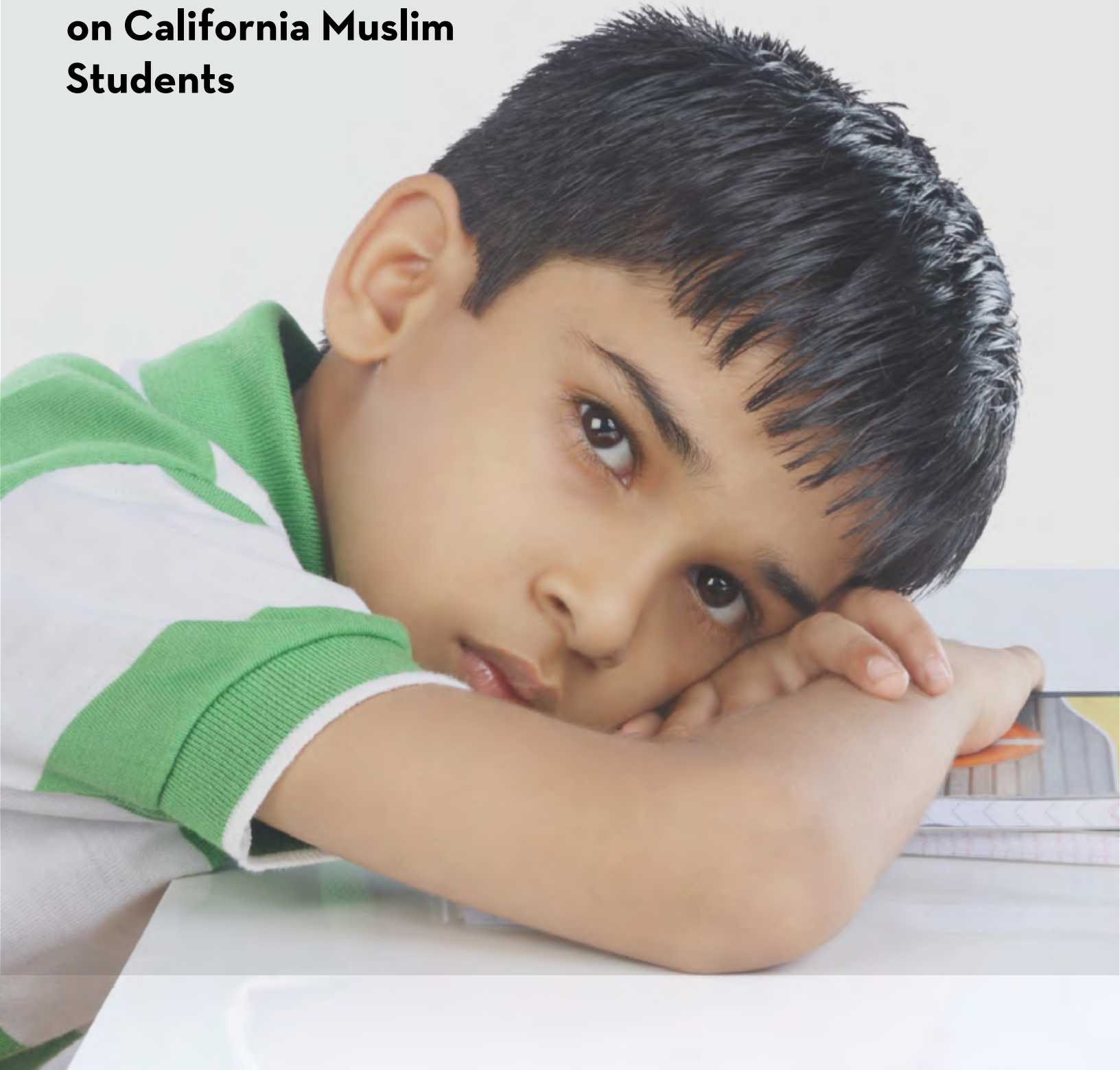# MISLABELED:

The Impact of School Bullying and Discrimination on California Muslim Students

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) 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 Vision: To be a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding.

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through this report, the California chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-CA) seeks to provide context to the socio-political climate in which American Muslims attend school. Specifically, it discusses how Islamophobia,[1] the fear or hatred of Islam and Muslims, in larger society filters into the school environment and manifests as teacher discrimination and student bullying.[2] The consequences of encountering Islamophobia at school are numerous. Muslim students may feel marginalized, disempowered, and begin to internalize negative stereotypes. Minority students who feel disconnected or alienated from the school environment will lack confidence, suffer academically, and fail to fully invest in their future.[3]

The report also presents the results of a 2014 follow-up to a 2012 CAIR-CA survey. The purpose of the survey was twofold, to understand how comfortable American Muslim students felt attending their schools and participating in classroom discussions, and discover to what extent American Muslim students were subjected to bias-based bullying and harassment at school. In 2014 CAIR-CA offices surveyed 621 students statewide. The survey was given to American Muslim students between the ages of 11 and 18 who were enrolled in public and non-Muslim private schools in California.

It is important to keep in mind that this survey looks at the American Muslim community primarily through a religious lens. While the American Muslim community in the United States is extremely diverse in terms of race, national and ethnic origin, being native-born or an immigrant, and socio-economic status, this report does not take into account the intersectionality of these different backgrounds or assess which ones are primarily responsible in shaping the specific experiences of American Muslim students. It provides only a cursory analysis of how those with certain demographic characteristics may experience religion-based student bullying and teacher discrimination. The CAIR-CA survey results demonstrate that the American Muslim students' experience is clearly affected by their religious identity. However, much more work is needed to examine how the convergence of their various identities affects their experience with bullying and discrimination.

Ultimately 55% of the American Muslim students surveyed reported being subjected to some form of bullying based on their religious identity. This is twice as high as the national statistic of students reporting being bullied at school.[4] Many students experienced multiple types of bullying; however, the most common type of bullying American Muslim students faced was verbal at 52%.

CAIR-CA also considered gender-based differences in survey responses. Remarkably, more male students reported experiencing bullying. However, the percentage of females who reported experiencing discrimination by a teacher or administrator was slightly higher. Of the female respondents who wear a *hijab*, the Islamic headscarf, 29% reported being offensively touched by another student, and 27% reported being discriminated by their teacher.

There were also two key findings in the students' responses to questions about their feelings regarding their school environment. The percentage of students who reported feeling that they were comfortable participating in class discussions about Islam or countries where Muslims live decreased

by 4 percentage points, from 80% in 2012 to 76% in 2014. Moreover, only 67% of students felt teachers and administrators were responsive to their religious accommodation requests. American Muslim youth continue to identify student-teacher relations as needing improvement. Many students' comments referenced increased problems in the classroom during discussions about 9/11, mainly due to teachers either failing to address harassment by other students against Muslim students or discriminating against Muslim students themselves.

Through understanding how Islamophobia functions in the school environment, legislators, administrators, educators, and parents can be better prepared to recognize and prevent it. Recommendations on how Congress, textbook publishers, schools, and parents can work to create safe and inclusive school environments include:

- Congress should pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act ("SSIA"), an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, prohibiting bullying and harassment based on a student's religion, race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

- Congress should amend Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include religion as a protected characteristic.

- Textbook publishers should ensure that material discussing Islam and Muslims is current and free of Islamophobic bias.

- Schools should ensure that teachers receive training on how to prevent bullying and harassment in their classrooms.

- Teachers should learn how to teach in diverse and multicultural classrooms and create inclusive environments by becoming familiar with the various religious identities of their students in addition to their racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities.

- Teachers should also be particularly sensitive to lesson plans about Islam, 9/11, and current global politics that may impact American Muslims, and refrain from making their American Muslim students feel as though they must answer for all Muslims.

- Parents should look for signs of bullying and harassment in their children who may not want to raise awareness of the problems they are encountering.

- Parents should know and immediately assert their children's right to learn in a bias-free environment.

We hope that the American public continues striving to understand Islam, and the dangers posed by falling victim to fear and hatred not only to American Muslim students, but to society at large.

UNDERSTANDING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Before 9/11, the general attitude toward Islam in America was one of tolerance, or at worst, indifference. Islamophobia, understood as a close-minded prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims, was a relatively uncommon phenomenon. According to hate crime statistics published by the FBI, there were only 33 religion-based hate crimes committed against Muslims in 2000.[5] However, by the end of 2001, the shock of 9/11 coupled with inaccurate and often Islamophobic portrayals of Islam by misinformed media outlets, caused that statistic to rise to 546, an increase of "more than 1,600 percent."[6] These crimes included harassment and physical assaults of Muslims, as well as vandalism of personal property and religious spaces belonging to Muslims. Although these statistics have trailed downward in the past decade, they are nowhere near their pre-9/11 figures. In its most recent report, the FBI announced that 165 such offenses were carried out against Muslims.[7]

However, progress has been one-dimensional as anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia in the United States continues to hold strong.[8] This is in large part due to the media's tendency to emphasize coverage portraying American Muslims as anti-American, anti-liberal, or simply uncivilized and violent. In doing so, they help perpetuate false stereotypes and conflate the tenets of Islam with the actions of radicals.

"Your existence is always interrogated, investigated and questioned."

-Wajahat Ali

In recent years the media has exemplified an eagerness to cast suspicion upon Muslims in the event of violent attacks, long before details of the perpetrators have even come to light, as was seen in coverage of the 2011 Oslo attacks in Norway. Several media personalities, including some from the Washington Post and CNN, were quick to suggest that Muslims were responsible for the attacks.[9] However, it was later revealed that the attacks were carried out by Norwegian national and white supremacist Anders Behring Breivik. Breivik emailed his Islamophobic manifesto titled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence* to hundreds of people just hours before bombing Oslo government buildings and carrying out a mass shooting, killing 69 youth, many of whom were Muslim, attending a youth camp. Such rushes to judgment by the media not only feed into Islamophobic sentiments, but also pose dangers for Muslims who can become direct or indirect targets of hate speech and crimes.

The political discourse of our nation is also rife with Islamophobia, often used by some candidates during elections to gain votes through fear-mongering,[10] discredit their opponents, and fundraise for their campaigns.[11] Recently, in the 2016 cycle of presidential campaigns, two Republican frontrunners unabashedly made derogatory remarks about Islam and Muslims. During a town hall event in Rochester, New Hampshire, famed businessman and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump failed to correct a number of Islamophobic comments made by a supporter who said, "We have a problem in this country. It's called Muslims. You know our current president is one. You know he's not even an American. Anyway, we have training camps growing where they want to kill us. That's my question: When can we get rid of them?" Instead of calling out the supporter for his hateful rhetoric and distancing himself from the comments, Trump responded, "We're going to be looking at that and many other things."[12] Subsequently, when questioned by reporters, Trump was unapologetic and continued to defend his response.[13] In the same month, in an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press," GOP presidential candidate Dr. Ben Carson stated that he "does not advocate" for a Muslim to be president of the United States because he believes Islam to be incompatible with the Constitution.[14]

The mental toll Islamophobia takes on American Muslims who feel they must constantly defend their religion and beliefs is rarely discussed. The stigma associated with being Muslim in America is very real and is best described by Wajahat Ali, co-host of Al Jazeera America's The Stream, who states that as a Muslim in America, "Your existence is always interrogated, investigated and questioned."[15] It is not surprising that American Muslims feel this way when their government allows congressional hearings on Muslim radicalization and continues to perpetuate federal law enforcement policies that allow broad based surveillance and profiling of their communities.[16] Government policies, media portrayal, and the inability to make their voices heard often lead American Muslims to feel disempowered, marginalized, and criminalized.

Islamophobia, however, is not an organic development of recent history. Rather, Islamophobia's rise can be attributed to a small network of organizations and people who have found fear-mongering to be a lucrative industry. Thirty-seven groups comprise the core of this network, and between 2008 and 2011 these groups generated over $119 million in revenue with key individuals benefitting from large salaries, making it their primary job to vilify Islam.[17]

WHY STUDENTS DON'T REPORT BULLYING

Fear

"I was scared that the school would not agree with me."

"It'll make things worse."

Embarrassment

"I felt embarrassed telling."

"I was scared and embarrassed."

"I don't want anyone to know."

Thinking It Was A Joke

"I didn't think it was a big deal."

"It was just a joke."

*"It was a joke, but had some connotation of racial profiling."*

ISLAMOPHOBIA AT SCHOOL

With such strong and far-reaching support behind Islamophobia, it is expected that its harmful effects are particularly felt by American Muslim youth. The school environment essentially functions as a "microcosm of society, reflect[ing] the narrow and negative representations of Muslims in the wider world."[18] Accordingly, the Islamophobic stereotype that all Muslims are terrorists is what seeped into the school environment in Irving, Texas, in September of this year, and allowed a 14 year-old American Muslim boy to be arrested and charged for bringing a clock to school. The student, Ahmed Muhammad, brought a homemade clock to school to show off to his engineering teacher.[19] Due to Ahmed's race and religion, school authorities automatically assumed the project was a bomb and called law enforcement. The incident highlights how, as a consequence of Islamophobia, American Muslim students do not have the academic freedom to pursue their interests without being subject to racism and bigotry. Other ways in which Islamophobia manifests at school is in the form of bullying, including teasing, name-calling, taunting, or even physical harm.[20] Verbal assaults are the most common, specifically those referencing bombs or calling American Muslim students terrorists.[21]

Since 9/11 there have been many religion-based bias incidents against American Muslim youth. In addition to student bullying, American Muslim students have had to deal with the difficult problem of discrimination at the hands of their teachers. At Galileo Academy of Science & Technology in San Francisco in 2004, a boy approached a 17 year-old *hijab*-wearing student during lunch and began

Bullying (v.):

Unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

screaming, "Her father is bin Laden! She's going to blow up the school; she's going to blow it up! She has a bomb under her sweater! Everybody run, this jihad[i] girl is going to kill us!" When the Muslim student complained to her teacher, she was told that the male student had a right to express himself, especially since Muslims had caused a lot of problems in the world.[22] A similar situation involving a teacher occurred in March of this year when a 14 year-old Muslim student at Cypress Bay High School in Florida was called a "rag-head Taliban" by an instructor.[23] Such discrimination by teachers can be detrimental to Muslim youth, who as members of a minority may feel further sidelined and alienated, causing them to self-identify as "the other." In the long term, this notion of being seen as an outsider in the school community can lead to poor academic performance and a negative self-image.[24]

Hijab-wearing students in particular are targets of Islamophobia in school settings as the *hijab* is an obvious and apparent symbol of their faith. Girls who wear the *hijab* are often stereotyped on a regular basis as uneducated or oppressed for wearing it and must constantly affirm to

55%
of California
Muslim students
have been
bullied.
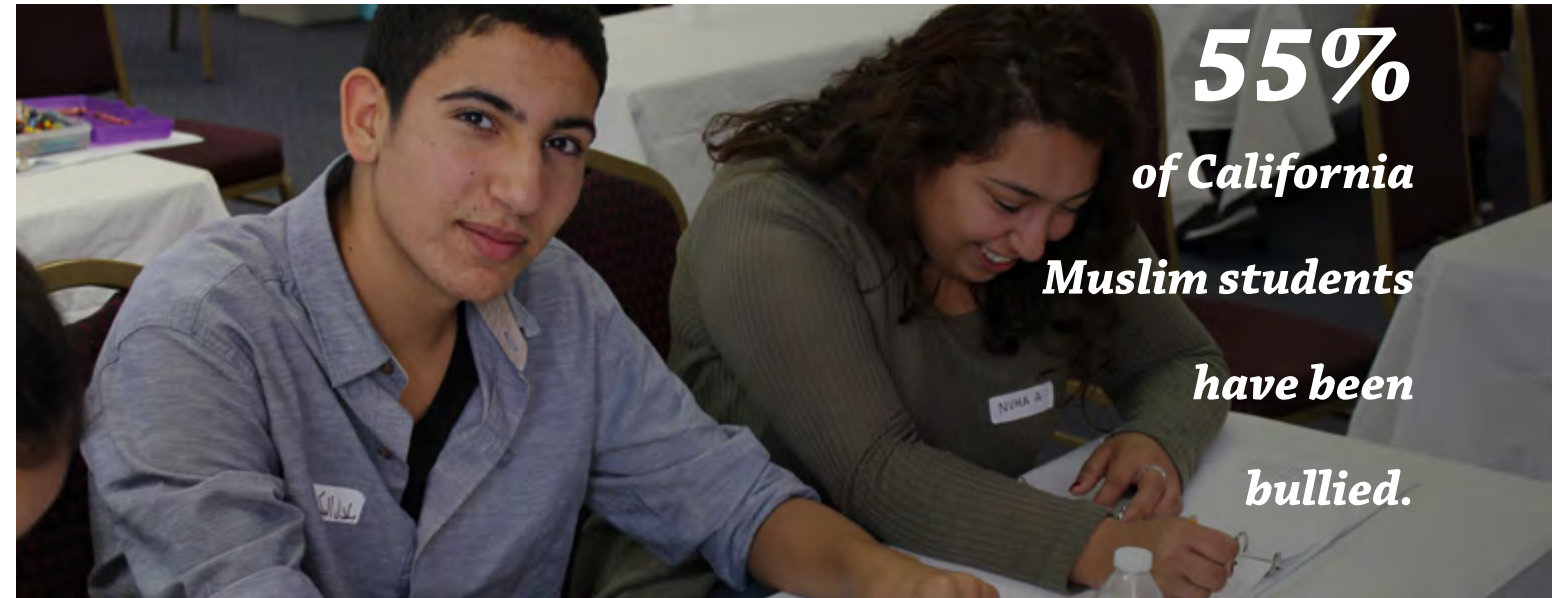
others that it is their choice to wear it.[25] Reports also suggest that students wearing the *hijab* are more likely to be placed in lower academic levels than those who do not.[26] In addition, schools may fail to accommodate them in certain activities, such as not providing single-sex swimming classes or not allowing them to wear long pants during Physical Education classes.[27] This ultimately leads to their exclusion from activities and further marginalizes the girls from their fellow students. Negative stereotypes and attitudes such as these can prove exhausting as well as detrimental to identity formation, self-confidence, and future success.[28]

Classroom discussions on Islam, the Middle East, and terrorism are another area where American Muslim students can feel marginalized. When these topics arise in a classroom setting, American Muslim students are often put in an uncomfortable situation of defending their beliefs, correcting misconceptions relating to them, or being perceived as unpatriotic.[29] This holds especially true in situations such as the one that arose at Foster High School in Texas earlier this year when a teacher distributed an eight page pamphlet titled "Islam/Radical Islam (Did You Know)." The pamphlet alluded to Islam being a violent religion that preaches an "ideology of war."[30] There have also been instances of students being disciplined for speaking up and contesting a view held by a teacher.[31]

Another nationally publicized case highlighting Islamophobia's pervasiveness in school environments occurred in March 2015 at the Pine Bush High School in New York.[32] As part of National Foreign Language Week at the school, a student recited the American Pledge of Allegiance in Arabic over the school's intercom. Several students quickly condemned this as an unpatriotic act causing the principal to issue an apology for allowing the pledge to be recited in a language other than English. In addition, the senior class president was reprimanded for allowing the pledge to be recited in Arabic[33] and the student who recited the pledge was called "a terrorist" and told to "go to the Middle East."[34] This incident demonstrates that many see Islam, Arabic, and terrorism as being synonymous.

American Muslim students who witness such Islamophobic responses can feel alienated and may disengage from future school activities.[35] This response may be compounded if figures of authority

Thinking It Won't Help

"It's not like it's going to solve anything."

"I felt like they wouldn't care."

"They don't care, they just make it worse, and they don't understand me nor connect."

"Insults towards me, as a Muslim, and towards my religion are given jokingly therefore making it difficult to present it as a serious case of bullying."

"Because it is pointless, since it will just happen again and again."

Distrust of Adults

"Because I don't feel comfortable w/an administrator and I don't have a good relationship with my parents."

"I don't think my [teachers and administrators] respect me."

"At the time, I didn't want my teacher to get mad at me. Plus I didn't want to make it into a bigger issue."

turn a blind eye to or even support the actions targeting the students.[36] As a direct result of forcing American Muslim students to suppress their culture and native language, the inclusion of which has been proven to help minority students perform better at school, their academic success may suffer and otherwise successful American Muslim students may not reach their full potential. [37]

In less noticeable ways, Islamophobia can also seep into the school environment through outdated or inaccurate textbooks that paint Muslims and Islam as antiquated and incompatible with Western values.[38] Such negative stereotypes, as well as those perpetuated by the media, can have long-term effects on Muslim students and have a ripple effect on their academic success.[39] Furthermore, studies show that constant exposure to negative stereotypes about one's identity can lead to inferiority anxiety.[40] This sense of inferiority can be internalized, becoming a permanent part of a student's personality and further hindering his or her success.[41]

Schools exist to educate, empower, and prepare students to navigate the world. However, when students are discriminated against, bullied, and/or marginalized, they suffer academically and miss out on developing the skills and confidence needed to succeed. As minority students, American Muslim youth are more susceptible to the long term effects of these types of behaviors. As such, a dedicated effort must be made to report and expunge Islamophobia and Islamophobic rhetoric from schools.

MUSLIM YOUTH AT SCHOOL SURVEY FINDINGS

In 2014 CAIR-CA surveyed 621 students between the ages of 11 and 18 who were enrolled in public and non-Muslim private schools throughout the state of California. The survey was as a follow-up to a 2012 survey about the experience of American Muslim youth at school. The purpose of the survey was to understand how comfortable American Muslim students felt attending their schools and participating in classroom discussions about Islam and Muslims. CAIR-CA also sought to discover to what extent American Muslim students were subjected

29%
of hijab-wearing students experienced offensive touching or pulling of their hijab.

to bias-based bullying and harassment at school. Some modifications were made to the 2012 survey in hopes of obtaining more meaningful responses in 2014. These changes included reformatting or rewording existing questions to clarify their purpose and the addition of four new questions.

The 2014 survey was divided into two main sections. The first section asked students how they perceived their school environment through the frame of their religious identity. The second part questioned whether students were experiencing bullying by their peers and discrimination by teachers. It also examined how students reacted to instances of bullying and discrimination, whether they reported it, took matters into their own hands, or did nothing.

SECTION 1: SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Questions 1 through 4 asked students whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements posed to them.

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

Similar to 2012, a majority of students felt safe at school.

83% AGREE
8% UNSURE
8% DISAGREE
1% NO RESPONSE

2. I am comfortable participating in class discussions about Islam or countries where Muslims live.

The number of students who felt comfortable participating in class discussions about Islam and Muslims decreased by 4 percentage points from the previous survey, with more students feeling unsure or uncomfortable.

76% AGREE
14% UNSURE
9% DISAGREE
1% NO RESPONSE
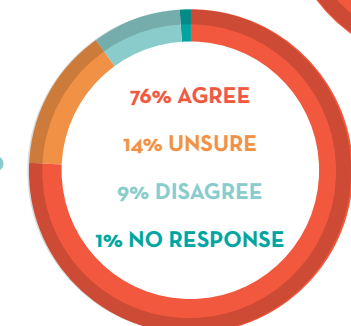
3. My teachers and administrators are responsive to my religious needs (e.g. they give me time for prayer, excused absence for Eid, alternative food options, allow me to wear a different P.E. uniform, etc.).

This statement was not included in the previous survey. Only 67% of students believe that schools are responsive to requests for religious accommodation.

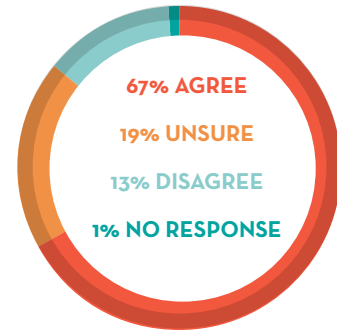67% AGREE
19% UNSURE
13% DISAGREE
1% NO RESPONSE

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

This question was slightly modified; the second part of the statement that read "and talking about Islam outside of the classroom" was dropped. Similar to the 2012 survey, most students felt comfortable expressing their Muslim identity to their peers.

83% AGREE
11% UNSURE
5% DISAGREE
1% NO RESPONSE
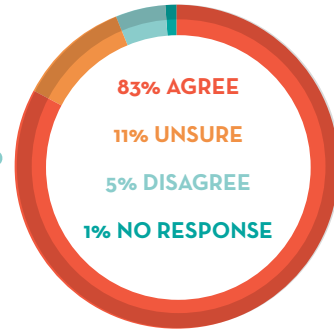
SECTION 2: BULLYING AND DISCRIMINATION

Questions 5 through 8 asked students if they had experienced either verbal, physical, or cyberbullying because of their religion. Each question addressed a specific type of bullying. Many students experienced multiple types of bullying, with 55% experiencing at least one form. This is 25-30 percentage points higher than the national average of students who have reported bullying.[42] The most common type of bullying experienced by American Muslim students was verbal.

Question 9 asked students whether they had experienced offensive comments by school administrators, teachers, and other staff. This question was added to the 2014 survey after CAIR-CA received many reports of discrimination by school personnel. This question provided a starting point to help determine the scale of the problem.

Question 10 asked students how they responded to bullying and discrimination; particularly whether they reported incidents to a trusted adult or fought and verbally insulted students in retaliation. Questions 11 and 12 examined whether students felt any of these methods worked.

1 in 5

students experienced discrimination by a school staff member.
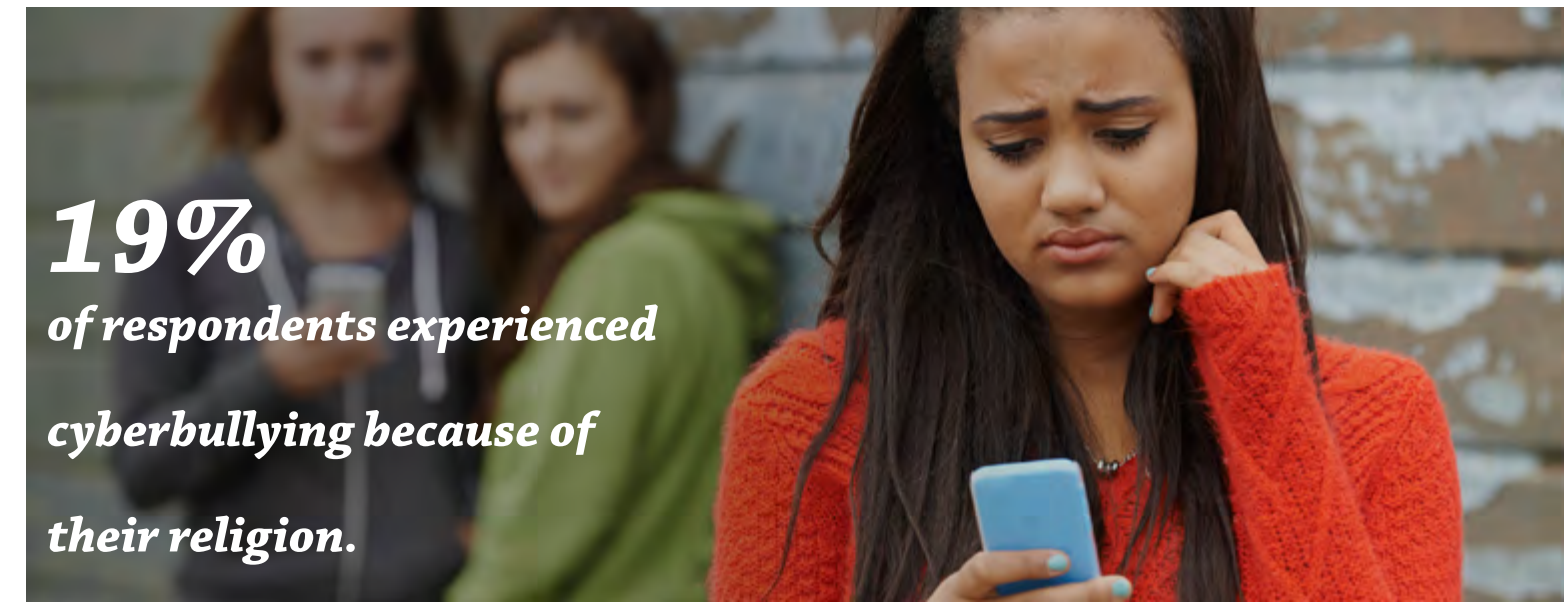
19%
of respondents experienced cyberbullying because of their religion.

5. Has a student at school verbally insulted or abused you because of your religion?

52% of all respondents experienced verbal abuse as a result of their religion. This is a two percentage point increase from 2012.

46% NEVER
30% 1-2 TIMES A YEAR
12% 3-6 TIMES A YEAR
6% ONCE A MONTH
4% ONCE A WEEK
2% NO RESPONSE

6. Has a student at school physically harmed or harassed you because of your religion?

Only 9% of students responded that they had been physically bullied because of their religion. This is similar to the 10% reported in 2012.

89% NEVER
6% 1-2 TIMES A YEAR
2% 3-6 TIMES A YEAR
1% ONCE A MONTH
2% NO RESPONSE

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

Of the female respondents that stated this question applied to them, 29% experienced offensive touching or pulling of their *hijab*.

71% NEVER
22% 1-2 TIMES A YEAR
4% 3-6 TIMES A YEAR
2% ONCE A MONTH
1% ONCE A WEEK

Distrust of Adults

"I sometimes don't report the discrimination because the adults don't think it is a big deal and just shrug the issue off. It is too much of a hassle to explain the problem."

"I was afraid they would have their own opinions and give priority to the others. Also, I didn't want any drama that would follow me telling on that person."

"I didn't report the teacher because they might treat me different afterwards, especially grades wise."

"Adults told me to let it go unless they did it more often. Telling any school faculty would have worsened the situation for me because they mostly have the same opinion of Muslims."

Fear of Being Called A Tattletale

"Because students are going to call me a snitch."

"Because I didn't want them to think I'm a tattletale."

8. Has a student from school made offensive comments to you about your religion through e-mail, text message, or on websites and apps like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram?

19% of respondents experienced cyberbullying because of their religion.

- **77% NEVER**
- **11% 1-2 TIMES A YEAR**
- **5% 3-6 TIMES A YEAR**
- **2% ONCE A MONTH**
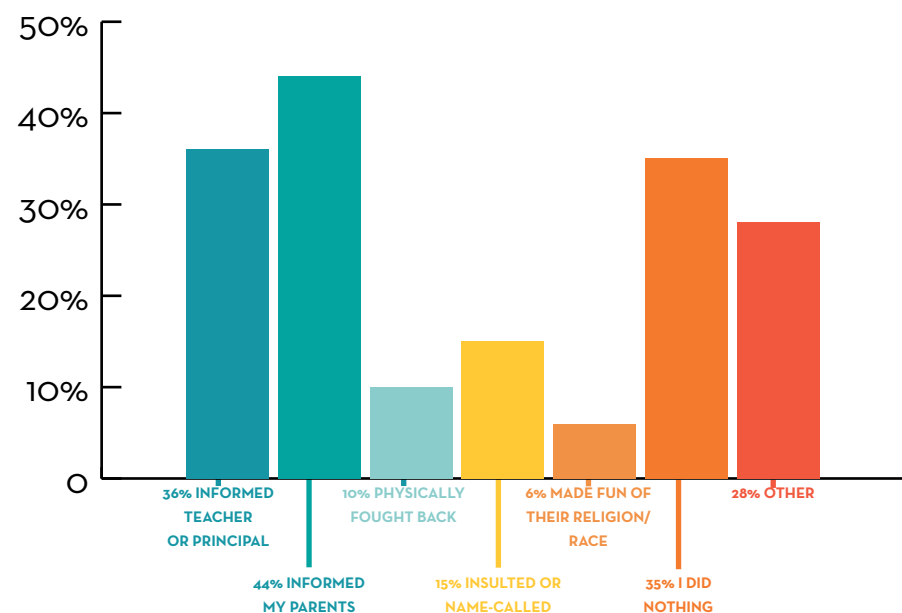- **1% ONCE A WEEK**
- **4% NO RESPONSE**

9. Have your administrators, coaches, school safety officers, or teachers made offensive comments about your religion or allowed other students to make offensive comments at school?

One in five students experienced discrimination by a school staff member.

- **76% NEVER**
- **15% 1-2 TIMES A YEAR**
- **3% 3-6 TIMES A YEAR**
- **1% ONCE A MONTH**
- **1% ONCE A WEEK**
- **4% NO RESPONSE**

10. If you had any of these experiences, how did you respond? (mark all that apply)

This question was reframed from the previous survey. Instead of asking how often students responded in a particular way, they were simply asked to indicate every response used. 44% of students reported instances of bullying to their parents, teacher, or principal. 10% fought, insulted, or made fun of the other student's faith or race. 35% of students failed to do anything at all in response to bullying or discrimination. Students who responded "Other" wrote in answers such as "I told them to leave me alone," "Ignored," "Walked away," and "Fought back with knowledge."

Bar chart (y-axis 0% to 50%):
- **36% INFORMED TEACHER OR PRINCIPAL**
- **44% INFORMED MY PARENTS**
- **10% PHYSICALLY FOUGHT BACK**
- **15% INSULTED OR NAME-CALLED**
- **6% MADE FUN OF THEIR RELIGION/RACE**
- **35% I DID NOTHING**
- **28% OTHER**

27%
*of girls wearing hijab reported teacher or administrator discrimination.*

11. When I told an adult, it helped solve the problem.

While 42% of students who reported incidents of bullying and discrimination believed that it helped solve the situation, close to the same percentage, 41%, were unsure or disagreed with the statement that telling an adult helped solve the problem.

- **42% AGREE**
- **23% UNSURE**
- **18% DISAGREE**
- **17% NO RESPONSE**
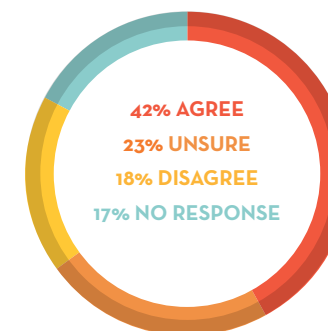
12. When I told the school, I was happy with the response.

While a little more than one-third of students were happy with the response from the school after reporting bullying and discrimination, 46% were unhappy or unsure about their school's response.

- **34% AGREE**
- **26% UNSURE**
- **20% DISAGREE**
- **20% NO RESPONSE**
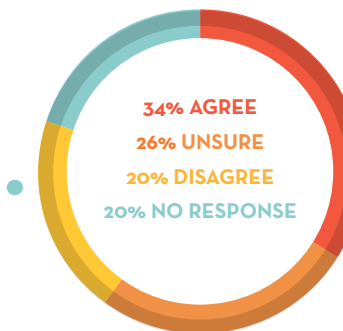
DEMOGRAPHICS

The Muslim Youth at School survey also collected demographic information about survey participants, including what county they live in, their race or national origin, age, grade, and gender. Unlike the previous report, this report examines the demographic data to understand how the rate of bullying and teacher discrimination changes according to the demographic characteristic.

County

Students from over 23 different counties across California participated in CAIR-CA's survey of American Muslim students. In contrast to the 2012 survey where 30% of respondents were from Orange County, the county with the largest number of participants was San Diego County which had previously been underrepresented. A greater effort was made to decrease overrepresentation from Orange County and increase participation in Los Angeles County, which gained 62% more respondents, and Central California.
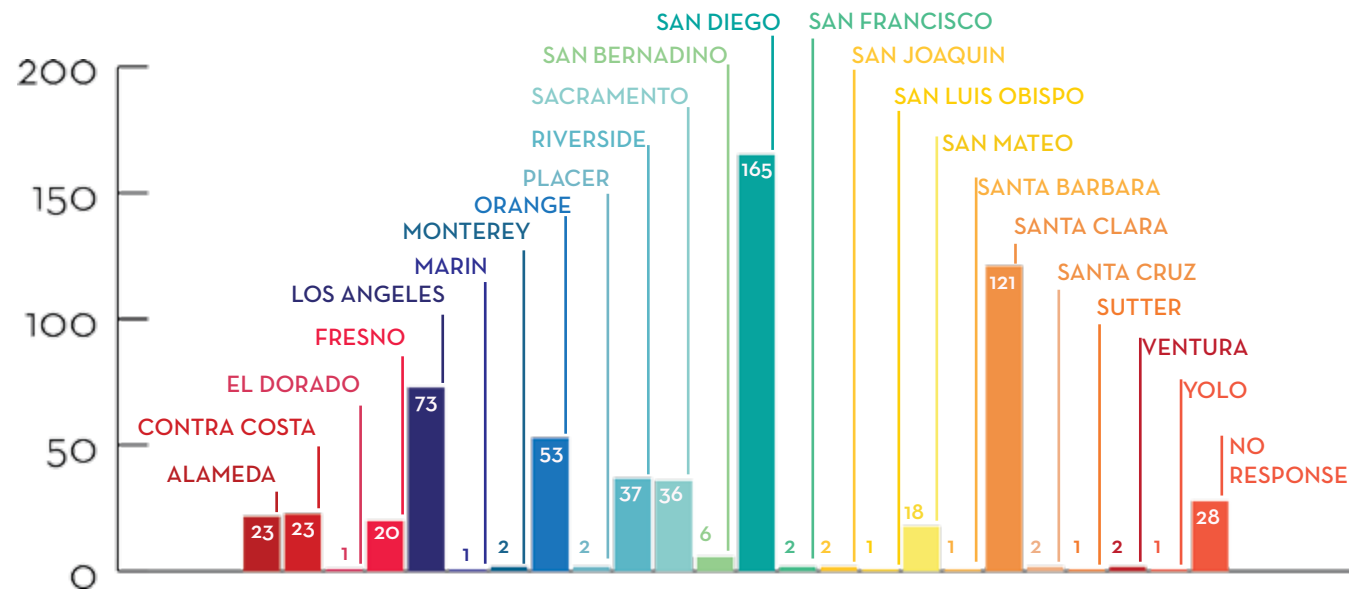
Race / National Origin

The racial and ethnic makeup of respondents reflected a 9 percentage point decrease in the number of South Asian respondents and a 5 percentage point increase of Middle Eastern respondents. The respondents' ethnic and racial backgrounds is a good reflection of the American Muslim community's diversity in California, although it may not be a true image of the actual sizes of these populations.
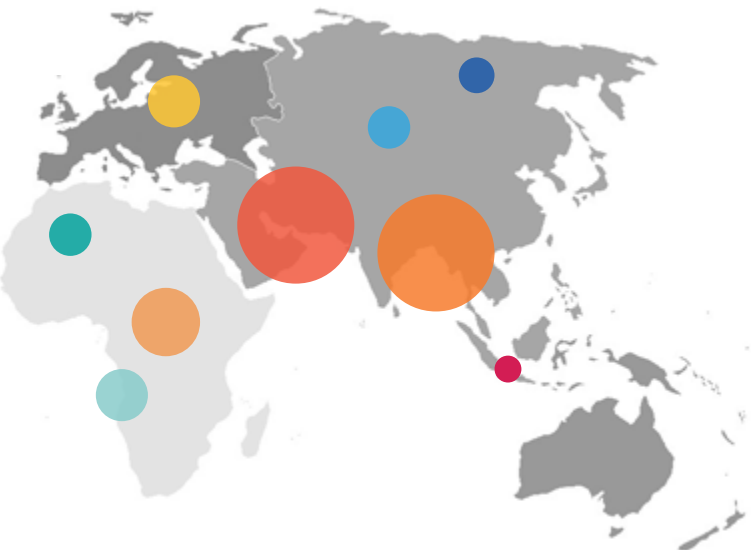
31% **MIDDLE EASTERN**
31% **SOUTH ASIAN**
8% **AFRICAN**
7% **NO RESPONSE**
5% **CAUCASIAN**
5% **MULTIETHNIC**
4% **BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN**
3% **NORTH AFRICAN**
3% **CENTRAL ASIAN**
2% **ASIAN**
1% **SOUTHEAST ASIAN**
>1% **PACIFIC ISLANDER**
>1% **OTHER**

CAIR-CA questioned whether respondents' racial or ethnic background impacted the rate at which they experienced religion-based bullying and discrimination by their teachers. Students of Middle Eastern and North African descent are among those that experience the highest levels of bullying and discrimination. This would seem consistent with the incorrect yet widespread perception that all Muslims are Arab, and thus, those demographics experience higher levels of religion-based bullying. (While the percentages for those of Pacific Islander descent appear much higher than that of other Muslim populations, it may not be an accurate reflection given that only three people from this group participated in the survey.)
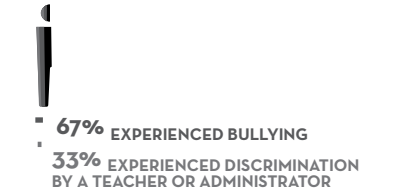
MULTIETHNIC - 31 RESPONDENTS
58% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
13% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

MIDDLE EASTERN - 194 RESPONDENTS
64% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
21% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

SOUTHEAST ASIAN - 5 RESPONDENTS
60% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
20% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

SOUTH ASIAN - 190 RESPONDENTS
51% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
23% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

PACIFIC ISLANDER- 3 RESPONDENTS
67% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
33% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

AFRICAN - 47 RESPONDENTS
51% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
21% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR
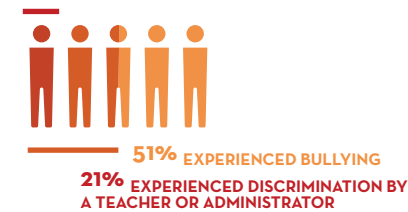
CAUCASIAN - 32 RESPONDENTS
53% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
19% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

ASIAN - 15 RESPONDENTS
53% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
>1% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR
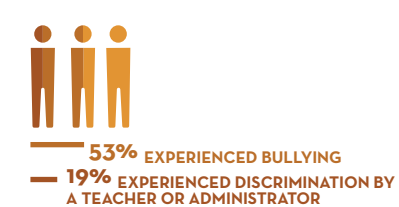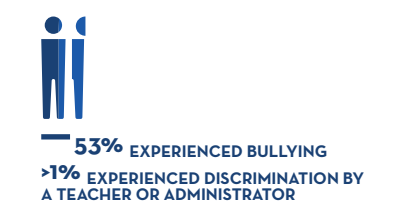
BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN - 22 RESPONDENTS
45% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
14% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

NORTH AFRICAN - 17 RESPONDENTS
65% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
29% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

CENTRAL ASIAN - 21 RESPONDENTS
57% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
14% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

Age and Grade

The survey focused on students between the ages of 11 and 18 who attended fifth through twelfth grade. The survey was distributed rel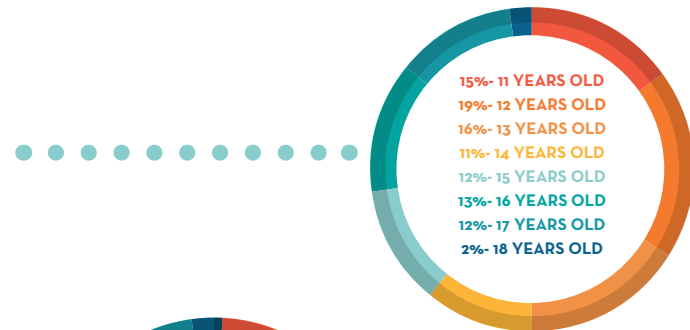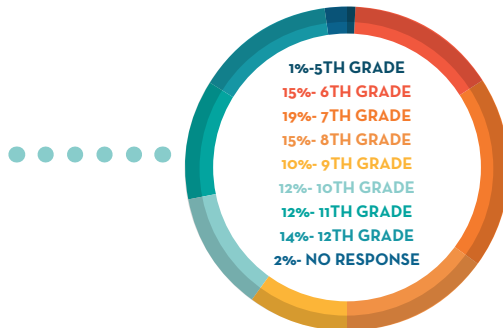atively evenly amongst the age groups surveyed with 50% of respondents between the ages of 11 and 13 and almost 50% between the ages of 14 and 18.

15%- 11 YEARS OLD
19%- 12 YEARS OLD
16%- 13 YEARS OLD
11%- 14 YEARS OLD
12%- 15 YEARS OLD
13%- 16 YEARS OLD
12%- 17 YEARS OLD
2%- 18 YEARS OLD

Similarly, the breakdown between students who attended elementary and middle school and those who attended high school was almost equal.

1%-5TH GRADE
15%- 6TH GRADE
19%- 7TH GRADE
15%- 8TH GRADE
10%- 9TH GRADE
12%- 10TH GRADE
12%- 11TH GRADE
14%- 12TH GRADE
2%- NO RESPONSE

CAIR-CA also examined whether a student's progression from elementary/middle school into high school effected the frequency of bullying he or she received. Generally, bullying is shown to be a bigger problem in middle school than in high school. [43] However, CAIR-CA's survey results demonstrate that American Muslim students experience more bullying and a significantly greater amount of discrimination from their teachers in high school.

308 PARTICIPANTS
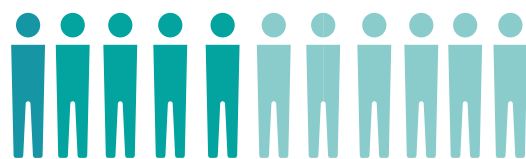
ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 5 - 8)

47% EXPERIENCED BULLYING

13% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR
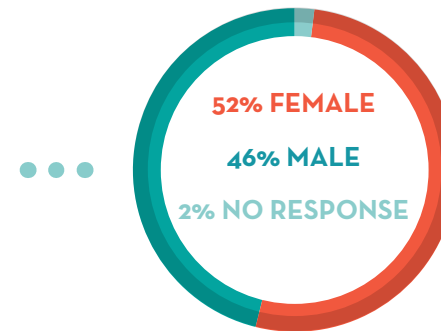
303 PARTICIPANTS

HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9 - 12)

64% EXPERIENCED BULLYING

28% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

Gender

Compared to 2012 where the percentage of female respondents was 20% higher than that of male respondents, the 2014 survey was more evenly distributed between the genders.

52% FEMALE
46% MALE
2% NO RESPONSE

CAIR-CA looked at differences in survey responses between the genders. While more male students experienced bullying than female students, the percentage of females who experienced discrimination by a teacher was slightly higher.

Amongst female students who wear *hijab*, the reports of discrimination by a teacher were higher.

FEMALE - 321 RESPONDENTS

52% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
21% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

MALE - 286 RESPONDENTS

60% EXPERIENCED BULLYING
19% EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION BY A TEACHER OR ADMINISTRATOR

Overall, male and female students viewed their school environment favorably with almost no difference between the genders. Reported differences based on gender appeared when it came to experiencing bullying. Not only did male students experience more bullying, but their response to the bullying also differed. Male students were more likely to fight back and insult or name-call in retaliation while female students were considerably less likely to do either. Male students were also less likely to report incidents to their parents yet slightly more likely to report incidents to their teacher or principal.

WHY STUDENTS DON'T REPORT BULLYING

Fear of Being Called A Tattletale

"I didn't want them to get involved because the oppressor would learn that I told on him."

"I would much rather keep it to myself because I don't want others to think of me as a snitch."

"I felt like everyone would say I'm a tattletale."

"I wouldn't tell the school because all of a sudden everyone would know the problem."

Fear of Bringing More Attention to the Problem

"I wouldn't tell the school because all of a sudden everyone would know the problem."

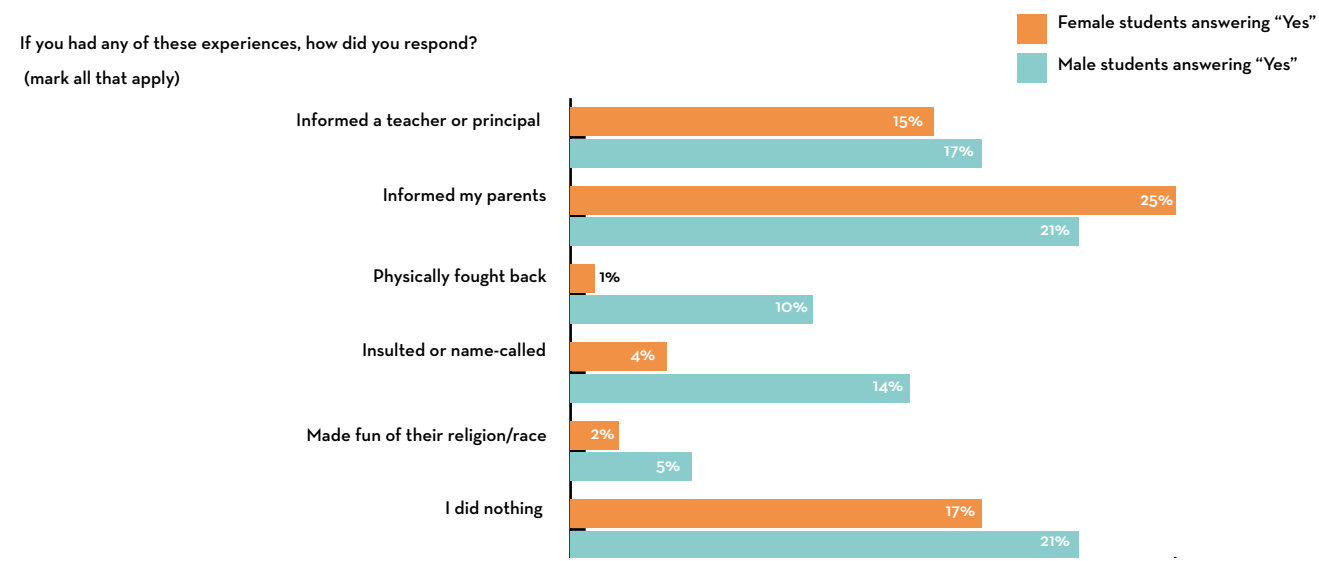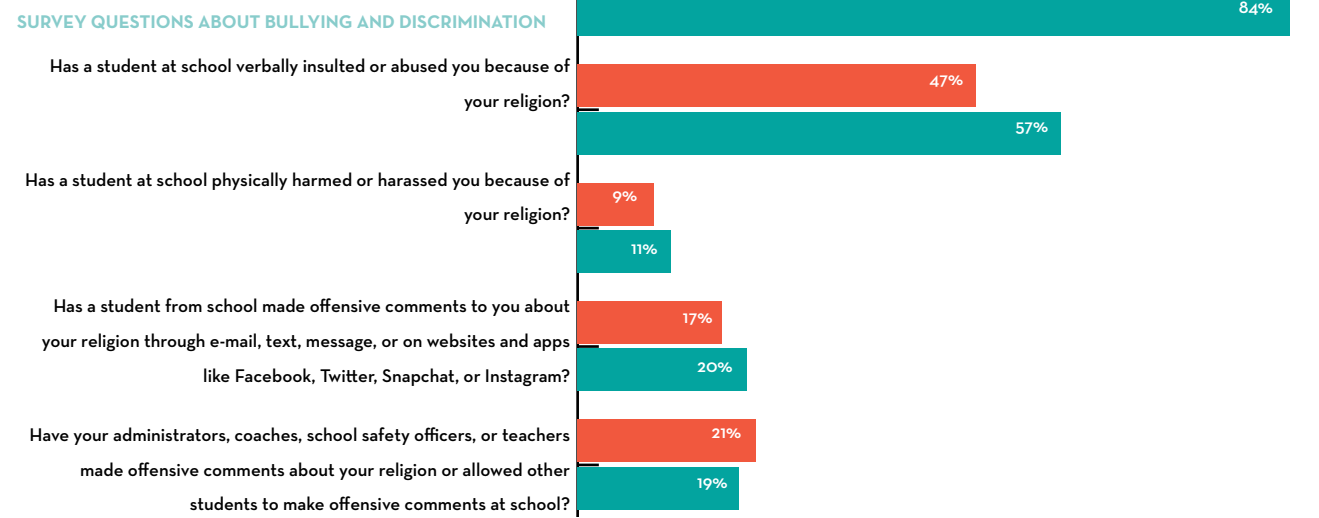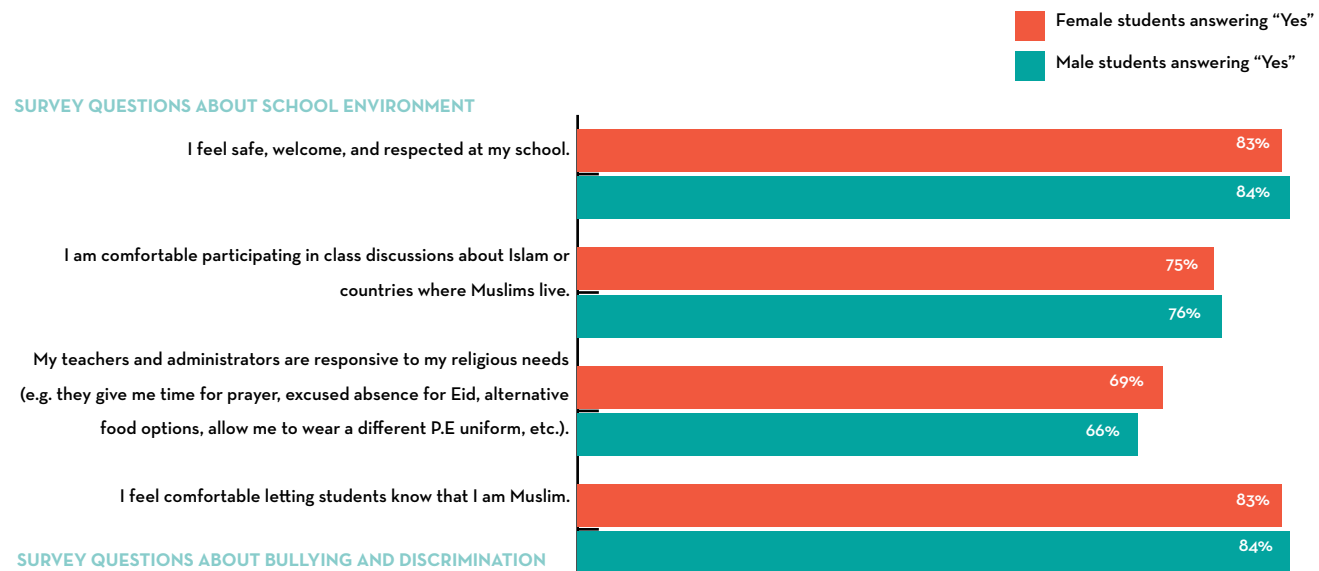*"I don't respond sometimes because I don't want them to make a 'BIG DEAL OF IT' and I don't want them to think differently."*

"Because I was afraid of drawing attention and increasing the problem."

"Then everybody is going to make even more fun of you because you just told on them."

Female students answering "Yes"
Male students answering "Yes"

I feel safe, welcome, and respected at my school.
- 83%
- 84%

I am comfortable participating in class discussions about Islam or countries where Muslims live.
- 75%
- 76%

My teachers and administrators are responsive to my religious needs (e.g. they give me time for prayer, excused absence for Eid, alternative food options, allow me to wear a different P.E uniform, etc.).
- 69%
- 66%

I feel comfortable letting students know that I am Muslim.
- 83%
- 84%

SURVEY QUESTIONS ABOUT BULLYING AND DISCRIMINATION

Has a student at school verbally insulted or abused you because of your religion?
- 47%
- 57%

Has a student at school physically harmed or harassed you because of your religion?
- 9%
- 11%

Has a student from school made offensive comments to you about your religion through e-mail, text, message, or on websites and apps like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, or Instagram?
- 17%
- 20%

Have your administrators, coaches, school safety officers, or teachers made offensive comments about your religion or allowed other students to make offensive comments at school?
- 21%
- 19%

If you had any of these experiences, how did you respond? (mark all that apply)

Female students answering "Yes"
Male students answering "Yes"

Informed a teacher or principal
- 15%
- 17%

Informed my parents
- 25%
- 21%

Physically fought back
- 1%
- 10%

Insulted or name-called
- 4%
- 14%

Made fun of their religion/race
- 2%
- 5%

I did nothing
- 17%
- 21%

"Someone threatened to kill me if I went to school on 9/11."

AMERICAN MUSLIM STUDENTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Students were asked to share any experiences that made them feel unsafe or unwelcome as a Muslim at school. Many of the responses demonstrated similar themes such as negative reactions to wearing a *hijab*, social ostracism, being called a terrorist, negativity from teachers, reactions to accommodation requests, and increased scrutiny on 9/11. The comments have only been edited for readability.

ON RESPONSES TO ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

"When I was fasting they still made me run the mile."

"Sometimes when I have asked the librarian to pray in the library she always agrees to allow me to pray but with a weak hesitant smile."

ON NEGATIVITY FROM TEACHERS

"My teacher would blame me or say my answers were never the best just because I wore a scarf."

"My teacher said, 'You're not American enough to understand.'"

ON WEARING A *HIJAB*

"I just feel like an outsider a lot of the time because I wear the hijab."

"When I wear my hijab in schools sometimes people ask me if I'm related to Osama bin Laden."

"They would call me a terrorist and towel head and throw rocks at me."

"Some people at my school tell me that I should just come without my hijab for one day just so they can see my hair. They sometimes tell me that I would just look so much better without my hijab, and that makes me feel uncomfortable."

"When I first started wearing hijab, people would laugh and snicker at me to each other. I get a lot of stares and some people that

normally did not, started avoiding me. I just decided to deal with it, and I eventually took it off. I want to put it on again but I'm not comfortable."

ON SOCIAL OSTRACISM

"When I want to play with anyone they run away or they bully me or they say I can't play."

"I told the school and the kid got in trouble and now I am known as a tattletale! Now the kid still bullies me."

"I heard another student call a Muslim student a terrorist and felt scared to portray my faith."

"I'm judged because I'm Muslim."

"It makes me feel unwelcome because people stare and whisper and sometimes it hurts."

ON BEING CALLED A TERRORIST

"One student would call me a terrorist but in a joking way and I did not take offense to it and laughed it off but deep down it was really irritating and at times I have thought of calling them out about it but I thought it would make a bigger issue than it really was."

"They would say I was a terrorist and always ask me, 'How is the bomb you are working on?' "

"Sometimes I get shoved, or punked because I am a Muslim. They call me names like 'bomb boy' or 'Osama Bin Laden' or 'terrorist.' "

"People always call Muslims terrorists and that they are dangerous people in a joking way

and I have a hard time responding to that. I don't like being judged."

ON INCREASED SCRUTINY ON 9/11

"Experience that made me feel unsafe or unwelcome would be during 9/11 or when something bad happened on TV that is about Muslims."

"Every September 11th, at my school there is a moment of silence. This entire day, and especially during that moment of silence, everyone just stares at me. I can feel their begrudging glares towards me and it very much irritates me."

"Someone threatened to kill me if I went to school on 9/11."

RECOMMENDATIONS

CONGRESS must pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act ("SSIA"),which is an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The act would prohibit bullying and harassment based on a student's religion, race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.[44] While California already has laws that prohibit such bullying, many other state laws are not as expansive in their protections and do not include discrimination based on religion.[45] The U.S. Department of Education's 2011 analysis of state bullying laws found that while many states had developed anti-bullying legislation and policies, problems related to implementation potentially rendered them ineffective in actually reducing bullying.[46] In addition to prohibiting bullying based on religion, SSIA would standardize anti-bullying best practices by requiring notice of prohibited conduct and communication of procedures that students and parents could follow to file complaints.[47] The act would also require data collection by states and biannual reporting to Congress and the President.[48]

CONGRESS should amend the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Currently, Title VI does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion. While the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights has addressed the issue of discrimination and harassment based on religion in a "Dear Colleague" letter and their ability to enforce the jurisdiction through the prohibition against national origin discrimination, the extent of this protection is weak and insufficient.[49] Amending Title VI would directly allow the Department of Education to ensure that schools receiving federal funding would be answerable for failing to prevent bullying and harassment based on religion.

TEXTBOOK PUBLISHERS should ensure that material discussing Islam and Muslims is current and free of Islamophobic bias. Textbooks are the primary source of information for most students.[50] The information provided in textbooks is generally accepted by students as the authoritative word on the subject.[51] Biased information has been shown to negatively affect the attitudes, personality development, behavior, and academic and occupational achievements of minority students.[52] Due to the crucial role of textbooks in the classroom, publishers must take great care in their production. With respect to providing information about Islam and Muslims, specific care should be taken to differentiate between what practices are considered as part of the religion as opposed to what are the cultural norms of Muslim countries. Too often classroom materials fail to distinguish between the two, thus creating misperceptions about Muslims and providing inaccurate representations of Islam.

SCHOOLS should 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.[53] It is often simpler to ignore conflict between students and hope that they will work it out between themselves, than to address a problem they feel unequipped to handle. In schools where zero-tolerance policies are implemented, teachers may report both the bully and victim to administrators and leave it to them to deal with the problem. The victimized student in these situations may feel disempowered at best, or at worst, face suspension or expulsion because of zero-tolerance policies. Lack of training to prevent bullying thus impacts teachers and students alike.

TEACHERS should learn how to teach in diverse and multicultural classrooms so they can 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. Teachers who are not sensitive to these characteristics risk marginalizing students. Minority students who feel that they do not have a place in the classroom may not perform as well.[54] The repercussions are more long-lasting in minority students who feel discriminated against by teachers because they may internalize feelings of inferiority and feel discouraged from investing in their futures.[55]

TEACHERS should also be particularly sensitive to lesson plans about Islam, 9/11, and current global politics that may impact American Muslims. American Muslim students should not be made to feel as though they must answer for all Muslims. Many American Muslim students feel pressured by their fellow students and teachers to speak authoritatively on these subjects when they may not be equipped to do so. Instead, if teachers believe they do not have the training to present on these subjects, they should look for professionals in their community who are qualified. Recommendations for teaching resources may be found in the Appendix.

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.[56] 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.

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 procedure to make complaints and 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES ON ISLAM

Islamic Networks Group (ING)
www.ing.org

Islamic Speakers Bureau of Southern California
http://www.isbsocal.org

Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center
www.teachingtolerance.org

Unity Productions Foundation
http://www.upf.tv

WEBSITES ON BULLYING PREVENTION

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

REPORTS ON BULLYING AND PREVENTION

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

Growing in Faith
Council on American-Islamic Relations - California
http://ca.cair.com/downloads/GrowinginFaith.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

California Education Code §32283

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

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/

ENDNOTES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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2 In this report and the CAIR-CA survey, the term "bullying" refers exclusively to bias-related actions committed by students while the term "discrimination" refers exclusively to bias-related actions committed by administrators and teachers. This is due to the differing relationships the perpetrators and victims have with each other in the school hierarchy. Since teachers have official authority over children and are expected to treat their students in a fair manner, discrimination is the term used; while students are said to engage in bullying as they seek to assert power and authority over their equals or peers.

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