

UNSHAKABLE



THE BULLYING OF MUSLIM STUDENTS AND THE
UNWAVERING MOVEMENT TO ERADICATE IT

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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 a general understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding. CAIR-California is the organization's largest and oldest chapter, with offices in the Greater Los Angeles Area, the Sacramento Valley, San Diego and the San Francisco Bay Area.

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-CA
SCHOOL
BULLYING
REPORT
2017**

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through this report, the California Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-CA) 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 into 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 is the result of a 2016-17 survey that examined how Muslim students felt about their school environment, about identifying as Muslim and the extent of anti-Muslim bullying and harassment students experience. It compares response patterns to a previously conducted 2014 school bullying survey. The survey was conducted by the four CAIR-CA offices covering the Greater Los Angeles, Sacramento Valley, San Diego and San Francisco Bay areas. It reached 1,041 Muslim students between the ages of 11 and 18 who were enrolled in public and private schools statewide.

As incidents of bullying continue to grow, the trust and comfort Muslim students feel at school is deteriorating. This is evidenced by the findings related to the way Muslim students view their school environment. More specifically, key findings of the survey illustrate the decline of school environments for Muslim students where only 69% of respondents feel welcome and respected in school, down from 83% in 2014. Additionally, only 61% of Muslim students feel comfortable engaging in class discussions about Islam and Muslims, which has decreased by 15 percentage points from the 2014 survey where 76% reported feeling comfortable.

One factor leading to discomfort among Muslim students is their peers' negative activity online. Students stated that they frequently view their peers posting negatively about Islam and Muslims. More specifically, 57% of the 2016 survey respondents reported that students from school make offensive statements and posts about Islam and Muslims.



Muslim students also report higher rates of discrimination and bullying than other students. Findings from the 2016 survey show that 53% of respondents report that students at school are made fun of, verbally insulted or abused for being Muslim. This is more than double the national statistic for students being bullied at school.¹

There has also been an increase in discrimination against those that are more visibly Muslim. Another key finding from the 2016 survey is the increase in targeting of Muslim students wearing the hijab, the Islamic head covering. More specifically, 36% of 2016 survey respondents who wear the hijab reported being targets of having their hijab tugged, pulled or other forms of offensive touching. This reveals an increase of 7 percentage points in offensive physical contact with Muslim students wearing the hijab since 2014, where only 29% of respondents reported the same.

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

In addition to showing an increase in peer-to-peer bullying, the survey results show a significant increase in bullying and discrimination from teachers, administrators and other officials from 20% in 2014 to 38% in 2016. Furthermore, 2016 survey respondents report an increase in Muslim students being 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 In 2016, 26% of survey respondents reported being victims of cyberbullying, up from 19% in 2014.

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

MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS OF BULLYING

It is more important now than ever to examine the long-term impacts of bullying on Muslim students. CAIR-CA has conducted school bullying surveys and reports for the past six years and they continue to indicate that Muslim students are twice as likely to be bullied than other students. Bullying has serious and long-lasting or permanent effects on the mental health and overall wellbeing of youth. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), negative effects of bullying may include: depression, anxiety, involvement in interpersonal violence or sexual violence, substance abuse, poor social functioning as well as poor school performance including lower grade point averages, lower standardized test scores and poor attendance.³ Bullied youth experience psychosomatic issues, such as headaches, stomachaches or sleeping problems.⁴

Not only are the effects of bullying detrimental to the victims, bullying also has negative effects on those who observe the bullying of others.⁵ Youth who have observed bullying behavior report significantly more feelings of helplessness and less sense of support from responsible adults than youth who have not witnessed bullying behavior.⁶ It is for that reason that CAIR-CA has expanded the questions on its 2016 Survey in order to also examine the impact on students who witness bullying. For example, the 2016 Survey asked students “[h]as someone you know at your school been made fun of, verbally insulted or verbally abused for being Muslim?” The purpose of the question was to show the extent that other students witness bullying and also the potentially negative implications for those that are observing the bullying, although they are not the targets.

Some insight into the effects of mainstream Islamophobia and the bullying of Muslim students comes from Crisis Text Line, a crisis counseling organization and New York based volunteer group that answers mobile text messages from individuals who are feeling stressed, bullied or in extreme cases suicidal.⁷ Most of these messages are sent by teenagers. Crisis Text Line reported that the number of “conversations referencing being Muslim and feeling bullied, feeling anxious, etc. increased significantly in November [2015] and are trending the same way in December [2015].”⁸ Crisis Text Line attributed the spike in calls to the November



13, 2015 attacks in Paris, the mass shooting in San Bernardino, and the political reaction to the tragedies in the U.S. – most notably from then Republican frontrunner Donald Trump, who has called for a ban on Muslims coming into the country.⁹ A similar increase was reported in June 2016 after the attack in Orlando, Florida.¹⁰ During the Presidential campaign, Crisis Text Line reported a 600% increase in October 2016 and a 900% increase in November 2016, after election results revealed Donald Trump won the presidency, in people saying they were Muslim and experiencing anxiety, bullying, depression or any number of those issues.¹¹

The toll that Islamophobia takes on the mental health of American Muslims is significant and even more substantial for students, who are expected to bear the burden of defending against Islamophobic stereotypes while coping with possible mental distress resulting from bullying.



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 the lesson plans and materials created by Muslim organizations to facilitate the incorporation of curricula about Islam. Educators should utilize specific lesson plans which address common misconceptions about Islam, the history of Muslims in U.S., Muslim contributions to civilizations and commonalities between Islam and other faiths.

Although California schools have made affirmative efforts to reflect the state's diversity in its common core curriculum, much of those changes ignore the need for revising the approach to education about Muslims and Islam.¹³ Unfortunately, many attempts by school districts across the nation to incorporate a more unbiased curriculum of Islam has 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 a 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 of parents and students when contacting CAIR-CA. When institutions ignore or dismiss requests for religious accommodations, they perpetuate the feeling of not belonging among 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 for ensuring 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 for Muslim students include, allowing for alternative uniform during a physical education class and breaks during the school day to carry out prayers and excusing absences due to observance of Eid holidays.



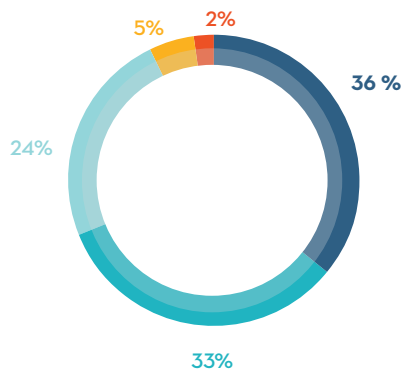
III. SURVEY FINDINGS

IN 2016, CAIR-CA surveyed 1,041 students between the ages of 11 and 18 who were enrolled in public and non-Islamic private schools throughout the state of California. The 2016 survey served as a follow up to the previous two CAIR-CA school bullying surveys from 2014 and 2012. 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 changes in the 2016 survey include reformatting and rewording existing questions and also added 14 more questions. The 2016 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

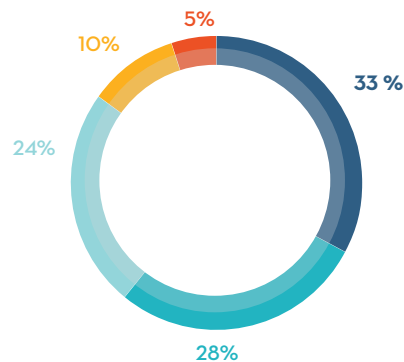


1. I feel safe, welcome and respected in my school.



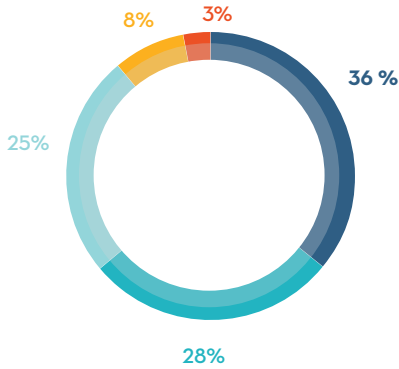
Survey results reveal that students feel less safe, welcome and respected at school. 83% of respondents in 2014 stated they felt safe, respected and welcome whereas only **69%** in the 2016 survey respondents stated the same. The number of students feeling safe, welcome and respected declined 14 percentage points since 2014.

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



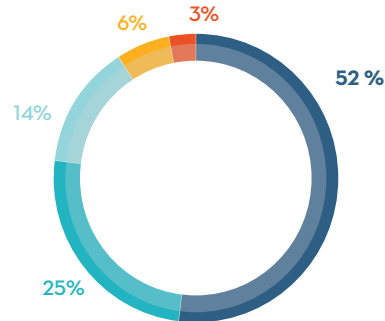
2016 Survey results reveal that Muslim students feel less comfortable participating in class discussion about Islam or Muslims. While 76% of respondents in 2014 stated that they feel comfortable in class discussions about Islam and Muslims, only **61%** of respondents in 2016 responded the same. As such, Muslim students who felt comfortable during class discussions decreased by 15 percentage points.

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



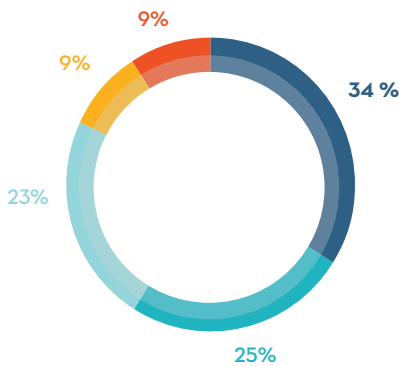
36% of survey respondents state that they do not participate in discussions about Islam and Muslims.

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



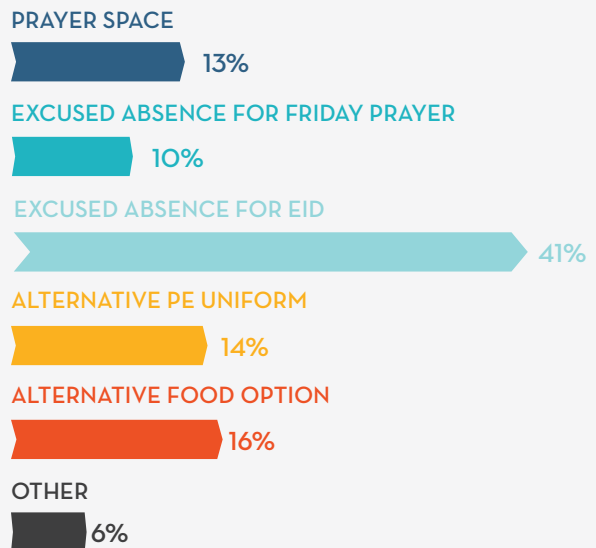
2016 Survey results reveal that Muslim students feel less comfortable letting students know that they are Muslim. While 83% of respondents in 2014 stated that they feel comfortable letting students know that they are Muslim, only 77% of respondents in 2016 responded the same. As such, Muslim students who felt comfortable letting students know that they are Muslim decreased by 6 percentage points.

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



Only 59% of survey respondents feel comfortable approaching teachers and administrators about religious requests.

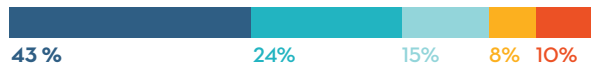
6. My parents or I have requested the following from a teacher, administrator or other official at my school...



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?



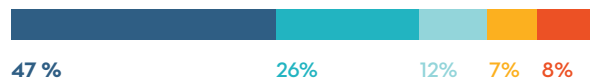
57% of respondents view their peers making offensive statements or posts about Islam and Muslims online.

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?



26% of survey respondents report being victims of cyberbullying up from 19% in 2014.

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



53% of respondents report bullying for being Muslim.

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



19% of the 2016 survey respondents report being physically harmed or harassed at school because they are Muslim, whereas only 9% of respondents experienced the same in 2014. That is an increase by 10 percentage points for students experiencing both physical harm and harassment.

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



19% 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?



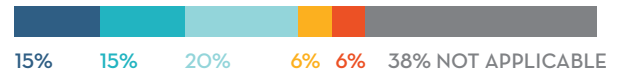
Only 101 of the 1,041 2016 survey respondents answered this question, which revealed that **38%** of Muslim students are targets of offensive comments from school educators, that is an increase by 18 percentage points since 2014, where only 20% of respondents reported the same. This is especially problematic since it implies that students are less likely to want to report—even anonymously—bullying by educators.

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



36% 2016 survey respondents who wear the hijab reported being targets of having their hijab tugged, pulled or other forms of offensive touching. 2016 results reveal an increase of 7 percentage points in offensive physical contact with Muslim students wearing the hijab since 2014, where only 29% of respondents reported the same.

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.



2016 survey results showed that **32%** of students felt their problems were resolved by an adult, whereas 42% of 2014 respondents believed that their problems were solved by an adult. That is a decrease in 10 percentage points.

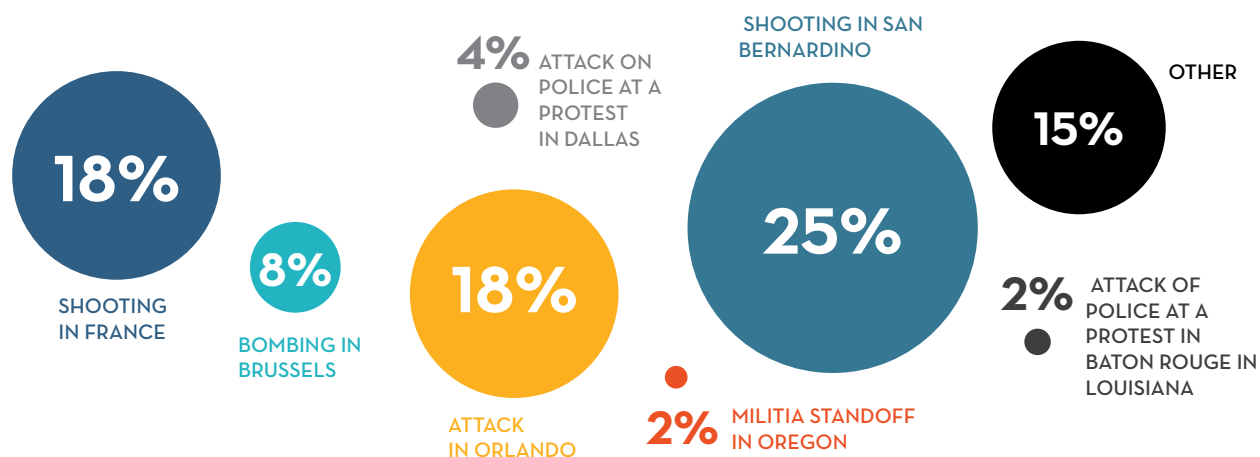




15. When incidents of harassment directed towards Muslims occurs at my school, I...

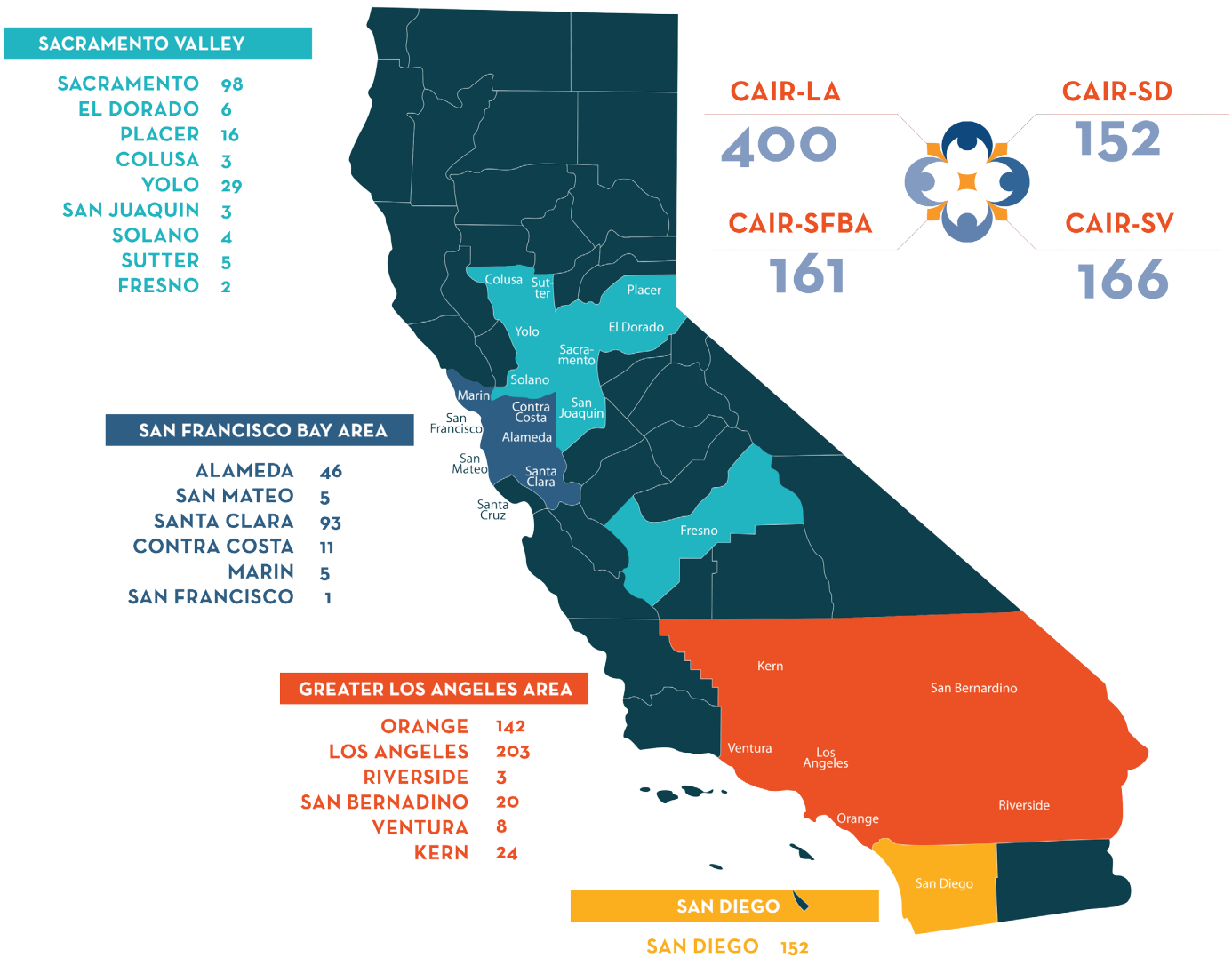


16. Did a student, teacher, administrator or other official at your school approach you after any of the following events?



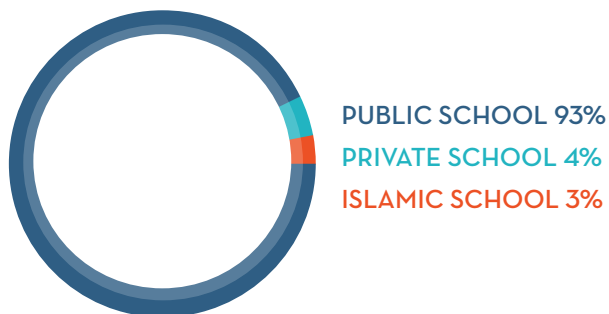
DEMOGRAPHICS

17. Office and Geographic Breakdown

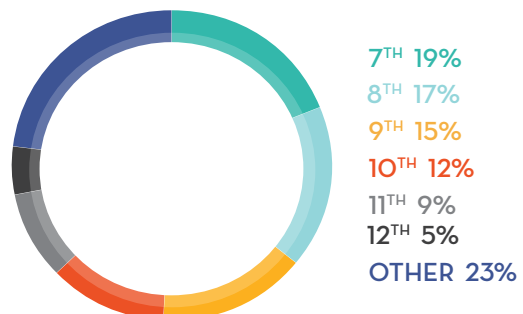


* Of 1,041 survey respondents, only 879 provided geographic information.

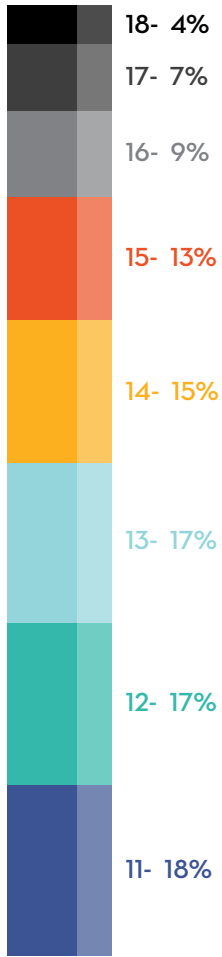
18. What kind of school do you attend?



19. Grade



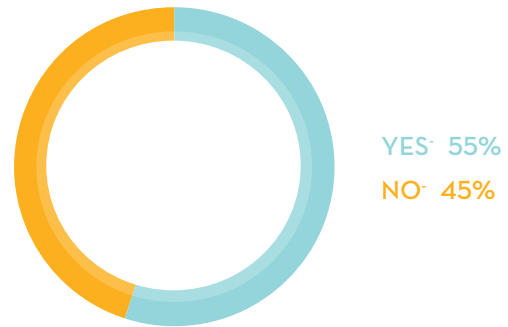
20. Age



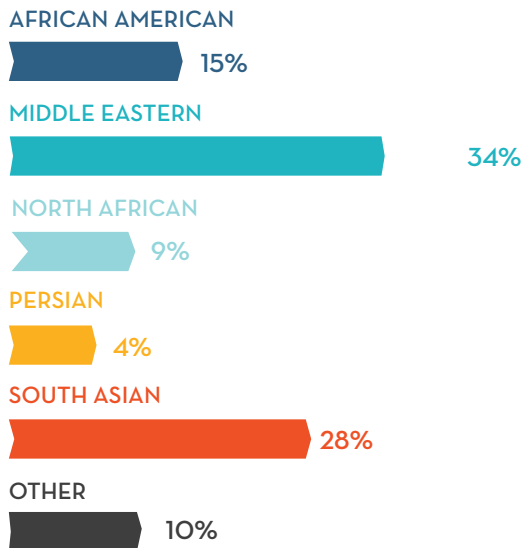
21. Gender



22. Is English a primary language spoken at home?



22. Race/National Origin



MUSLIM STUDENTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

ON WEARING HIJAB

“We would get cussed at and told that we’re hiding a bomb under our hijab.”

“One month someone pulled off my hijab. The next month someone hit the back of my head.”

“There was a girl and she was wearing the hijab, a guy came up to her and said, ‘why do you wear that, do you not have hair?’”

“They would just ask and be curious about my hijab. Some people would make fun of my hijab and call it a towel or say that I am oppressed.”

ON BEING CALLED A TERRORIST

“They say that Trump is going to kick us terrorists out because all we do is ‘Bomb.’”

“They say ‘She’s going to kill us all, she has a bomb.’”

“They make fun of the word ‘Allah’ and ‘salam’ at school. They say, ‘That’s what they say when they blow up the space.’”

“They call me terrorist and when I get frustrated they say ‘you’re going to bomb us and laugh.’”

“Last month a kid called me a terrorist. And another kid called my parents refugees. I was called the N word multiple times.”

ON RESPONDING TO BULLYING

“I usually do nothing and I try not to interfere.”

“Well, I don’t really know how to respond so I explain that I’m not part of ISIS and I won’t bomb them.”

“Try to get them to stop but they usually don’t.”

“I generally just ignore them because I know they don’t know much about Islam, they are just making up false statements, so I just walk away.”

“I try to calmly to explain to them they should get to know Muslims in the community and learn more about Islam before making offensive statements.”

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-CA 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 conducting an assessment of 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 only a reporting one. 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. California 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

to ensure a response from the school. Parents should also report any instances of bullying and discriminatory harassment to their local CAIR-CA office.

LAWMAKERS

While the Trump administration has announced the scaling back of investigations of 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 California 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, currently no federal law directly addresses 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-CA DOES

Students and parents should report incidents of bullying to their local CAIR-CA office. CAIR-CA 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.

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

Upon request, CAIR-CA 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-CA 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-CA if the student is experiencing bullying or discrimination at school. CAIR-CA offers legal services for 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

CALIFORNIA LAWS RELATING TO BULLYING

California Education Code §234 - 234.5 (Safe Place to Learn Act)

California Education Code §32261 - 32262 (Interagency School Safety Demonstration Act of 1985)

California Education Code §32265

California Education Code §32270

California Education Code §32282

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

California Department of Education

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cp/>

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

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