



New Jersey Department of Education

School Climate State Coordinator

Annual Report

January 3, 2023 to June 30, 2023

New Jersey Department of Education

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Background

In 2022, *P.L. 2021, c. 338* established the role of the School Climate State Coordinator within the New Jersey Department of Education (Department) to serve as a resource for parents and caregivers, students, and educators regarding the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR)* (*N.J.S.A. 18A:37-13 et seq.*). The School Climate State Coordinator (State Coordinator) will also review data on harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) in order to inform the development of guidance, trainings, and resources for local educational agencies (LEA)s, families, and other agencies to support their efforts to address HIB.

As part of this role, the State Coordinator is statutorily required to annually provide the Commissioner of Education, the State Board of Education, and the Legislature a report summarizing the activities of the State Coordinator and recommendations regarding school climate best practices and procedures. This report reflects the activities and services provided for fiscal year 2023, covering the period from when the position was filled on January 3, 2023 through June 30, 2023.

Role and Responsibilities

The duties of the State Coordinator, as set forth in the statute, include the following:

- Identify and disseminate research and resources, including professional development resources, to promote best practices in student social-emotional learning and the development of positive, supportive school climates in New Jersey schools.
- Provide information regarding the provisions and procedures of the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act*, regulations promulgated thereto, relevant provisions of the *Law Against Discrimination*, and other State and federal laws addressing harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB).
- Review and report data collected on HIB to identify and report to the Department any patterns of HIB in public schools.
- Assist the Department in creating public information programs that educate parents, educators, and the public concerning the duties of the State coordinator, the issue of HIB, and the resources available to address and prevent HIB.
- Work collaboratively with law enforcement, the Department, the Division on Civil Rights in the Department of Law and Public Safety, and the Department of Health to develop a training program on the impact of HIB on students and schools, that will be available for school districts to use in local anti-bullying programs and intervention plans.
- Work collaboratively with law enforcement, including organizations representing school resource officers, to develop resources and training for law enforcement concerning the impact of HIB on students and schools, and the appropriate role of law enforcement in such matters pursuant to the Uniform Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials.

Key Terms and Acronyms

Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR) – Passed in 2011, the ABR is New Jersey’s anti-bullying law that includes the requirements local educational agencies (LEA) must follow as it pertains to: defining, reporting, investigating, responding to, and preventing harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB). The ABR was amended in 2012 and 2022.

Anti-Bullying Coordinator (ABC) – The school district staff member who is responsible for coordinating and strengthening the school district’s anti-bullying policies. The ABC must work closely with each school anti-bullying specialist, the chief school administrator, and the board of education. The ABC is also responsible for reporting information on the number and type of HIB incidents that occur within the LEA to the board of education and to the Department.

Anti-Bullying Specialist (ABS) – The primary school staff member responsible for preventing, identifying, and addressing HIB incidents within a school. The ABS is the chairperson of the School Safety/School Climate Team and is responsible for investigating reported incidents of HIB.

HIB – HIB is a commonly used acronym to indicate harassment, intimidation, and bullying.

Local Educational Agency (LEA) – Refers to a school district which operates local public primary and secondary schools in the United States.

New Jersey Department of Education (“NJDOE” or “Department”) – The State agency that administers State and Federal aid programs affecting more than 1.4 million public elementary and secondary school children in the state of New Jersey.

Office of Student Support Services (OSSS) – The Office within the Department that supports the positive development of K-12 students, with a focus on health, behavior, school culture and climate, and social-emotional skills. The OSSS produces reports and provides guidance, web resources, professional development, and technical assistance to educators. Additionally, the State Coordinator is a staff member in the OSSS.

Parent – The natural or adoptive parent(s), legal guardian(s), resource family parent(s), or surrogate parent(s) of a student. When parents are separated or divorced, “parent” means the person or agency who has legal custody of the student, as well as the natural or adoptive parent(s) of the student, provided parental rights have not been terminated by a court of appropriate jurisdiction.

School Safety/School Climate Team (SS/SCT) – A group of school-level stakeholders that review complaints of HIB and HIB investigation reports to identify and address patterns of HIB in the school. Additionally, the SS/SCT reviews and strengthens school climate and policies to prevent HIB; educates the school community to prevent and address HIB; and performs other duties set forth in the ABR. The team is required to include, at minimum: the school principal or designee, the ABS, a teacher in the school, and a parent of a student in the school.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) – Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy

identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. The Department released [New Jersey Social and Emotional Learning Competencies and Sub-Competencies](#) in August 2017.

Student – A student is a person age three through 21 who is entitled to receive educational programs and services in accordance with Federal or State law or regulation.

Summary of Activities

The School Climate State Coordinator (State Coordinator) position was filled effective January 3, 2023, when the State Coordinator assumed the roles and responsibilities of the position. To get oriented to the role, the State Coordinator spent the first few weeks reviewing the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act* (ABR), *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.7* and *7.8*, and other relevant statutes, meeting with Department leadership and colleagues, and establishing connections with outside stakeholder groups.

Response to Inquiries

The vast majority of the services provided by the State Coordinator during this period involved responding to inquiries concerning the implementation of the ABR and subsequent amendments (e.g., how to report HIB, HIB investigation procedures, appeal process, etc.). Beginning March 1, 2023, the State Coordinator transitioned to being the primary respondent to emails and phone calls regarding the ABR and HIB. During this four-month period, the State Coordinator responded to over 100 telephone inquiries and received over 300 emails.

Figure 1 represents the total number of inquiries received each month between March and June 2023, for each mode of communication: telephone and email. It is important to note that there were multiple emails received from two stakeholders. In total, 177 emails were received from one private citizen and 25 emails were received from the same parent. These numbers are reflected in the chart below.

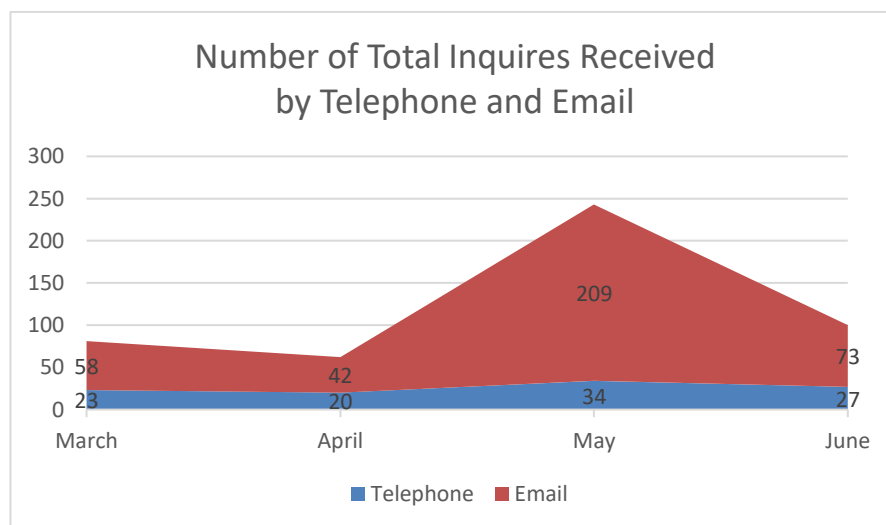


Figure 1: Number of Total Inquiries Received by Telephone and Email

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of combined email and telephone inquiries received by stakeholder group between March and June 30, 2023. It is notable that the “Other” category includes inquiries from media, other State agencies, attorneys, etc.

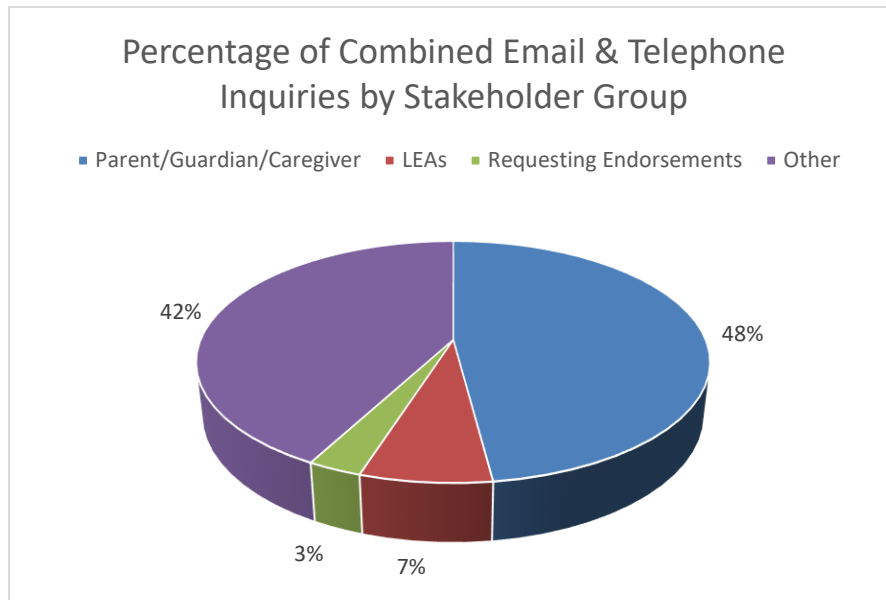


Figure 2: Percentage of Combined Email and Telephone Inquiries by Stakeholder Group

The majority of inquiries within both modes of communication were received from parents, guardians, and/or caregivers. The inquiries received from LEAs included: principals, ABCs, ABSs, SS/SCTs, and Board of Education members.

The inquiries received involved a variety of issues and questions regarding the implementation of the ABR and school districts HIB policies. The majority of the inquiries were related to the following HIB topics:

- Investigations
- Reporting
- Appeals
- Policy
- Timelines

In addition to providing information on implementation of the ABR, responsibilities of LEAs, and resources, the State Coordinator also provided contact information for other Department offices. The most frequent references were to specific [county offices of education](#) and the [Office of Controversies and Disputes](#). When appropriate, contact information for other State agencies was provided, including but not limited to the [Division on Civil Rights](#) and [New Jersey’s Children’s System of Care](#).

The State Coordinator also received inquiries unrelated to the implementation of the ABR, such as

questions related to teacher certification and chronic absenteeism and requests for endorsement for products and/or services. Additionally, the State Coordinator was cc'd on emails that did not require a response and also received emails that were more appropriate for other Department offices (e.g., School Ethics Commission). Finally, the State Coordinator also responded to newspaper and media inquiries.

It is important to note that during the initial months of establishing the role of the State Coordinator new systems were piloted for data collection of inquiries which included a Microsoft Office Form for telephone inquiries and an electronic filing system for email inquiries. One flaw of this data collection method was that the Microsoft Office Form allowed for multiple categories to be indicated for the type of inquiry (e.g., HIB policy and HIB reporting), however, the electronic filing system allowed only one way to categorize the type of inquiry. This became problematic as oftentimes telephone inquiries and email inquiries involved multiple questions on a variety of ABR and HIB categories. As noted in the recommendations at the end of this report, one mode of data collection should be utilized for both means of communication (telephone and email). This will allow for a parallel comparative analysis of data over subsequent years and will accurately capture the needs of various stakeholder groups as it pertains to this report and informing statewide trends, future guidance materials, and resources.

Collaboration with Project Partners and Stakeholders

- Served as a liaison to the School Climate Transformation Project at Rutgers University which is responsible for the development and use of the New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) survey and online platform. As part of this collaboration, the State Coordinator provided input on the refinement of the NJ SCI platform and the development of resources to support educators to use a school climate change process to foster positive school climates that prevent HIB.
- Represented the Department on the SEL4NJ Advisory Board in order to stay up to date on the needs of the field in order to identify resources to promote best practices in student social-emotional learning and the development of positive, supportive school climates.
- Supported the work of the 2023 Anti-Bullying Task Force to fulfill the duties outlined in *P.L. 2019, c. 179*. The initial meeting of the task force occurred on April 19, 2023, and officially convened on June 26, 2023. This work will continue through December 2023.

Development of Resources

- Assisted with the revision of the HIB 338 Form for Families and Caregivers and HIB 338 Form for LEAs that are required to be used in all LEAs.
 - Collected feedback from stakeholders about the initial implementation of the HIB 338 Forms.
 - Developed revisions in response to the feedback and to improve reporting of information regarding allegations of HIB.

- Facilitated the translation of the HIB 338 Forms for Families and Caregivers into multiple languages.
- Disseminated updated forms through posting on the Department website and via a broadcast memo to all LEAs.
- Assisted with the revision of the 2022-2023 School Self-Assessment for Determining Grades under the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR)* to reflect the 2022 Amendments to the ABR.
- Reviewed the most recent versions of the Department’s Guidance to Parents and Guidance to Schools on the ABR to determine need for changes and plan for development of updated guidance documents.

Dissemination of Information

- Developed broadcast memos and social media posts to share information and updates with LEAs related to HIB, school climate, and social and emotional learning.
- Collaborated with colleagues to promote awareness and share resources and activities in celebration of International SEL Day held on March 10, 2023.
- Updated the Department’s HIB webpages to reflect the most current resources for LEAs and families on the prevention of HIB as well as New Jersey specific resources.
- Promoted the use of the State Coordinator’s email (HIB@doe.nj.gov) and the Department’s HIB website.

Presentations

- March 10, 2023: Conducted a virtual presentation during SEL Day on *Using NJ SCI to Support Social and Emotional Learning*.
- May 15, 2023: Delivered a training to staff members from newly established charter schools on *Requirements Related to Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying*.
- May 23, 2023: Developed and facilitated a workshop at the New Jersey Alliance for Social, Emotional, and Character Development statewide annual conference on *NJ SCI & Data-Informed School Counseling Practices*.

Recommendations

- Update the Department’s [*Guidance for Parents on the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act \(ABR\)*](#). A review of the data collected over the last 6 months revealed that most inquiries received are from parents, guardians, and/or caregivers centered around the following: HIB reporting, HIB investigations, HIB findings appeals, and HIB policies. In addition to common themes, the guidance document should include information on the 2022 amendments to the ABR.

- Develop an informational webinar series for parents, guardians, and/or caregivers that focuses on the most common inquiries about the ABR. The webinar series should be designed in short segments and posted on the Department’s HIB website for parents to access.
- Update the Department’s [Guidance for Schools on the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act \(ABR\)](#) to include the most up to date information, such as the 2022 amendments to the ABR.
- Develop and deliver trainings for school staff on the requirements of the ABR. Trainings will place emphasis on building meaningful school safety/school climate teams and the roles and responsibilities of the anti-bullying coordinator and anti-bullying specialist.
- Develop and deliver trainings on the requirements of the ABR for school safety specialists. Trainings should place emphasis on the role of school safety specialists in HIB prevention, implementation of the Uniform Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials, and how to collaborate with the school safety/school climate teams to foster positive school climates.
- The School Climate State Coordinator will develop trainings on the requirements of the ABR for school safety specialists. Trainings will place emphasis on the requirements of the ABR, the role of school safety specialists in HIB prevention, updates to the [Uniform Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials](#), and how to partner with the SS/SCT
- Update the Department’s [Questions and Answers](#) document that was released in November 2015 to reflect the most common inquiries and information about the 2022 amendments to the ABR.
- Research the most up to date resources to promote best practices for preventing HIB and fostering positive school climates. Resources should be disseminated to LEAs and posted on the [Department’s HIB website](#).
- Develop a data collection system for email and telephone inquiries. A single data collection system should be created to capture relevant information from both telephone and email inquiries. This will allow for a parallel comparative analysis of data over subsequent years.
- Develop language regarding the purpose and intent of the State School Climate Coordinators’ email account (HIB@doe.nj.gov) to adequately convey to constituents the scope of assistance this email account may provide (e.g., resources and guidance as it pertains to the ABR). Increasing understandings around the use of the account may clarify expectations from parents and families and decrease the amount of time addressing inquiries unrelated to the ABR.