. Its mission is to enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice and empower American Muslims. CAIR-Texas DFW is a chapter, with offices in the Dallas Fort-Worth, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin.

OUR MISSION

To enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

OUR VISION

To be a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding.



CAIR-DFW SCHOOL BULLYING REPORT 2020



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through this report, the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Dallas Fort-Worth (CAIR-DFW) provides an analysis and evaluation of the current school climate for American Muslims. The purpose of this report is to understand the extent to which Islamophobia, the closed-minded prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims, manifests itself in the school environment in the form of bullying and discrimination. As such, this report focuses on anti-Muslim bullying, the unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance that is or can be repeated and is based on the student's Islamic faith.

As the 2016 presidential campaign became rife with Islamophobic rhetoric, many students, parents and educators feared the negative impact this mainstream Islamophobia would have on Muslim students. This report examines how Muslim students felt about their school environment, about identifying as Muslim and the extent of anti-Muslim bullying and harassment students experience. The survey was conducted by the CAIR-DFW office covering the Greater Dallas Fort-Worth areas. It reached **321 Muslim students between the ages of 11 and 18** who were enrolled in public and private schools statewide. The next report will be a statewide Texas report that will be published in 2021 after the Presidential Election.

As incidents of bullying continue to grow, the trust and comfort Muslim students feel at school is deteriorating. Muslim students report higher rates of discrimination and bullying than other students. Findings from the 2020 survey show that **48% of respondents** experienced some type of bullying. That respondents were **verbally insulted, physically abused, or bullied Online for being Muslim**. This is **nearly double** the **national statistic for students being bullied at school**.¹ More specifically, key findings of the survey illustrate the decline of school environments for Muslim students, where **25%, nearly 1 in 4, did not respond that they felt welcome and respected in school**. Additionally, **41% of Muslim students did not respond that they feel comfortable engaging in class discussions about Islam and Muslims**.

One factor leading to discomfort among Muslim students is their peers' negative activity online. Students stated that they frequently see their peers posting negatively about Islam and Muslims.



More specifically, **42% of the survey respondents** reported that students from their school make **offensive statements and posts about Islam and Muslims online.**

Another key finding from the survey is the targeting of Muslim students wearing the hijab, the Islamic head covering. **15%, nearly 1 in 7, reported having their hijab tugged, pulled or other forms of offensive touching.**

MUSLIM STUDENTS ALSO REPORT HIGHER RATES OF DISCRIMINATION AND BULLYING THAN OTHER STUDENTS.

In addition to showing peer-to-peer bullying, the survey results show bullying and **discrimination from teachers, administrators and other officials at 18%, that's nearly 1 in 6 students.** Furthermore, the survey shows Muslim students are targets of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying involves posting or sending electronic messages, including text, pictures or videos, aimed at harassing, threatening or targeting another person through a variety of media and social media platforms.² Among the survey respondents, **23%, nearly 1 in 4, reported being victims of cyberbullying.**

The findings of this report show that there is a need to continue monitoring anti-Muslim bullying, its underlying factors and its long-term mental health effects in the coming years.

II. ISLAMOPHOBIA AT SCHOOL

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS & ANTI-BIAS CURRICULUM

American Muslim students should be given the opportunity to thrive in a school environment that cultivates feelings of inclusion instead of re-enforcing feelings of otherness. Schools foster the feeling of otherness for American Muslim students by institutionalizing certain cultural practices above others in curriculum and pedagogy. In the post 9/11 context, American Muslim students face constant obstacles to exercising their religion, while also bearing the burden of defending their religious identity, which is frequently undercut by the stereotypical misunderstandings of Islam and Muslims. Learning improves when educators provide for a more unbiased approach to education about Islam and Muslims, which can be achieved by having educators re-examine their prejudices and be open-minded and aware of how cultural interpretations affects learning. Furthermore, allowing for reasonable religious accommodations promotes the further inclusion of Muslim students in schools and discourages feelings of isolation and otherness.

It is well established that being aware of and moving to eliminate bias in the classroom can promote equity, excellence and empowerment.¹² A simple solution for educators and schools is to incorporate lesson plans and materials created by Muslim organizations for curricula about Islam. Educators should utilize specific lesson plans that address common misconceptions about Islam, the history of Muslims in the U.S., Muslim contributions to civilizations and commonalities between Islam and other faiths.

Although Texas schools have made affirmative efforts to reflect the state's diversity in its common core curriculum, many of those changes ignore the need to revise the approach to education about Muslims and Islam. Unfortunately, many attempts by school districts across the nation to incorporate a more unbiased curriculum on Islam have been met with backlash, where the less informed accuse schools of imposing the indoctrination of Islam on non-Muslim students or being pro-Islam.¹⁴ The continued use of outdated material in schools reinforces misconceptions about Islam and further perpetuates Islamophobia.

Receiving religious accommodation positively impacts a student's perception of their environment. "It makes you feel you belong here," stated a Muslim high school senior when her school provided Muslim students with a prayer room to perform daily prayers.¹⁵ Failure of K-12 schools to allow for religious accommodations for Muslim students is a common complaint from parents and students when contacting CAIR-TX DFW.

When institutions ignore or dismiss requests for religious accommodations, they perpetuate the feeling of not belonging for Muslim students who are then forced to choose between their religious practices and curricular activity. In a July 2016 Report prepared by the Department of Justice (DOJ) entitled "Combating Religious Discrimination Today: Final Report," the government recognized that there is a need to ensure that students have access to reasonable religious accommodations.¹⁶

The report further recognized the importance of individualized accommodations for religious beliefs, including excusal from school for religious holidays, religious clothing exceptions to school dress codes and accommodations for prayer during the school day.¹⁷ Thus, it is imperative that federal, state and local school boards and districts work with American Muslims to ensure schools recognize the importance of religious accommodations in the school setting. Common accommodations requests from Muslim students include allowing for alternative uniforms during a physical education class and breaks during the school day to carry out prayers and excusing absences due to observance of Eid holidays.



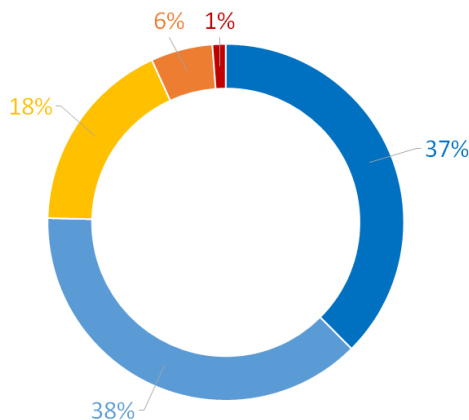
III. SURVEY FINDINGS

In 2020, CAIR-TX DFW surveyed **321 students** between the **ages of 11 and 18** who were enrolled in public and non-Islamic private schools throughout the Dallas Fort-Worth Metroplex. The 2020 survey served as part of a project launched by CAIR-California, who have been actively surveying Muslim students in that state for the last six years. Over the years, CAIR-CA has modified the surveys to better understand the difficulties that Muslim students experience in the face of bullying and discrimination at school. The CAIR-TX DFW survey is based on the CAIR-CA survey. The 2020 survey is divided into three main sections. The first section asked for demographic information about each respondent. The second section asked student respondents about how they perceive their school environment. The third section of the survey requested information about the type of bullying and discrimination experienced at school as either the target or bystander.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

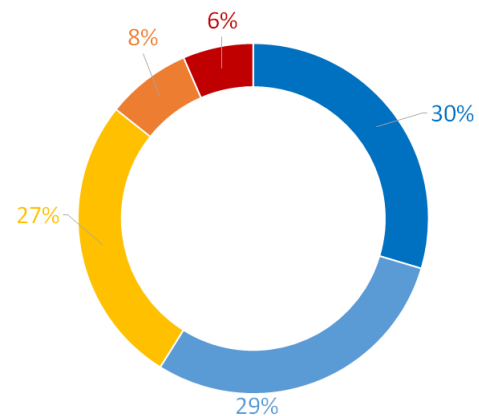


1. I feel safe, welcome and respected in my school.



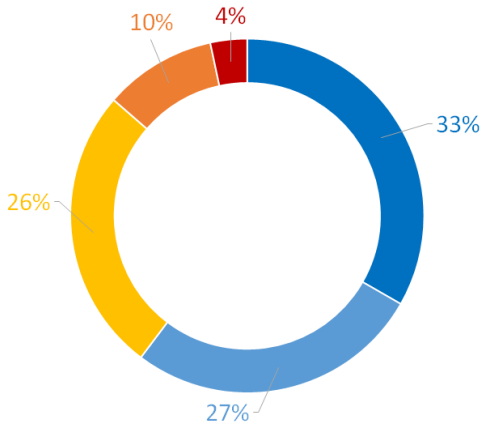
Survey results reveal that **25%, nearly 1 in 4**, students did not respond that they feel safe, welcome and respected at school.

2. I'm comfortable in class discussions about Islam and Muslims



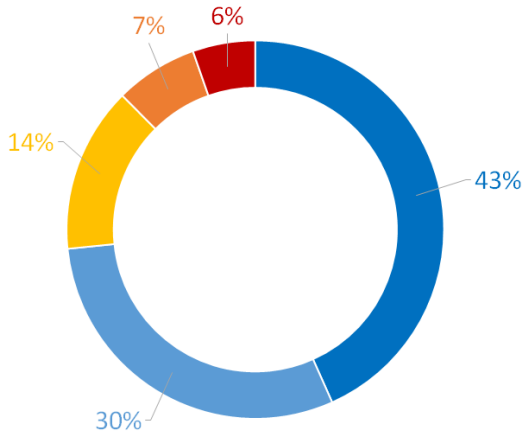
41% did not respond that they feel comfortable discussing Islam and Muslims in class.

3. I participate in class discussions about Islam and Muslims.



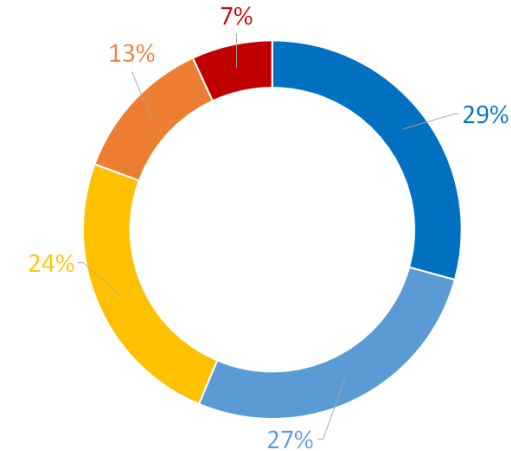
40% of survey respondents state that they do not participate in discussions about Islam and Muslims.

4. I feel comfortable letting students know I am Muslim.



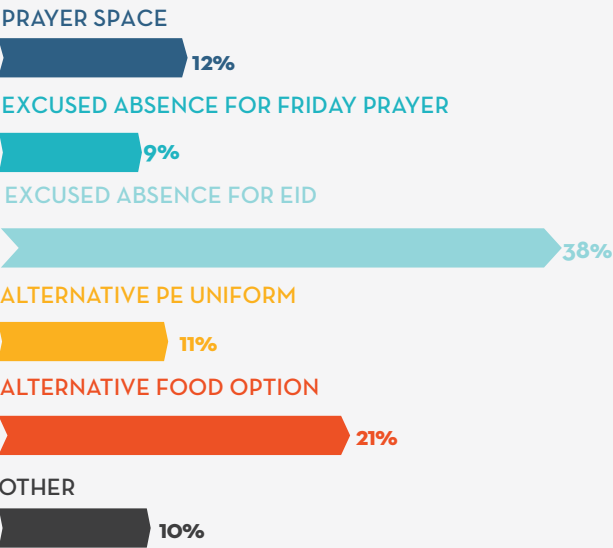
27%, nearly 1 in 4, did not respond that they felt comfortable letting students know that they are Muslim.

5. I feel comfortable approaching my teachers and administrators about my religious requests.



44%, nearly half, did not respond that they feel comfortable approaching teachers and administrators about religious requests.

6. My parents or I have requested the following from a teacher, administrator or other official at my school...



BULLYING AND DISCRIMINATION

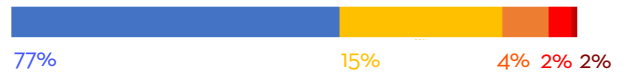


7. How often do students at your school make offensive statements or posts about Islam and Muslims through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and other social media apps?



42% of respondents view their peers making offensive statements or posts about Islam and Muslims online.

8. Has a student from your school made offensive comments about Muslims or Islam directed towards YOU through E-mail, text message or social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram?



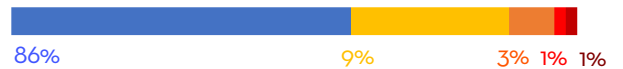
23%, nearly 1 in 4, of survey respondents report being victims of cyberbullying.

9. How often is a student at your school made fun of, verbally insulted or verbally abused for being Muslim?



40% of respondents report being made fun of, verbally insulted or abused for for being Muslim.

10. How often are you physically harmed or harassed at your school because you are Muslim?



14%, nearly 1 in 7, of the 2020 survey respondents report being physically harmed or harassed at school because they are Muslim.

11. How often are others at your school physically harmed or harassed for being Muslim?



19%, nearly 1 in 5, of respondents reported that others at school are physically harmed or harassed for being Muslim.

12. How often do your teachers, administrators or other officials at your school make offensive comments about your religion?



18%, nearly 1 in 5, of Muslim students are targets of offensive comments from school educators.

13. When I told a teacher, administrator, or other official at my school about an incident of harassment directed towards Muslims, it helped solve the problem.



2020 survey results showed that only **17%** of students felt their problems were resolved by an adult.

14. If you wear hijab, how often have you had your hijab tugged, pulled or in any way offensively touched by another student?

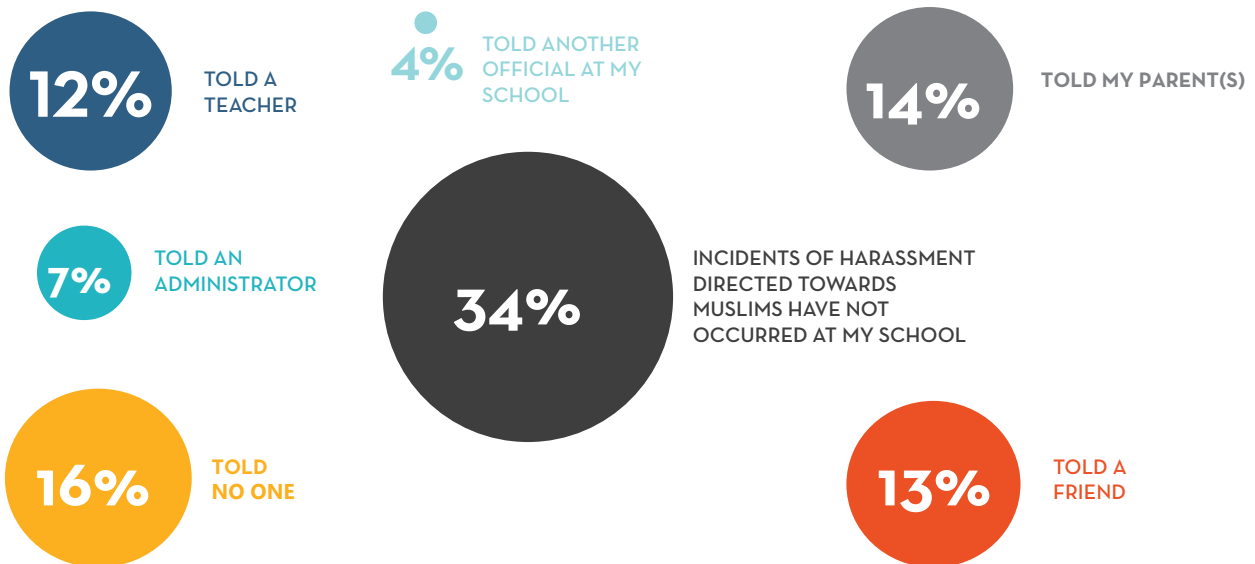


15%, nearly 1 in 7, respondents who wear the hijab reported being targets of having their hijab tugged, pulled or other forms of offensive touching.



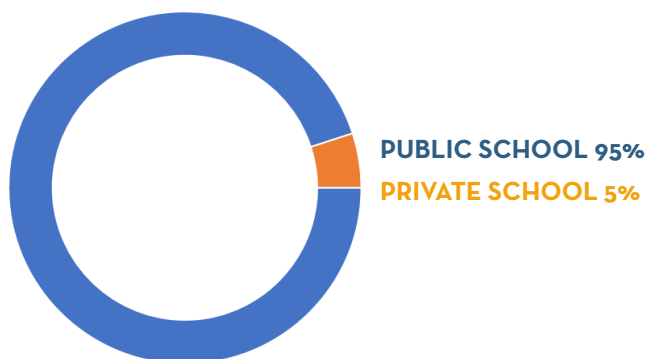


15. When incidents of harassment directed towards Muslims occurs at my school, I...

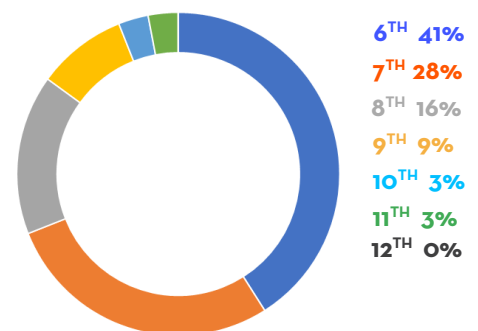


DEMOGRAPHICS

18. What kind of school do you attend?



19. Grade

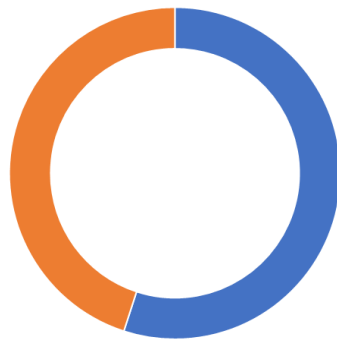




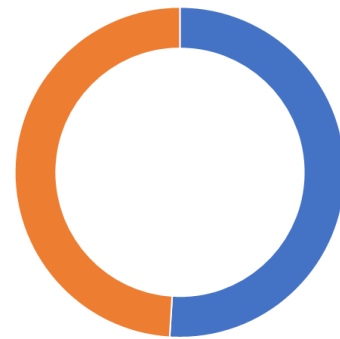
20. Age



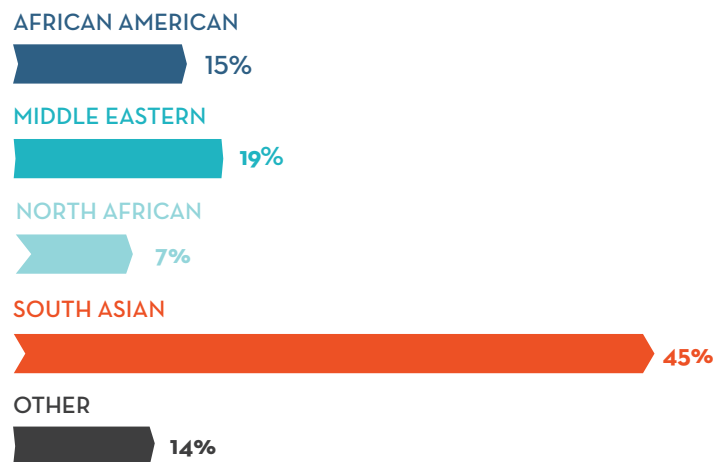
21. Gender



22. Is English a primary language spoken at home?



22. Race/National Origin



IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Belonging to a stigmatized religious group may lead to increased feelings of rejection and discrimination.¹⁸ This is especially true for Muslim students in the current sociopolitical climate. Included below are recommendations made by CAIR-DFW that educators, families and lawmakers can utilize to combat Islamophobia at school.

EDUCATORS

In addition to implementing anti-bias curriculum, as set forth above, schools should work towards learning what the climate at their school is by assessing the school's environment. After a proper assessment has been completed, schools should then implement a policy-based action plan, including training school administrators and teachers, and working to engage Muslim families in the school's community. Educators should foster a diverse and multicultural environment to create an inclusive environment for all students. It is important for educators to be familiar not only with the various religious identities of their students, but also their racial, ethnic, sexual and gender identities.

In order to understand the climate and environment at a school, administrators should conduct assessments where all members of the school's community, including teachers, students, counselors, coaches and parents are surveyed and asked their views about Muslims and Islam.¹⁹ The information collected from the assessment should be used to implement action plans and specific policies on—most importantly—prevention and response procedures to incidents of bullying. Policies should clearly define what bullying and harassment is, including setting standards and thresholds for verbal bullying. Action plans should consider how to incorporate bystander involvement in preventing bullying instead of acting as passive observers. Likewise, school policies should implement procedures on how teachers should intervene in preventing bullying incidents and ensure that teachers receive training on how to prevent bullying and harassment in their classrooms. Teachers often report that they do not have sufficient training to address such incidents.²⁰

Many schools enact policies where a single administrator is responsible for investigation and discipline of reported bullying, which results in teachers ignoring the conflict between students and viewing their responsibility as limited to reporting. Training for teachers and school administrators should inform them, from an un-biased point of view, about the religion and practice of Muslims so that staff may anticipate and identify areas of bullying.²¹ Teachers should be trained to be sensitive to the lesson plans and class discussions about Islam and current global politics that may impact Muslim students. Muslim students should not be made to feel that they must answer for all Muslims. Many American Muslim students feel pressured by their peers and teachers to speak authoritatively on these subjects when they may not be equipped to do so. Instead, schools should encourage teachers who do not have training to present on these subjects to look for professionals in their community who are qualified, such as WhyIslam.org, Islamic Network Group (ING) and the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance Program. Additional recommendations for teaching resources may be found in the Resources section.

PARENTS & STUDENTS

Parents should be vigilant in looking for signs of bullying and harassment. Signs can include physical manifestations such as scrapes, bruises, property stolen from children or more subtle changes in behavior where a child becomes withdrawn, anxious and has excessive absences from school.²² Oftentimes, children will not inform their parents that they have been bullied. Thus, parents must foster relationships of trust with their children, so that they feel comfortable telling them. Parents must also understand that it is not a child's fault if they are bullied nor should it be considered a natural part of growing up. They should also make sure that their children understand this as well. Moreover, parents need to teach their children what to do if they are bullied, particularly if the bullying is taking place online. The increase in cyberbullying in recent years requires parents to closely monitor their children's online activity.

Additionally, parents should immediately assert their children's right to learn in a bias-free environment. Texas state law requires schools to have policies and procedures in place to respond to complaints of bullying and harassment. Parents should use the stated procedures to make complaints, then follow up

school. Parents should also report any instances of bullying and discriminatory harassment to their local CAIR-DFW office.

LAWMAKERS

While the Trump administration has announced the scaling back of investigations into civil rights violations at public schools and universities by the Department of Education, federal legislators and state lawmakers should ensure that the appropriate laws are passed to protect vulnerable students from bullying and violence at school.²³ Congress should amend Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, which is already prohibited by Texas law. Amending Title VI would allow targets of religious based bullying to seek redress against schools receiving federal funding and would allow for accountability for failing to prevent bullying and harassment based on religion.

Additionally, there are currently no federal law directly addressing bullying. As such, Congress should pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) of 2017. The act would prohibit bullying and harassment based on a student's religion, race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.²⁴ This bill amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to require states to direct their local educational agencies (LEAs) to establish policies that prevent and prohibit conduct, including bullying and harassment, that is sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive that: (1) limit students' ability to participate in, or benefit from, school programs; or (2) create a hostile or abusive educational environment that adversely affects students' education.²⁵ School districts would then be required to adopt codes of conduct specifically prohibiting bullying and harassment.

SSIA would also require that states report data on bullying and harassment to the Department of Education.²⁶ The Department of Education would then be required to provide Congress with a biennial report on the state reported data from the programs and policies to combat bullying and harassment in elementary and secondary schools.²⁷ The National Center for Education Statistics would collect this state data to determine the incidence and frequency of the conduct prohibited by LEA disciplinary policies.²⁸

WHAT CAIR-DFW DOES

Students and parents should report incidents of bullying to their local CAIR-DFW office. CAIR-DFW provides awareness workshops to the American Muslim community to train parents and children on how to address and prevent bullying at their schools and educate them about the protections available to them under state and federal laws.

TEXAS STATE LAW REQUIRES SCHOOLS TO HAVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES IN PLACE TO RESPOND TO COMPLAINTS OF BULLYING AND HARASSMENT.

Upon request, CAIR-DFW provides cultural competency training to schools and we work with students, parents and school administrators in dealing with issues relating to Muslim students. Additionally, CAIR-DFW conducts focus groups, listening sessions and community surveys to understand the problems American Muslim students face in schools. Parents and students should reach out to CAIR-DFW if the student is experiencing bullying or discrimination at school. CAIR-DFW offers legal services to those experiencing civil rights violations, which includes discrimination at school and bullying.



V. RESOURCES

WEBSITES WITH BULLYING PREVENTION RESOURCES

Korematsu Institute

<http://www.korematsuinstitute.org/curriculum-kit-materials/>

WhyIslam

www.WhyIslam.org

Sikh Coalition

<https://www.sikhcoalition.org/>

Act to Change

<https://acttochange.org/>

Islamic Networks Group (ING)

www.ing.org

National Education Association

www.nea.org

National Crime Prevention Council

www.ncpc.org

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center

www.pacer.org

Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center

www.teachingtolerance.org

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

www.stopbullying.gov

Crisis Text Line

www.crisistextline.org

REPORTS ON BULLYING AND PREVENTION

Know Your Rights as a Muslim Youth At School

CAIR-California

<https://ca.cair.com/sfba/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Kids-Know-Your-Rights-Pocket-Guide.pdf>

MISLABELED: The Impact of School Bullying and Discrimination

CAIR-California

<https://ca.cair.com/sfba/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CAIR-CA-2015-Bullying-Report-Web.pdf>

Growing in Faith: CA Muslim Youth Experiences with Bullying

CAIR-CA

<http://ca.cair.com/downloads/GrowingInFaith.pdf>

Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU)

<https://www.ispu.org/social-policy/youth/>

Bullying Prevention Guide

Islamic Networks Group

http://www.ing.org/downloads/ING_Bullying_Prevention_Guide.pdf

Go Home Terrorist

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund & Sikh Coalition

<http://www.sikhcoalition.org/documents/pdf/go-home-terrorist.pdf>

State of American Muslim Youth: Research & Recommendations Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/ISPU_FYI_Report_American_Muslim_Youth_Final.pdf

TEXAS LAWS RELATING TO BULLYING

Texas Education Code §37.0832

(Bullying Prevention Policies and Procedures)

FEDERAL LAWS RELATING TO HARASSMENT

Disability

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

Race, Color & National Origin

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Sex

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

STATE & FEDERAL GOVERNMENT REPORTING AGENCIES

Department of Education Office of Civil Rights

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html

Department of Justice Civil Rights Division

www.justice.gov/crt/

VI. ENDNOTES

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, 2015, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017004.pdf>.

² United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), School Violence and Bullying, Global Status Report, 2017, available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002469/246970e.pdf>.

³ Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), The Relationships Between Bullying and Suicide: What we Know and What it Means for Schools, 2014, available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-suicide-translation-final-a.pdf>.

⁴ Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Bullying Surveillance Among Youths, Uniform Definitions for Public Health And Recommended Data Elements, 2014, available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/Bullying-Definitions-FINAL-a.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Crisis Text Line, <https://www.crisistextline.org/purpose/>.

⁸ Brian Selter “Muslim Bullying Fears on the Rise, Hotline Says,” CNN, December 9, 2015, available at: <http://money.cnn.com/2015/12/09/media/muslim-bullying-harassment-crisis-text-line/index.html>.

⁹ David Mack, “This Graph Gives An Insight Into How U.S. Muslims Are Feeling Right Now,” Buzzfeed, December 9, 2015, available at: https://www.buzzfeed.com/davidmack/this-one-graph-shows-how-bad-us-muslims-are-feeling-right-no?utm_term=.tj9bv6PO9#.qpBxj2ZdN.

¹⁰ Laura Mahalingappa, Terri Rodriguez, Nihat Polat, Supporting Muslim Students, A Guide to Understanding the Diverse Issues of Today’s Classrooms, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, pg. 21 personal email with Crisis Text Line June 20, 2016.

¹¹ Nancy Lubin, “Crisis And Response.” TED. April 1, 2016. Lecture, transcripts available at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=472451687>.

¹² Laura Mahalingappa, Terri Rodriguez, Nihat Polat, Supporting Muslim Students, A Guide to Understanding the Diverse Issues of Today’s Classrooms, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, pg. 129.

¹³ Stephen Magagnini, “California’s new public school history standards reflect state’s diversity.” The Sacramento Bee, July 29, 2016, available at: <http://www.sacbee.com/news/local/education/article92446782.html>.

¹⁴ Emma Green, “The Fear of Islam in Tennessee Public Schools,” *The Atlantic*, December 15, 2015, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/12/fear-islam-tennessee-public-schools/420441/>; Matt Katz, “Allegations of Islam Indoctrination in Public Schools Spread to New Jersey,” *WNYC News*, April 10, 2017, available at: <http://www.wnyc.org/story/allegations-islam-indoctrination-public-schools-spread-nj/>.

¹⁵ Helmut Schmidt, “‘It makes you feel you belong’: Schools provide Muslim students space, time for daily prayers,” *Duluth News Tribune*, February 19, 2017, available at: <http://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/4220776-it-makes-you-feel-you-belong-schools-provide-muslim-students-space-time-daily-prayers>.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, *Combating Religious Discrimination Today: Final Report*, July 2016, available at: <https://www.justice.gov/crt/file/877936/download>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Laura Mahalingappa, Terri Rodriguez, Nihat Polat, *Supporting Muslim Students, A Guide to Understanding the Diverse Issues of Today’s Classrooms*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, pg. 23.

¹⁹ Laura Mahalingappa, Terri Rodriguez, Nihat Polat, *Supporting Muslim Students, A Guide to Understanding*

the Diverse Issues of Today’s Classrooms, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, pg. 114-115.

²⁰ Leslie Tillerson, “Teachers Say That Training Must Support Laws,” *Michigan State University School of Journalism, The New Bullying*, February 13, 2012, available at: <http://news.jrn.msu.edu/bullying/2012/02/13/teacher-anti-bullying-training-schools/>.

²¹ Laura Mahalingappa, Terri Rodriguez, Nihat Polat, *Supporting Muslim Students, A Guide to Understanding the Diverse Issues of Today’s Classrooms*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, p. 116.

²² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, *Warning Signs*, [stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/warning-signs/), <http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/warning-signs/>.

²³ Erica L. Green, “Education Dept. Says It Will Scale Back Civil Rights Investigations,” *The New York Times*, June 16, 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/us/politics/education-department-civil-rights-betsy-devos.html?mcubz=0>.

²⁴ *Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2017*, H.R. 1957, 115th Congress (2017-2018), bill summaries available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1957/>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*



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