CAIR
NEW YORK

FEELING THE HATE
IN OUR SCHOOLS

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About CAIR-NY

As America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has worked for more than 30 years to defend civil liberties. CAIR's New York chapter (CAIR-NY) is one of the busiest and most dynamic of CAIR's nationwide affiliates—defending, representing, and educating nearly one million Muslims in New York. Our vision is to be a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding. Our mission is to protect civil rights, enhance understanding of Islam, promote justice, and empower Muslim Americans. Our areas of operation include legal advocacy, education, media relations, civic engagement, and grassroots mobilization. We are often the first line of defense for Muslim New Yorkers who have experienced discrimination, harassment, hate crimes, and other manifestations of bigotry. CAIR-NY works diligently to combat Islamophobia and systemic inequality in all its forms.

Acknowledgement of Contributors:

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Message from the Executive Director

As-salaamu 'alaikum / May God's peace be with you,

Religious, racial, and xenophobic discrimination have always been present in our nation's history and, unfortunately, our youth have not been immune. Of the hundreds of requests for assistance that come into CAIR-NY, issues arising in an educational setting have consistently ranked in the top three categories of concern. Denial of religious accommodations, faith- and ethnic-based bullying, and biased curriculum have persisted, especially since 9/11. Additionally, the ongoing genocide in Palestine has further intensified the discrimination, bringing added civil rights abuses relating to first amendment protected speech, law enforcement questioning of minors, and school disciplinary hearings in our K-12 systems.

One of our many responses to the bigotry our youth face in school has culminated in this report, *Feeling the Hate in Our Schools.* A sequel to our earlier publication which examined bias and hate crimes experienced by Muslims in New York, we narrowed the topic to capture data specific to experiences of our youth in educational institutions. Focusing on religious based bullying, the report conveys the results of a comprehensive survey and confirms the prevalence of bias Muslim students experience in public schools. Perhaps most concerning is that we found adult-to-student issues were way too common, and reporting was too low.

Change is possible, and it starts with acknowledging the presence of hate and bias in our schools. Along with sharing data on religious-based bullying of Muslim students, we have included recommendations for school administrators, educators, and parents. CAIR-NY will continue to work with policy makers, school districts, and allies who are dedicated to creating a safe, positive learning environment, free of discrimination. Our goal is to advance systemic change through all channels available, including educational programming, policy advocacy, and when necessary, legal challenges.

This publication is made possible by our funders, parents, educators, and of course, our youth. We thank you all for championing CAIR-NY's work and hope that this report inspires you to help safeguard our students' ability to thrive in schools, inshaAllah (God willing).

Sincerely,
Afaf Nasher, Esq.

Key Findings

Over half of the students **(58.2%)** reported being bullied at school by another student because they were Muslim.

Almost half **(44.7%)** of students who wear a hijab reported their hijab was tugged, pulled, or offensively touched by another student rarely, sometimes, often, or very often.

29% of students reported that a teacher, administrator, or other adult at their school made offensive comments or acted in a way that is offensive to Islam or Muslims.

64% of students have witnessed a Muslim student at school being bullied by another student.

Out of the students that said they had been bullied for being Muslim, **43%** said they never asked for help.

64.9% of students said they have seen students at their school make offensive comments or posts about Islam or Muslims online.

43.6% said they do not think it will make a difference to report.

74.6% of students said that they did not report to an adult at their school about being bullied by another student for being Muslim.

79.4% said they did not report to another adult that a teacher, administrator, or other adult at their school bullied them or made offensive comments about Islam or Muslims.

Introduction

In this report, the New York Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-NY) aims to provide a thorough analysis and evaluation of the prevailing school climate for Muslim American students falling between the ages of 9-18 in New York. With a keen focus on understanding the pervasive issue of Islamophobia within educational settings, particularly in the form of bullying and discrimination, this report delves into the multifaceted challenges faced by Muslim students. Islamophobia, characterized by its closed-minded prejudice or hatred towards Islam and Muslims, has insidiously permeated various facets of society, including the educational realm. Through this report, we aim to highlight a specific manifestation of this prejudice within schools: anti-Muslim bullying. Defined as unwanted, aggressive behavior stemming from a real or perceived power imbalance based on a student's Islamic faith, these instances not only undermine the well-being of individual students but also erode the foundational principles of inclusivity and diversity within educational institutions.

The treatment of Muslim students in New York has been a longstanding concern within the local Muslim community, with discernible patterns emerging over time. Historical reflection reveals a notable surge in discriminatory practices following pivotal events such as 9/11 and the tenure of the Trump administration. These instances of discrimination are not isolated incidents but rather intricately intertwined with broader societal shifts and attitudes, particularly exacerbated by xenophobic and anti-Islamic sentiments perpetuated through political rhetoric. Consequently, such rhetoric serves to incite unease among Muslim youth, thereby facilitating a climate of apprehension and hostility within educational settings. Moreover, the enduring impact of significant events characterized by the dissemination of Islamophobic narratives and policies continues to exert a profound influence on the experiences of Muslim students. Evidence of this phenomenon is exemplified in the aftermath of the escalation of state-sanctioned violence in Gaza, Palestine, in October 2023. This crisis has cast a palpable shadow over the treatment of both Muslim students and educators alike, further exacerbating existing tensions and disparities (see Special Note on Palestine).

CAIR-NY's 2022 Report, titled "Feeling the Hate: Bias and Hate Crimes Experienced by Muslim New Yorkers," revealed a significant trend: a notable proportion of bias incidents and hate crimes against Muslims occurred within educational institutions, presenting a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by Muslim New Yorkers. This highlights the imperative for proactive measures to address this issue effectively. One striking observation from the report was the apparent lack of reporting of such incidents, suggesting that educational settings reflect larger societal trends magnified within their microcosm. Despite these challenges, CAIR-NY remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding civil rights and empowering Muslim Americans. Through vigilant advocacy and concerted efforts to foster a culture of inclusivity and respect within educational institutions, we strive to dismantle the prevalent forces of Islamophobia and ensure that all students can follow their academic pursuits in an environment free from fear and discrimination.

Methods

The conclusions drawn within this report stem from an extensive survey conducted among Muslim student youth, ages 9-18, in New York. Our organization facilitated the survey through two primary channels: respondents were offered the option to complete the questionnaire via Google Forms or in hard copy format, depending upon their accessibility and the distribution channels employed. The online platform utilized for this purpose was Google Forms, with the survey disseminated through a hyperlink. Community engagement for survey participation was promoted through various channels, including email communication, social media outreach, text messaging, and integration into 'Anti-Bullying' training sessions and other community events. The survey consisted of 25 questions broken down into four sections:

- Background and demographic information of respondents,
- Experiences of bullying perpetrated by peers and bystanders,
- Incidents of bullying involving administrative figures, and
- Reporting mechanisms.

The validated surveys were restricted to Muslim students of ages 9-18 who attended non-Islamic schools, which included NYC public schools, charter schools, and non-Islamic private schools. Due to logistical limitations, the survey was only administered in English, thereby missing portions of the Muslim student youth community who may not read or speak the language. For questions that were skipped or otherwise not completed by a respondent, the percentages given reflect the number of only those who answered. Most questions were closed-ended. Some questions allowed respondents to select "other" and provide feedback if the pre-populated choices did not sufficiently apply to their responses. In conducting a qualitative review of the descriptions provided in the "other" field, re-coding was administered in circumstances where the answer describes one of the pre-populated choices. The survey questions were not restricted to a time frame.

Note: Many survey questions allowed participants to select multiple responses. Therefore, the percentages of some questions reported do not sum to 100% as they do not represent the proportion of participants who selected a single response over another. Instead, these percentages reflect the frequency and probability of each choice being selected by participants who answered that particular question.

Definitions:

- **Bullying:** The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or online.
- **Islamophobia:** A fear, hatred, or prejudice toward Islam and Muslims that results in a pattern of discrimination and oppression.
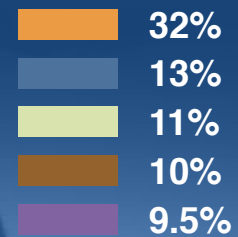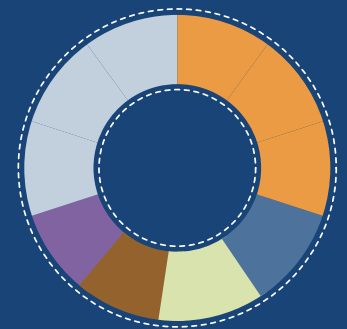
SPECIAL NOTE ON PALESTINE

A notable surge in anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian sentiment within the fabric of New York City emerged when the genocide in Gaza erupted in October 2023. This escalation manifested a disturbing increase in hate crimes, encompassing physical assaults, verbal abuse, and the suppression of any solidarity with Palestine, which have notably seeped into educational settings. In 2023 alone, CAIR-NY received 555 requests for legal assistance, with **43%** directly linked to Palestinian solidarity, highlighting the urgency of this issue. The trend against Pro-Palestinian solidarity has continued in the first half of 2024 with vicious persistence. The disparity in treatment toward students and educators expressing even minimal pro-Palestinian solidarity has been stark, resulting in suspensions, disciplinary actions, and even law enforcement questioning. NY schools have been suppressing speech supporting Palestinian rights, failing to protect Palestinian, Middle Eastern, Arab, South Asian, and Muslim students and staff. This teaches young people the dangerous lesson that their voices, identities, and experiences are not valued or welcomed in schools.

1 Our survey included an optional question about events in Palestine that was added after the survey was launched and was already being distributed. As a result, the number of responses to this question was lower than the overall sample, with 168 students responding.

2 As a result of students voicing their opinions on Palestine, **32%** of students said they experienced school silencing, **13%** said they experienced unwanted attention from school staff, **11%** said they experienced unwanted attention from authorities, **10%** said they experienced online harassment/doxing, **9.5 %** said they experienced social isolation.

🟧	**32%**
🟦	**13%**
🟩	**11%**
🟫	**10%**
🟪	**9.5%**

Demographics

Age

5.0% (Age 9)		**10.4%** (Age 14)	
5.8% (Age 10)		**11.2%** (Age 15)	
9.5% (Age 11)		**16.6%** (Age 16)	
11.6% (Age 12)		**15.4%** (Age 17)	
8.3% (Age 13)		**6.2%** (Age 18)	

Gender

46.8% Male
53.2% Female

Kind of School

3.8% Non-Islamic Private
4.6% Charter School
91.7% Public School

County

- Bronx
- New York
- Richmond
- Kings
- Queens
- Nassau
- Suffolk

2.2%

11.5%

45.5%

15.8%

4.4%

13.7%

2.4%

***4.4%**
Other Counties

0.1%
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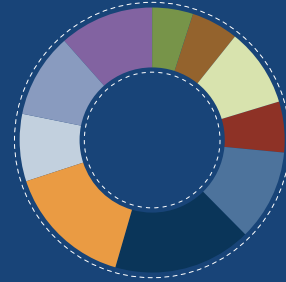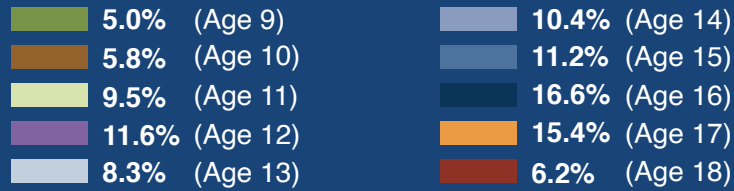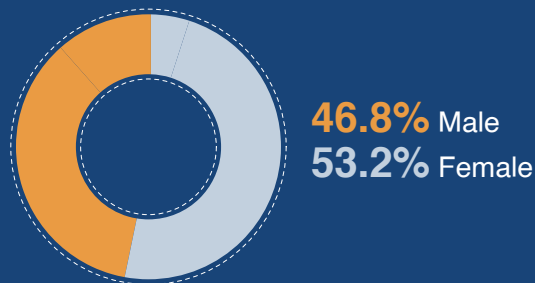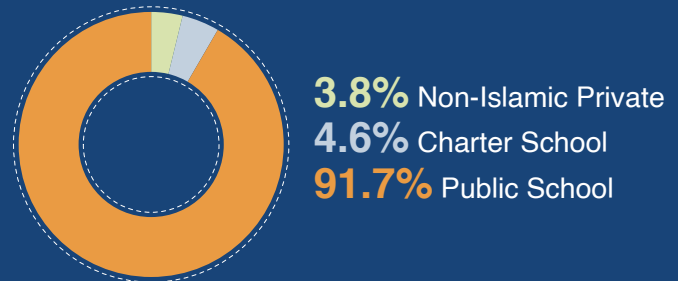
Survey Results
Peer-to-Peer Bullying

Out of the 500 Muslim students that participated in this survey, **58.2%** said that they were bullied for being Muslim.

- "No" they were not bullied for being Muslim
- "Yes" they were bullied for being Muslim

Out of the students that said they were bullied for being Muslim, **23.9%** said they were often or very often bullied, **17%** said they sometimes were bullied, and **59.2%** said they were rarely bullied. This means that almost half the students experienced bullying at a frequent or somewhat frequent rate.
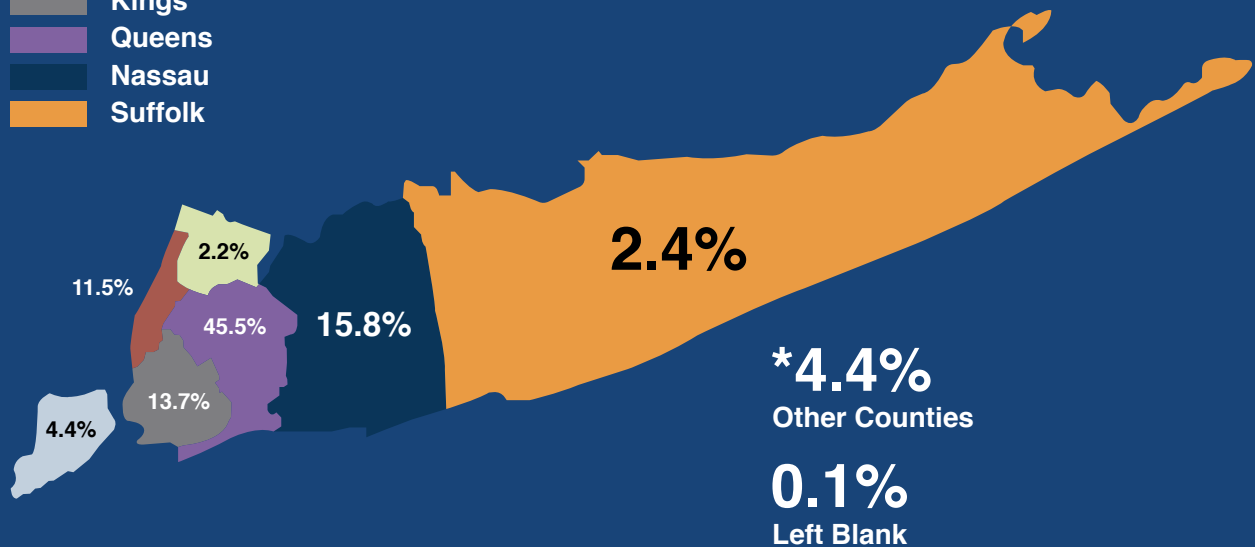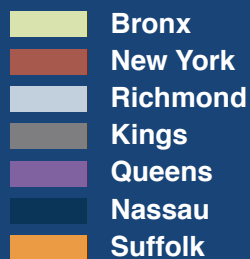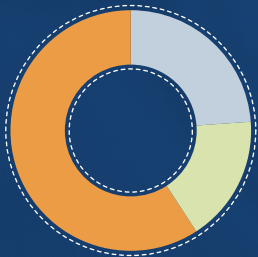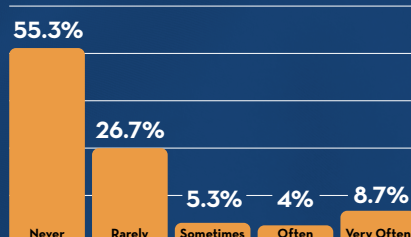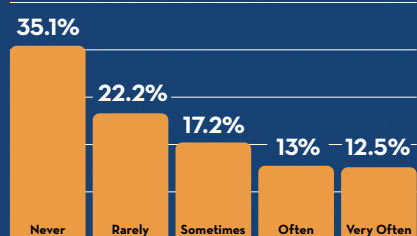
- Often or very often
- Sometimes
- Rarely

For the students who responded yes to having been bullied, **47.5%** checked off that they were made fun of, called names, or insulted, **15.3%** said that they were bullied online, **15%** said they were purposely excluded from activities, and **15.7%** said that they were threatened with harm and/or physically harmed.

47.5% MADE FUN OF, CALLED NAMES, OR INSULTED
15.3% BULLIED ONLINE
15% PURPOSELY EXCLUDED FROM ACTIVITIES
15.7% THREATENED WITH HARM AND/OR PHYSICALLY HARMED

36% Never
27.8% Rarely
20.4% Sometimes
7.1% Often
8.7% Very Often
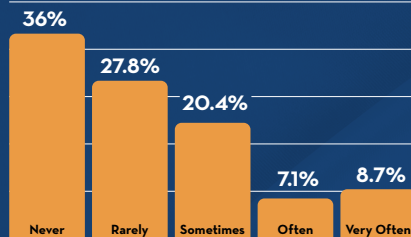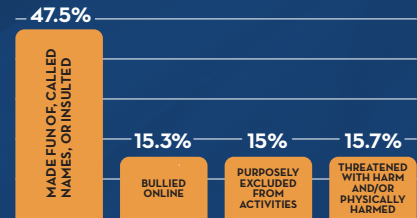
64% of Muslim students said that they have witnessed another Muslim student at school being bullied by another student at least once, while **36%** said they have never witnessed another Muslim student at school being bullied.

64.9% of students said that they have at least once encountered other students at their school make offensive comments or posts about Islam or Muslims online, while **35.1%** have said they have never encountered other students at their school make offensive comments or posts about Islam or Muslims online.

35.1% Never
22.2% Rarely
17.2% Sometimes
13% Often
12.5% Very Often

55.3% Never
26.7% Rarely
5.3% Sometimes
4% Often
8.7% Very Often

Out of those that said they wear hijab, **44.7%** said they had their hijab tugged, pulled, or in any way offensively touched by another student at least once, while **55.3%** said they never had their hijab tugged, pulled, or in any way offensively touched by another student.

Survey Results
Adult-to-Student Bullying

Out of the 500 respondents to this survey, **12.9%** said that a teacher, administrator, or other adult at their school bullied them because they were Muslim.

29.1% of students said they had a teacher, administrator, or other adult at their school who acted or made offensive comments about Islam or Muslims.

Out of those who responded yes to having had a teacher, administrator, or another adult at their school who acted or made offensive comments about Islam or Muslims, **66.4%** said the offensive comments were made in general, **60.9%** said they were presented or taught material that was offensive to Islam or Muslims, and **33%** said they have witnessed a teacher, administrator, or other adults at their school make offensive comments towards another Muslim student.

Survey Results
# Reporting of Bullying Incidents

Out of those that responded yes to having been bullied, **74.6%** said they didn't report to an adult at school that they were bullied for being Muslim by another student.

74.6%

60.9%

60.9% of those who did not report to an adult that they were bullied for being Muslim by another student said it was because they did not think it would make a difference.

Students who did not report bullying incidents checked off the reasons why they chose not to report to an adult. **60.9%** said it was because they did not think it would make a difference, **55.4%** are afraid that reporting will make it worse, **42.7%** aren't comfortable reporting, and **12.7%** don't know who to report to.

60.9% NO DIFFRENCE
55.4% MAKE WORSE
42.7% AREN'T COMFORTABLE
12.7% DON'T KNOW
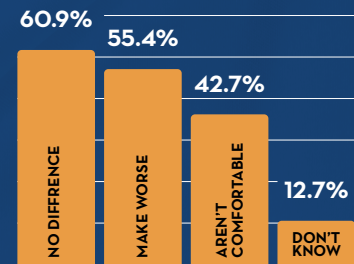
79.4%

79.4% said they did not report a teacher, administrator, or other adult at the school who made offensive comments about Islam or Muslims.

Out of those bullied by peers or an adult, **43%** said they never asked for help.

43%

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. For NY Public Schools:

Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Policies:

Anti-bullying policies should include the creation of a dedicated task force to address bullying based on religion, with a particular focus on Islamophobia. Current policies often group all social characteristics together without detailing the specific types of bullying associated with each category, such as race, ethnicity, and religion. This task force would be responsible for identifying and addressing the unique forms of bullying that Muslim students face. It is crucial for the task force to develop detailed guidelines and intervention strategies tailored to combat Islamophobia specifically. Additionally, the task force must include Muslim stakeholders who have a deep understanding of these issues. The existence and activities of this task force must be well-publicized in all schools and made accessible to students, parents, and staff to ensure comprehensive awareness and understanding.

Training and Professional Development:

Mandate regular training for all school staff on cultural competency, anti-bullying strategies, and addressing Islamophobia, incorporating workshops and seminars led by experts on Islam and community stakeholders.

Support and Reporting Mechanisms:

Create a clear, confidential, and accessible reporting system for students and parents to report incidents of bullying. Implement a bullying report form that is completely secure and handled by a specific team of unbiased administrators. This form should be handled with the utmost seriousness, as bullying can occur at all levels, from peers to adults at school. This system would hold higher-ups at schools accountable. Additionally, establish a dedicated task force or support team within the department to handle reports of religious-based bullying and provide support to victims. Furthermore, investigations must include written communication to the students and parents involved, with regular updates provided through completion.

Parental Involvement in Serious Investigations

Any investigation that can lead to suspension or law enforcement questioning must include the parents or guardians from the onset. Students should not be questioned about serious allegations without the presence of a parent or guardian to ensure their rights and well-being are protected.

Curriculum Inclusion:

Integrate lessons on religious diversity that emphasize the history and contributions of Muslim communities. Ensure that the curriculum is presented inclusively, avoiding stereotypes and generalizations, and addressing various subjects like current events, history, film, religion, and other subjects with sensitivity and accuracy. Collaborate with key stakeholders from the Muslim community to develop and review the curriculum, ensuring it accurately reflects Islamic principles and practices. Additionally, promote events and activities that celebrate multiculturalism and religious diversity, such as interfaith dialogues and cultural heritage days, to foster a better understanding of Islam and Muslims within school communities and deter harmful stereotypes that can lead to bullying.

Community Engagement:

Partner with local Muslim organizations and community leaders to ensure the voices of Muslim students and their families are heard and respected. Organize community forums and town hall meetings to discuss issues of bullying and Islamophobia, fostering a collaborative approach to solutions.

Make Data Public

Make the data on disciplinary actions publicly available while maintaining the anonymity of individual students. This data should include detailed records of disciplinary measures taken, the reasons for these actions, and a demographic breakdown showing the racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of students subjected to these actions. Comparative statistics should highlight disparities between Muslim students, students of color, and other students, with additional context provided regarding the circumstances leading to disciplinary actions. The objectives are to ensure transparency, hold school administrations accountable for fair treatment, and provide a data-driven foundation for equitable policy-making. Implementation involves systematic data collection, anonymization for privacy protection, and regular updates to track progress.

II. For Educators:

Create an Inclusive Classroom Environment:

Students should not feel targeted due to their identity. Encourage respect and understanding by including diverse perspectives in teaching materials and discussions. Display materials (e.g., posters, books) that reflect diverse cultures and religions, including Islam, to promote a welcoming environment. Review your curriculum carefully and critically, with an eye toward religious and cultural sensitivity. Terminology that degrades groups of people based on faith, national origin, immigration status, race, or other protected classes should not be used.

Address Bullying Promptly:

Act promptly when witnessing or being informed of bullying incidents. Investigations should be thorough, allowing both sides to be heard without bias. Implement restorative justice practices to address the incident, such as facilitated dialogues where both parties can communicate openly in a controlled and safe environment. Consider using peer mediation programs in intermediate schools and high schools to encourage students to resolve conflicts collaboratively.

Foster Safe Spaces for Diverse Perspectives:

Hold regular classroom meetings to discuss bullying, its effects, and the importance of standing against it, fostering an ongoing dialogue. Promote a culture in which diverse viewpoints can be heard, agreed with, or disagreed with in a respectful manner.

Cultural Competency Training:

Continuously educate yourself on cultural competency and learn to recognize the discriminatory bias, stereotypes, and tropes that affect Muslim students. Partner with CAIR-NY or other reputable Islamic organizations to perform training for staff and age-appropriate anti-bullying workshops for students.

Promote Reporting Mechanisms:

Share information with parents and students repeatedly throughout the year on how to report bullying and discrimination. Be sensitive to language accessibility and the digital divide. Ensure that parents and students know their complaints will be taken seriously without fear of retaliation.

III. For Parents/Guardians:

Maintain an Open Line of Communication:

Always check in with your child by asking how their school day is. Talk about bullying in general, but also ask specific questions about their experiences with bullying and discrimination in school. For example, ask your child, "Have you ever experienced or witnessed bullying" or "Has an adult at your school ever said anything that made you feel targeted or unsafe?" These conversations help build trust and make it easier for your child to share with you when something actually happens.

Immediately Report Any Incident of Bullying to the School:

Review your child's school's bullying policies and follow the procedures for reporting it. If a school or district fails to inform parents of their Code of Conduct regarding bullying or posting its anti-bullying policies online, they are in violation of New York's Dignity for All Students Act (DASA). Insist that a formal report is filed. Once you report the incident to the school and district, the school is required to investigate and provide recourse. Following up is crucial to ensure that your child gets the support they need from the school.

Document and Record Complaints in Writing

Make sure to keep a record of any complaints and communication with the school/administration in writing. For example, create email threads that record who you spoke with, when the discussion took place, and what was stated by each individual. Clear records of communications are helpful in the event further legal action becomes warranted.

Be Aware of the Signs of Bullying and Discrimination:

Behavior changes may include not wanting to attend school, avoiding social situations, difficulty sleeping, or decreased self-esteem. Physical changes may include unexplained injuries such as bruises or scrapes, frequent headaches or stomach aches, or lost or destroyed personal belongings.

Report Incidents to CAIR-NY:

Incidents of bullying and discrimination should also be reported to the CAIR-NY office. By reporting to CAIR-NY, their legal department can assess the situation, provide advice, and potentially represent the bullying victim and their family to advocate for the victim's rights. Furthermore, by reporting these incidents, CAIR-NY can collect data about bullying of Muslim students and promote policies to ensure our schools stay safe and welcoming for all.