Youth Bullying Prevention in the District of Columbia

School Year 2015-2016 Report

Acknowledgments

This report was developed by Child Trends under contract with the DC Office of Human Rights. We would like to acknowledge the following staff who contributed to this report:

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Letter from the Director of the Citywide Bullying Prevention Program

To: The Council of the District of Columbia

In accordance with the requirements set forth in the Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012, I am pleased to submit this report on behalf of the Mayor and the Office of Human Rights. It provides an overview of the current status of bullying and bullying prevention efforts in the District of Columbia.

The Citywide Youth Bullying Prevention Program, created in June 2013, aims to reduce incidents of bullying across the District by emphasizing prevention and proper procedures for responding when incidents occur. The program works with youth-serving government agencies, District schools, and youth-serving government grantees to ensure that bullying prevention policies are adopted and implemented in accordance with best practices and research.

The philosophy of the program discourages an over reliance on discipline and instead adopts a public health approach focused on prevention, supporting at-risk youth, and addressing incidents to change behavior. Schools are encouraged to incorporate bullying prevention into whatever larger framework they have selected to support their school, such as Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), Response to Intervention (RTI), Restorative Justice, or any other whole-school model.

The information in this report is meant to establish a baseline of what we know about the bullying situation in the District of Columbia from the data available. Some of these data are new and collected here for the first time. The recommendations provided in the report are meant to be a path forward as we ensure that all youth have access to support and adults know how to respond in ways that make a difference.

Our continued attention to and investment in bullying prevention in the District of Columbia is key to ensuring all of our students have safe and supportive learning environments in which to learn, grow, and thrive. As we enter into the second half of the 2016-17 school year, I look forward to continuing to work with the Council to accomplish this goal.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Greenfield
Director, Citywide Bullying Prevention Program

Executive Summary

The Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012 (YBPA; DC Law L19-167) requires the mayor to review the programs, activities, services, and policies established as a result of the Act; report the current status of bullying in the District of Columbia; and provide recommendations for the continued implementation of the Act.

Key findings

- Nearly all local education agencies (LEAs; **95 percent**) have submitted anti-bullying policies that comply with the Youth Bullying Prevention Act. Only three LEAs do not have a compliant policy.
- According to the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), **about 31 percent of middle school students and 12 percent of high school students** reported being bullied at school in the past year. These rates have remained generally stable since 2007, and represent some of the lowest rates among states and jurisdictions participating in the YRBS.
- In school year 2015-16, District schools reported **499 incidents of bullying**, a prevalence rate of less than 1 percent.
- There are **no significant differences** in bullying prevalence between wards on incident data.
- More than two thirds of schools (**68 percent**) reporting discipline as a result of bullying primarily used exclusionary forms (e.g. out-of-school suspensions), despite research suggesting that such methods are ineffective at addressing bullying.

Key recommendations

- Conduct regular audits of schools' bullying reporting to ensure schools are consistently recording and investigating all reports of bullying.
- Sponsor facilitated discussions between students, parents, and school officials to identify potential reasons for underreporting.
- Provide interactive training opportunities for students, parents, and school officials to address differences in definitions of bullying to encourage alignment.
- Provide schools with data to better contextualize incident data and drive decision-making.
- Encourage the use of evidence-based prevention approaches that are integrated within schools' broader initiatives and behavioral frameworks.
- Support schools in implementing supportive disciplinary practices and warn educators of the consequences of overreliance on exclusionary discipline for bullying incidents.

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Overview and Background of the Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012

The Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012 (YBPA; DC Law L19-167) requires all youth-serving agencies (including, but not limited to, government agencies, schools, libraries, nonprofits, and community centers) to address bullying in a systematic and consistent way. The law emphasizes both the need for prevention as well as the need for consistent and appropriate responses when incidents are reported. Specifically, the YBPA requires agencies to:

- adopt a comprehensive anti-bullying policy, consistent with the definitions and procedures outlined in the YBPA;
- submit the compliant policy for review including annual updates of agencies' point of contacts;
- incorporate information on bullying prevention into new employee training;
- publicize the bullying prevention policy; and
- for educational institutions, provide an annual report of bullying incidents and other requested information.

In addition, the YBPA requires the mayor to review the programs, activities, services, and policies established as a result of the Act; report the current status of bullying in the District of Columbia; and provide recommendations for the continued implementation of the Act. The present report fulfills this requirement for school year 2015-16.

Section 1: Programs, Activities, Services and Policies Established as a Result of the Act

Bullying prevention in the District requires active collaboration between the local government, led by the D.C. Office of Human Rights (DCOHR), District public and public charter schools, parents, and students. In this section we outline the accomplishments of the DCOHR and the Mayor's Bullying Prevention Task Force as well as schools' efforts to prevent bullying as a result of the YBPA in school year 2015-16.

## The Citywide Bullying Prevention Program

DCOHR was designated as the central point of contact for implementing the YBPA and houses the Citywide Bullying Prevention Program. It oversees the

Mayor's Youth Bullying Prevention Task Force (Task Force) established by the Act. The Task Force is comprised of representatives from the District's youth-serving agencies and subject matter experts. Although its original function was to develop the District-wide Model Bullying Prevention Policy, a framework to guide the creation of compliant agency policies, the Task Force continues to support ongoing bullying prevention work across the District. DCOHR and the Task Force conduct ongoing needs assessments to identify and develop technical assistance and training materials for the District's youth-serving agencies. To assist in these activities, DCOHR contracts with Child Trends, a nonprofit research organization.

Building on the research-based best practices emphasized in the Model Policy, DCOHR and the Task Force adopted a public health approach to their support activities, focusing on prevention and supporting at-risk youth while discouraging an overreliance on discipline. All of this work recognizes that there is no single or simple way to change the dynamics of bullying. Instead, it stresses the importance of reestablishing safety, building resiliency for youth that have been targeted, and changing the behavior of youth who bully others. A summary of products and strategies developed over the course of school year 2015-16 follows.

Know Your Policy Portal

In an effort to increase transparency and allow parents and guardians to easily access information regarding the YBPA, the Task Force launched the "Know Your Policy Portal." The portal contains the policies for all youth-serving agencies covered under the Act as well as the name and contact information of each agency's designated point of contact.
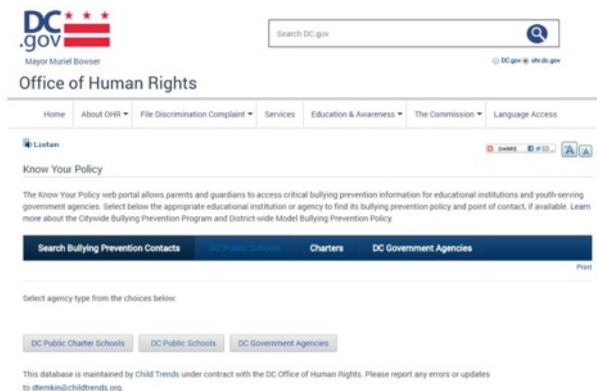
Bullying Prevention Toolkit

In April 2015, the Task Force created and released "Bullying Prevention and Intervention in DC Educational Institutions: A Training Toolkit," a self-directed training that can be done in sections or as a whole. It provides the legal and philosophical framework of the citywide bullying prevention program. The Toolkit includes a
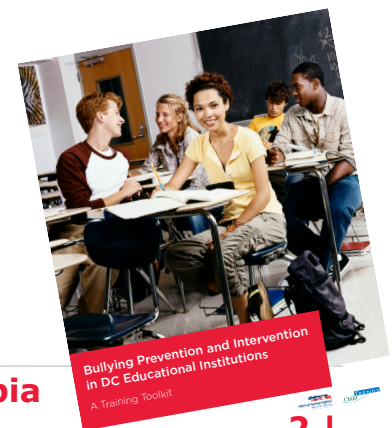
presentation, a comprehensive and flexible user guide, and practice scenarios, all of which are available for download on the Office of Human Rights website. The Toolkit also includes the "Investigator Checklist" and "Fact Sheet on Cyberbullying." As a whole, it provides schools, agencies, and grantees a step-by-step protocol to protect youth, build positive school climates, and respond appropriately if an incident has been reported.

Parent and guardian pamphlet

In October 2015, the Task Force released a new parent and guardian pamphlet (available in multiple languages) that provides guidance for parents on how to best support their children and how to work with their school to address bullying. The parent pamphlet outlines the YBPA and provides parents and guardians a step-by-step process for supporting their students. It also contains information for outside resources and best practices for de-escalating concern and focusing on student safety.

Regulations

In June 2016, the Notice of Final Rulemaking was published to provide guidance, procedures, and standards for implementation of the Act.

Research opportunity

From the Task Force's beginning in 2012, it has advocated for comprehensive, cross-sector, evidence-based school climate data. The Task Force is committed to bringing these data directly to schools to inform each school's unique needs. There is no one-size-fits-all response to bullying and building a positive school climate. Schools must be given the appropriate data to make decisions that will benefit their own communities.

In September 2015, the National Institutes of Justice (NIJ) awarded a four-year research grant to Child Trends, DCOHR and OSSE to focus on school climate and violence prevention in District schools through implementation of the evidence-based Safe School Certification Program (SSCP). SSCP is a framework designed to develop schools' capacity to implement evidence-based programs to prevent violence and improve school safety, a key element of school climate. SSCP is 3-year technical assistance model that fully aligns with the model policy created by the Task Force. The model does not dictate what schools should be doing, but rather helps them understand what is and is not working in their current activities and how to shift their focus to better address the needs of their communities. The grant will also

provide funding for schools to engage with new evidence based programs that respond to their needs.

There are 30 cross-sector schools in the pilot and they will all collect school climate data through the newly created U.S. Department of Education School Climate Survey (ED-SCLS) and will be given the technical assistance and supports necessary to analyze the data and identify the appropriate programs and strategies needed to build positive school climate and reduce violence. This pilot will create the opportunity for the District to understand the importance of this data and build the capacity at OSSE to both collect and support schools in interpreting the data and matching needs with evidence based programs.

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life.[1] Researchers have studied the characteristics of safe and supportive schools with positive climates. A school's climate is measured by its norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interaction, and organizational processes and structures. Research shows a positive school climate is not only linked to decreased bullying, but also to increased academic achievement, increased attendance, increased graduation rates, and decreased violence.[2] The ED-SCLS is administered not only to students but to parents/guardians and school staff.

Local education agencies' and schools' efforts to prevent and address bullying

The YBPA primarily requires all youth-serving agencies, including local education agencies (LEAs), to establish a consistent anti-bullying policy. Although the YBPA does not prescribe any one method for responding to or preventing bullying incidents, it strongly recommends the adoption of such practices in order to achieve its overall goal of reducing the prevalence of bullying in the District. It is critical to effectively respond to bullying and engage in evidence-based prevention activities in order to create a climate where bullying is less likely to occur, and in which all students—including both those targeted and those perpetrating bullying—feel supported when incidents occur. Below, we report on the available data regarding schools' adoption of anti-bullying policies, use of discipline for bullying, and efforts to provide training around bullying prevention.

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[1] Thapa, 2013
[2] Thapa, 2013

Nearly all local education agencies have compliant bullying prevention policies.

As required in the YBPA, all LEAs are required to submit a copy of their anti-bullying policy for review by the Task Force. All submitted policies are compared to a rubric consisting of the seven components and 43 subcomponents that detail the specific language required in every District bullying prevention policy. After review, each LEA is provided a detailed memo outlining any identified inconsistencies with the law.

Once a policy is deemed compliant, it is not required to be reviewed again. However, all LEAs must annually update their designated point of contact (POC) to DCOHR. Thus, all policies deemed compliant for the 2013-14 compliance report continue to be noted as compliant in this 2015-16 update, provided a new POC was received. A full listing of each LEA's compliance status can be found in Appendix A. Currently, all but three LEAs lack a compliant policy, a compliance rate of 95.5 percent.

Half of local education agencies have a compliant bullying prevention policy on their website.

Simply having submitted a compliant policy to the Task Force does not ensure that schools actively use, distribute, or implement these policies. As an initial check for utilization, each LEA's website was systematically searched for the bullying prevention policy. If a policy was identified, it was compared against the submitted policy for compliance. Policies were identified for 56 of the 66 LEAs (85 percent). However, only 33 of these policies (59 percent) were found to be compliant with the YBPA requirements. Overall, only 50 percent of LEAs have a compliant bullying prevention policy on their website.

Eighty-one percent of local education agencies reported incident data.

Local education agencies are also required to annually submit incident and other requested data under the YBPA. School year 2015-16 was the first year these data were requested. Fifty-two LEAs (81 percent) submitted incident data.

The majority of disciplinary measures used in response to bullying incidents in DC are exclusionary in nature, contrary to established best practices.

A 2016 report from the National Academies of Science makes clear that exclusionary forms of discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, are generally not effective at reducing or preventing bullying.[3] In fact, such disciplinary methods are linked to negative outcomes for youth who are subject to them; students who experience at least one suspension have decreased academic achievement and are more likely than similar peers to enter the juvenile justice system, a trajectory known as the "school-to-prison pipeline."[4] Further, some worry that primary use of exclusionary discipline for purposes of responding to bullying may actually reduce willingness of students to report bullying behavior and of schools to respond at all to more minor incidents.[5]

The YBPA promotes the use of more flexible discipline through its requirements that discipline shall be determined based on the nature of the incident, the developmental age of the youth involved, and the history of problem behavior of the youth who perpetrated the bullying. However, as noted in the 2013-14 bullying report,[6] the majority of LEAs' policies enumerate this flexibility, yet they only provide in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion as possible disciplinary methods for bullying. These policies are in compliance with the YBPA as written but likely do not address the intention of these provisions.

For the 2015-16 school year, 58 percent of discipline reported by LEAs as part of the YBPA data collection involved exclusionary measures. The near-majority (46 percent) of these were out-of-school suspensions. Of the 93 schools reporting bullying-related discipline, more than two-thirds (68 percent) reported more incidents of exclusionary discipline than other forms of discipline or consequences. Other forms of discipline or consequences could include detentions or loss of privileges or could involve more supportive forms of consequences, such as restorative justice approaches.

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[3] National Academies of Science, 2016
[4] Losen, 2015
[5] *Orr & Abramson, 2014*
[6] Temkin, Horton, & Kim, 2014

Figure 1. Discipline in response to bullying incidents
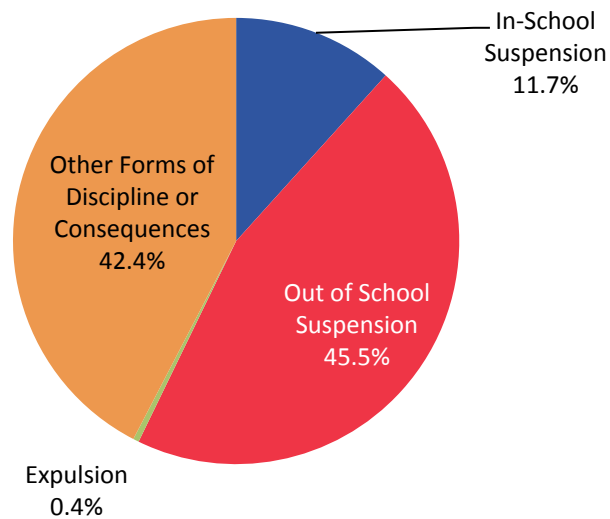
Schools need additional support to implement evidence-based bullying prevention activities.

As part of their school year 2015-16 Healthy Schools Profiles, schools were asked to report on the types of training provided to students, staff, and parents regarding their bullying prevention policy. The vast majority of schools reported providing at least one form of training to parents (88 percent), staff (97 percent), and students (96 percent). Generally, parents and students were most often provided with written materials (84 percent and 71 percent of schools, respectively) and staff were engaged in professional development activities (86 percent). Table 1 presents the percentage of schools reporting the use of each type of training mode for each audience.

Table 1. Types of training provided to parents, staff, and students

	Outside organization	Other	Professional development	Webinar	Written materials
Parents	5.5%	15.9%	30.3%	4.0%	83.6%
Staff	10.9%	5.9%	85.5%	9.5%	68.2%
Students	14.7%	25.7%	43.6%	3.2%	70.6%

Schools reported a wide variety of programs and partnerships to train students in bullying prevention as part of open-ended responses to the "outside organization" and "other" categories. A summary of these responses can be found in Appendix C. Although these responses likely do

not provide a full account of bullying prevention programs and practices in the District's schools, they provide insight into how schools are approaching the issue. Based on the level of detail that schools provided, the majority of cited programs or practices—including assemblies, anti-bullying campaigns, peer mediation, and skills groups for perpetrators—are not evidence-based nor aligned with best practices.[7] These data indicate that more work is needed to help schools identify and implement effective programs and practices for bullying prevention.

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[7] National Academies of Science, 2016

Section 2: Status of Bullying in the District of Columbia

Prevalence of bullying in the District of Columbia

The District collects and reports multiple data sources regarding the prevalence of bullying. In order to outline the current status of bullying and bullying prevention in the District, this report draws from multiple data sources. We provide data on the prevalence of bullying drawn from three specific data sources: incident data reported by schools, the District's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), and the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection. We also reference bullying incidents data from the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education.

Each data source has its own limitations and needs to be understood in its own context, but together they can add to the overall picture of what youth in the District are experiencing with regard to bullying. These data differ with regards to the definition of bullying being used, the respondent (e.g. students versus school), and the frequency of their collection. Only the school incident dataset uses the definition set forth in the YBPA.

Still, it is important to consider each of these data sources, together, to understand the status of bullying in the District. By analyzing each of the datasets available we can best understand what youth are experiencing and what more we need to know as we better understand how to support them and the schools to reducing the incidents of bullying. Where data align, we can feel confident in the validity of the statistics. Where data diverge, we identify areas in need of further investigation and support. For instance, data from one school district suggests consistent underestimation by teachers of bullying among students, highlighting potential underreporting and the need to provide additional supports and education for students.[8] Alternatively, such discrepancies may also highlight differences in definitions held between students and school staff and the need to provide better training for both on identifying what bullying is and what it is not. In this section, we first report findings from each dataset separately, then provide a comparative analysis.

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[8] Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007

The District of Columbia has one of the lowest reported rates of bullying for middle and high school students in the country: 31 percent of middle school students and 12 percent of high school students report being bullied in 2015. These rates have remained relatively stable over time.

As part of the biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), the district surveys a representative sample of middle and high school students on their experiences with cyberbullying and bullying at school. The YRBS provides the following definition of bullying to students: "Bullying is when one or more students tease, threaten, spread rumors about, hit, shove, or hurt another student over and over again. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight or tease each other in a friendly way." This definition is then followed by these questions:
- During the past 12 months, have you ever been bullied on school property?
- During the past 12 months have you ever been electronically bullied?

For the 2015 YRBS, 31 percent of middle school students and 12 percent of high school students reported being bullied at school. For electronic bullying, these rated were 13 percent and 78 percent, respectively.

Although these figures represent a significant number of students, the District has one of the lowest rates of bullying across all states and jurisdictions participating in the YRBS. In fact, for the high school YRBS, the District's reported rates are just over half of the national prevalence of 20 percent. While the middle school YRBS does not generate a national prevalence (it is not designed to be nationally representative), the District has a lower rate of middle school bullying than all other participating states and jurisdictions.[9] This may be in part due to the District's predominately black student population. Research has found that youth of color tend to underreport bullying victimization when asked if they have been bullied, as on the YRBS, rather than to list the individual behaviors that can comprise bullying.[10] It should be additionally noted, that while the District has one of the lowest bullying rates, for both middle and high school, it has one of the highest rates of experiencing a physical fight at school (14 percent in high school versus a national rate of 8 percent). However, further investigation is necessary to understand if and to what extent potential underreporting by youth of color has affected bullying prevalence rates in the District.

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[9] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016
[10] Sawyer, Bradshaw, & O'Brennan, 2008

Despite the passage of the YBPA in 2012, rates of bullying have remained relatively unchanged since 2010, according to the YRBS. Rates have declined from their peak in the 2007 data collection (19 percent and 32 percent for high school and middle school, respectively), but have seen slight increases (not statistically significant) each year since 2010.[11] This suggests that, to this point, the current implementation of the YBPA is not related to any significant changes in rates of bullying in the District. The implications of this finding are further discussed in the "Discussion and Recommendations" section of this report.

Figure 2. Comparison and national rates of bullying and fights, YRBS

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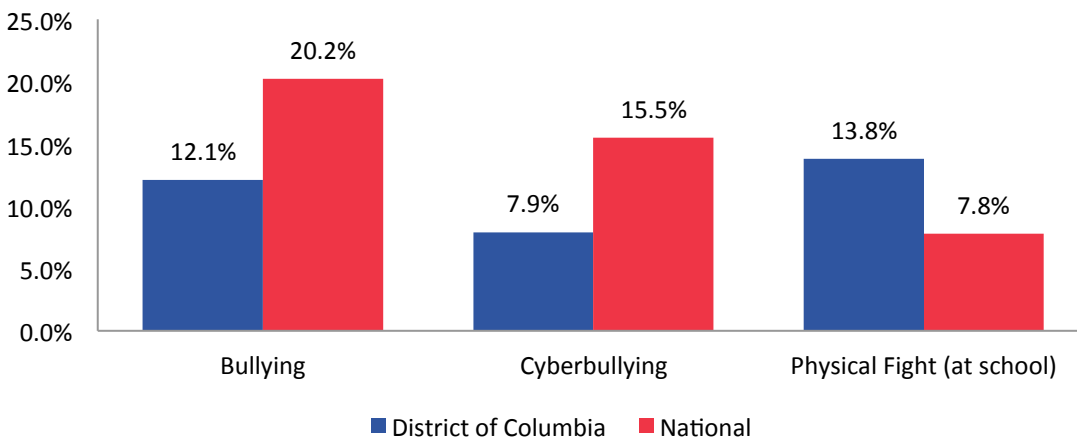
[11] It should be noted that the 2010 DC YRBS collection only included District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and did not include any public charter schools.

Figure 3. Rates of Bullying (YRBS) over time
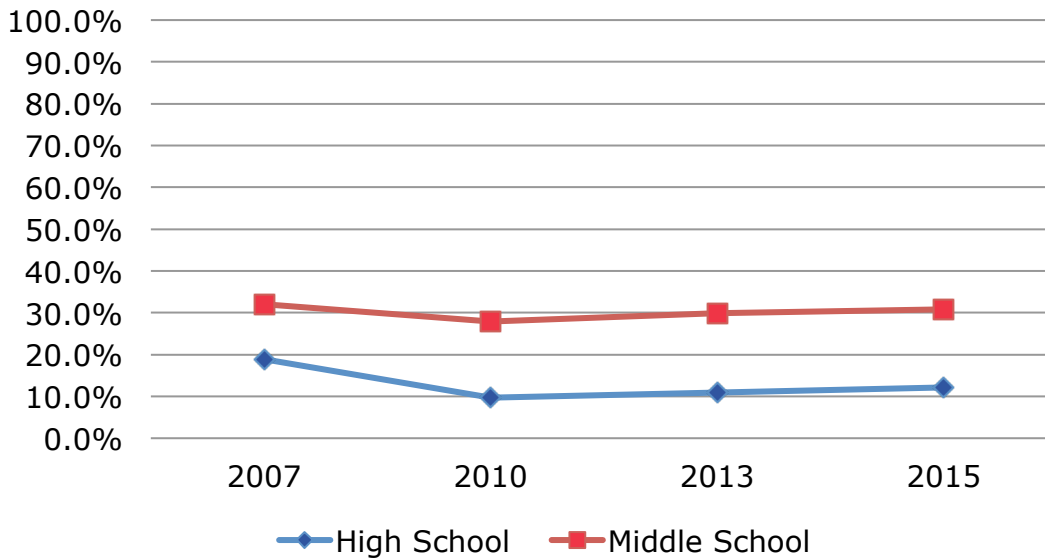
Incident data suggest that less than 1 percent of students in the District of Columbia experience bullying.

The District reports two sources of incident data. The first, the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC),[12] requires LEAs to biennially report incidents of harassment or bullying based on disability, race/color/national origin, and sex to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). OCR releases CRDC data 2 years after collection; the most recent available data are from the 2013-14 school year. Across all three types of bullying and harassment, only nine LEAs reported any incidents. Thus, the CRDC suggests only one tenth of 1 percent of students experienced bullying or harassment based on these characteristics.

Table 2. Number and percentage of students bullied or harassed in the District of Columbia based on disability, race/color/national origin, and sex, CRDC 2013-14

	Number of students	Percentage of enrolled population[i]
Disability	8	0.01%
Race, color, or national origin	26	0.03%
Sex	47	0.06%

[i]Enrollment as reported by the CRDC.

[12] U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016

The second data collection requires LEAs to report incidents of bullying in each school building to the mayor, in compliance with the YBPA.[13] The collection asks LEAs to report on both the total number of reports received of bullying and the total number of confirmed incidents, disaggregated by the 22 categories enumerated in the YBPA and including incidents not attributable to a distinguishing characteristic.

School year 2015-16 was the first year to require such collection, and consequently, many local education agencies had not recorded data in this disaggregated fashion. All responding LEAs reported total number of confirmed incidents of bullying. As such, only total incidents are included for this report. [14]

This more inclusive data collection revealed a similarly small prevalence of bullying (0.6 percent). Although a greater number of schools reported at least one confirmed incident of bullying on the YBPA collection than on the CRDC collection, over 55 percent of schools in the District reported no incidents of bullying at all. Of those reporting incidents, school-level prevalence rates ranged from 1 percent to 15 percent of enrolled students.[15] In total, the District's LEAs reported 499 incidents of bullying in school year 2015-16.

There is some variation in the number of incidents between wards, though these differences are not statistically significant.

A breakdown of incidents by ward is presented in Figure 4. The number of bullying incidents is greatest in ward 8 and smallest in wards 2 and 3, which follows the overall student enrollment in each ward (ward 2 has the smallest student enrollment of 3,017 in 2015-16 and ward 8 the largest enrollment of 15,854). This finding is consistent with the breakdown of the 48 bullying-related reports received by the District Ombudsman's office in school year 2015-16 that were shared in their annual report, and are reproduced in Figure 5.[16] These data represent the number of reports received from parents who felt their schools were not adequately addressing bullying incidents. Such consistency between schools' reports of confirmed incidents

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[13] Such data are only reported in aggregate across the District of Columbia.
[14] For the District of Columbia Public Schools, this number reflected the total number of incidents recorded as: Bullying, or using humiliating, or intimidating language or behavior including Internet bullying; Communicating slurs based on enumerated categories in the DC Human Rights Act; and Persistent Harassment based on enumerated categories in the DC Human Rights Act
[15] Enrollment as reported on the 2015-16 OSSE Enrollment Audit.
[16] Smith, 2016

and parents' reports of inaction suggests that wards 5, 7, and 8 may need more support to identify and prevent bullying.

Figure 4. Percentage of bullying incidents by ward, YBPA data collection
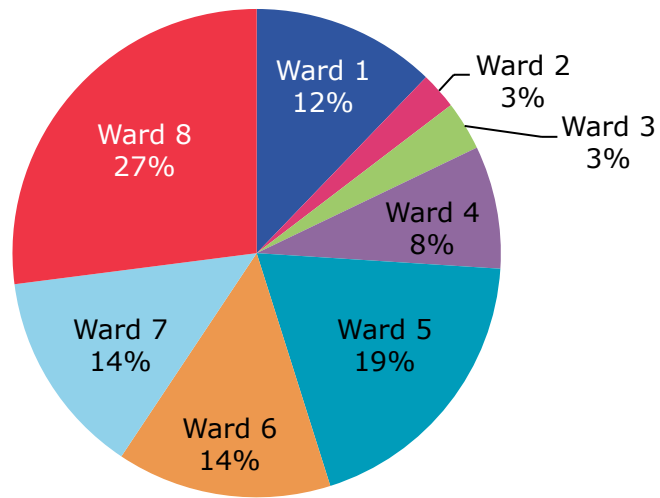
Figure 5. Bullying reports received by the DC Ombudsman Office, by ward
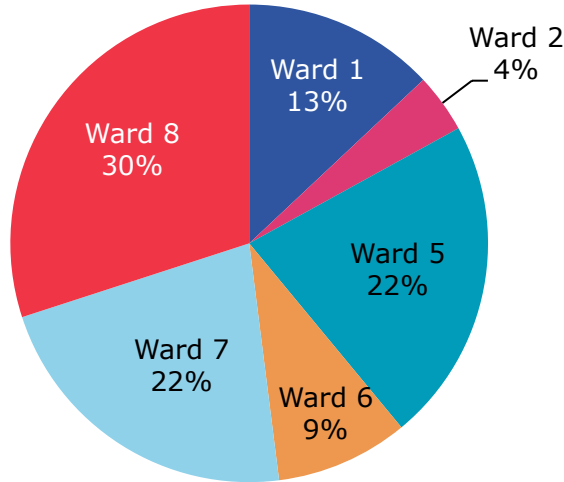
It should be noted, that, as a proportion of total enrollment in each ward, there is no significant difference[17] in bullying rates between wards according to incident data.

Self-reported student data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey present a significantly different picture of the prevalence of bullying in DC than school-reported incident data.

As summarized in Table 3, rates of bullying in the District are 20 to 40 times higher according to student self-report data from the YRBS versus school-reported incident data.

Table 3. Comparison of incident, CRDC, and YRBS bullying

Incident Data[i]	CRDC Data[ii]	YRBS Data
0.6%	0.1%	30.8% (middle) 12.1% (high)
[i]Calculated as the number of confirmed incidents divided by total enrollment of schools providing incident data; includes all school levels.		
[ii]Calculated as the sum of incidents based on disability, race/color/national origin, and sex over total enrollment as reported by the CRDC for the 2013-14 school year; includes all school levels.		

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[17] Significant differences were assessed using a one-way ANOVA model in SAS; $F_{(7,196)}=0.61$, $p=0.74$; Incident prevalence rates range from 0.13 percent in ward 3 to 1.00 percent in ward 6.

Although both incident data and YRBS student self-report data purport to measure bullying, clearly these measures capture different constructs. In part, these differences may reflect a disconnect between students' (and parents') definitions of bullying versus the definition contained in the YBPA. As the recent District ombudsman annual report noted in regards to parents filing complaints about bullying, parents and schools both need additional training to identify bullying. Specifically, the ombudsman notes,

> In [our] work with schools, we have observed that many LEAs might not have a full understanding of how to identify bullying and how to prevent it…However, school staff from charter LEAs and DCPS schools have expressed frustration in addressing bullying. Many incidents do not rise to the legal definition of bullying."[18]

In other words, schools may not be recording and addressing all incidents of bullying as required under the YBPA. At the same time, parents and students may be reporting behaviors, such as conflicts or teasing, that do not rise to the District's uniform definition of bullying. Such incidents may have a similar negative impact on students and thus should still be addressed by schools. However, they may require different approaches than those used for bullying.[19]

The available data, however, do not necessarily reflect that parents are over-reporting non-bullying behaviors as bullying. Under the YBPA, schools must investigate all reports of bullying received. Though only 91 of 204 reporting schools provided separate data on reports received versus confirmed incidents, these data suggest that the vast majority of reports resulted in confirmed incidents (86 percent). Definitional conflicts, then, do not fully explain the low incident data in comparison to high student self-reports. It may be that schools are simply not recording all reports of bullying received (which is reflected in parents' complaints reported to the District ombudsman), but it may also reflect underreporting by the students themselves. National data from the *School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization* suggest that three of every five students who reported being bullied never informed an adult.[20]

At this point, it is not possible to determine whether the incident data or the student self-report YRBS data are the more valid reflection of the state of bullying in the District. Most likely, the incident data reflect mixed and underreporting by schools. It is very unlikely for a school to have zero

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[18] Smith, 2016
[19] Temkin, 2014
[20] U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2015

incidents of bullying in a school year.[21] This is not a problem unique to the District, but it is still one that warrants further attention. At the same time, the student data may be capturing a broader base of behaviors than are covered under the YBPA and thus reflect an overestimate of bullying in the District.

Discussion and Recommendations

School year 2015-16 marked the third year since passage of the YBPA. In that time, nearly all local education agencies have complied with the explicit requirements of the YBPA—submitting a compliant policy to the DC Office of Human Rights and submitting incident data—but the broader implementation of the YBPA is more mixed.

Although the District has one of the lowest rates of bullying as self-reported by middle and high school students on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, these numbers are still extraordinarily high; 31 percent of middle school students and 12 percent of high school students means that over 6,000 of DC's 6th through 12th graders feel as though they have been bullied in the past year. Bullying is linked to several detrimental outcomes ranging from decreased academic achievement and increased school absenteeism to increased risk for suicidality.[22] Effectively addressing and preventing bullying remains a critical priority for the District.

At the same time, this high prevalence rate is not reflected in the incidents reported by schools on either the federal Civil Rights Data Collection or the YBPA data collection, where less than one percent of the District's students are reported to have been bullied. There is clearly a disconnect between students' perceptions of bullying and schools' efforts to address the behavior. A combination of students' inclusion of behaviors beyond the YBPA definition of bullying in their self-reports, a reluctance by students to report bullying experiences to school officials, and underreporting and lack of documentation by schools, likely drive these differences. Students, their parents/guardians, and school officials need additional training to understand bullying as defined by the District under the YBPA. Schools must also recognize, however, that even if behaviors do not meet the threshold of bullying under the YBPA, they still require intervention. After all, it is through research relying almost exclusively on students' self-reports of bullying

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[21] Schroeder, 2016
[22] National Academies of Science, 2016

experiences that we understand the linkages between bullying and negative outcomes.[23]

Furthermore, in order to gain a more valid understanding of bullying in the District and to implement the YBPA as intended, greater consideration must be given regarding the incentives and disincentives schools and students have to report bullying behavior. The YBPA prescribes several steps that must be taken for every report of bullying received, including conducting a thorough investigation and reinvestigation upon appeal from "any party not satisfied with the outcome of the initial investigation." School officials may be reluctant to engage in this process when they, prior to investigation, perceive that an incident fails to meet the definitional threshold under the YBPA. Many legitimate cases of bullying may then be overlooked in this process, contrary to the intention of the YBPA. School officials may also be reluctant to report high numbers of bullying incidents for fear of potential consequences of being perceived as an unsafe school; especially in the District's environment of high competition between and among public and public charter schools, steps must be taken to praise schools that validly report bullying data and scrutinize those that report few or no incidents. In doing so, educators can come to an agreement on what constitutes a "reasonable" bullying rate at a given school.

The disciplinary environment may also serve as a disincentive for both students and school officials to address certain incidents of bullying. The majority of DC schools rely on highly punitive, exclusionary discipline techniques to address bullying. However, bullying prevention researchers overwhelmingly discourage the use of such techniques. Exclusionary discipline remains largely ineffective at preventing further incidents of bullying; does not and cannot address underlying factors that are driving bullying behavior; and can lead to further negative outcomes for those subject to such discipline.[24] Beyond the ineffectiveness of such techniques, they may actually further exacerbate underreporting. As one recent amicus brief for a case in the state of New York notes:

> When the severity of consequences is greatly disproportional to the severity of an incident, it can discourage reporting by students and

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[23] Temkin, 2017
[24] National Academies of Science, 2016

encourage inaction and dismissal by teachers and school officials, who lack ability to address [bullying] outside the bounds of the law.[25]

Moving away from exclusionary discipline to more supportive approaches, such as restorative justice techniques, could encourage schools to more broadly address bullying and other behaviors not captured under the definition in the YBPA, and to prevent future incidents of bullying by identifying and addressing the underlying causes of the behavior.

Addressing bullying incidents after they occur is only a small piece of the broader efforts needed to prevent bullying in schools. Effective intervention must work in tandem with evidence-based bullying prevention initiatives that are woven into the fabric of each school's climate.[26] In the District, however, data from the schools' Healthy School Profiles suggest that anti-bullying efforts are largely not evidence-based and often rely on one-time assemblies or campaigns, which are known to be ineffective.[27] Schools may not be thinking comprehensively about how all of their many initiatives may work together to target bullying. For instance, many District schools are involved in school climate initiatives or implement evidence-based social and emotional learning programs, both of which have been shown to have positive impacts on bullying behavior, yet these generally were not reflected in the reported data. Furthermore, many schools employ multi-tiered behavioral frameworks, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or Response to Intervention (RTI), which can serve as a foundation to implementing effective bullying prevention. Integrating these various efforts can help schools better prevent bullying and other negative behaviors. and save valuable resources. Bullying prevention should not be done in isolation.

The DCOHR, the Task Force's Bullying Prevention Toolkit, and the ongoing school climate pilot in 30 middle and high schools provide an initial platform for schools' work in this area, but much more needs to be done to successfully implement the YBPA. To that end, we provide several specific recommendations for next steps:

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[25] *The People of the State of New York v. Marquan W. Mackey-Meggs*, 2013
[26] National Academies of Science, 2016
[27] National Academies of Science, 2016

1) **Conduct regular audits of schools' bullying reporting to ensure schools are consistently recording and investigating all reports of bullying, especially for schools which reported zero incidents of bullying for school-year 2015-16.** To assist in this process, schools should be encouraged to use the Task Force's Bullying Prevention Toolkit, which includes an Investigator Checklist and sample incidents that illustrate what fits and does not fit the YBPA definition of bullying.

2) **Sponsor facilitated discussions between students, parents, and school officials to identify potential reasons for underreporting.** As noted earlier, there is a significant gap between the percentage of students reporting bullying victimization and the number of schools reporting bullying incidents. One potential cause of this gap is underreporting of bullying incidents—by parents or students—to school officials. Another is schools' resistance to recording incidents as bullying. Convening targeted focus groups with students, parents, and school officials may help to confirm whether there is underreporting, identify the reasons why communities may not feel comfortable reporting incidents to schools, and identify potential solutions, for instance ensuring all incidents are addressed in some way, even if they do not meet the YBPA definition of bullying.

3) **Provide interactive training opportunities for students, parents, and school officials to address differences in definitions of bullying to encourage alignment.** At present, the vast majority of parents and students receive their training from written materials, while school staff receive information from professional development opportunities. To address potential differences in how these populations understand bullying, training opportunities should provide an overview of the YBPA definition, and provide participants with opportunities to display their understanding and receive feedback.

4) **Provide schools with data, including from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and future school climate data as part of the *Suicide Prevention and School Climate Measurement Act,* to better contextualize incident data and drive decision-making.** When gaps are identified between self-report and school incident data, school leaders will be better equipped to investigate and address underlying issues. Furthermore, while school leaders need data that presents the prevalence of bullying victimization within their schools, this data often does not provide sufficient information as to how to begin to address such behaviors. Additional data regarding other risk and protective factors (such as violence or peer-to-peer relationships) may help educators identify potential root causes that drive bullying behaviors or inhibiting bullying prevention efforts.

5) **Encourage the use of evidence-based prevention approaches that are integrated within schools' broader initiatives and behavioral frameworks.** Bullying is just one issue that schools face in the broader school climate. By helping schools understand the interconnections between bullying prevention work and existing behavioral frameworks, programs and practices will help streamline these efforts and maximize resources. Schools should be encouraged to follow best practices regarding bullying prevention rather than focusing on ineffective assemblies and anti-bullying campaigns.

6) **Support schools in implementing supportive disciplinary practices and warn educators of the consequences of overreliance on exclusionary discipline for bullying incidents.** Additionally, school leaders should be notified of the potential detrimental effects of suspension, and the potential legal implications of exclusionary discipline under federal civil rights and disability statutes. Legal guidance regarding these statutes is available at www.ed.gov.

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Appendix A. Bullying Policy Compliance by LEA

All local education agencies (LEAs) are required to submit their anti-bullying policies for review by the DC Office of Human Rights. Each submitted policy is compared against a rubric of seven overarching categories made up of 43 subcomponents detailing the requirements of the Youth Bullying Prevention Act (YBPA). Each LEA receives a memo detailing areas in which their policies are not in compliance with the YBPA and are able to resubmit their policies until all issues are addressed. Once a policy is deemed compliant, it is not re-reviewed. However, LEAs are asked to annually update the contact information for the required point of contact.

LEAs are also required to annually submit incident data on behalf of their school buildings. School year 2015-16 was the first year in which LEAs were asked to submit these data. Schools were provided with an online form requesting the following information: number of bullying reports, by categories enumerated in the YBPA; number of confirmed bullying incidents, by categories enumerated in the YBPA; and number and type of discipline used in response to bullying. Schools were counted as compliant with submitting these data if they provided any information on the online form or submitted data separately.

		Compliant policy	Incident data
Public LEA			
	D.C. Public Schools	Yes	Yes
Charter LEAs			
1	Academy of Hope PCS	Yes	Yes
2	Achievement Prep Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
3	Apple Tree Early Learning PCS	Yes	Yes
4	BASIS DC PCS	Yes	Yes
5	Breakthrough Montessori*	Yes	N/A
6	Bridges PCS	Yes	Yes
7	Briya PCS	Yes	No
8	Capital City PCS	Yes	Yes
9	Carlos Rosario International PCS	Yes	Yes
10	Cedar Tree PCS	Yes	Yes
11	Center City PCS	Yes	Yes
12	Cesar Chavez PCHS	Yes	Yes
13	Children's Guild DC PCS	Yes	Yes
14	City Arts & Prep¥	Yes	No
15	Community College Preparatory Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
16	Creative Minds International PCS	Yes	No

		Compliant policy	Incident data
17	DC International School	Yes	Yes
		Compliant policy	**Incident data**
18	DC Prep PCS	Yes	No
19	DC Scholars PCS	Yes	Yes
20	Democracy Prep	Yes	Yes
21	District of Columbia Bilingual PCS	Yes	Yes
22	E.L. Haynes PCS	Yes	Yes
23	Eagle Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
24	Early Childhood Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
25	Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom PCS	Yes	Yes
26	Excel Academy PCS	No	Yes
27	Friendship PCS	Yes	Yes
28	Goodwill Excel Center*	Yes	N/A
29	Harmony DC PCS	Yes	Yes
30	Hope Community PCS	Yes	Yes
31	Howard University PCMS	Yes	Yes
32	IDEA Public Charter School	Yes	No
33	Ideal Academy PCS	No	No
34	Ingenuity Prep PCS	Yes	No
35	Inspired Teaching Demonstration PCS	Yes	Yes
36	Kingsman	Yes	Yes
37	KIPP DC	Yes	Yes
38	Latin American Montessori Bilingual PCS (LAMB)	Yes	No
39	LAYC Career Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
40	Lee Montessori PCS	Yes	Yes
41	Mary McLeod Bethune PCS	Yes	Yes
42	Maya Angelou PCS	Yes	Yes
43	Meridian PCS	Yes	Yes
44	Monument Academy	Yes	No
45	Mundo Verde Public Charter School	Yes	Yes
46	National Collegiate Preparatory PCS	Yes	Yes
47	Next Step PCS	Yes	Yes
48	Paul PCS	Yes	Yes
49	Perry Street Prep PCS	Yes	Yes
50	Richard Wright PCS for Journalism and Media Arts	Yes	Yes

		Compliant policy	Incident data
51	Rocketship Rise Academy*	Yes	▨
52	Roots PCS	Yes	Yes
53	SEED PCS	Yes	Yes
54	Sela PCS	Yes	No
		Compliant policy	Incident data
55	Shining Stars Montessori PCS	Yes	No
56	Somerset Preparatory Academy PCS	No	No
57	St. Coletta Special Education PCS	Yes	Yes
58	Thurgood Marshall Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
59	Two Rivers PCS	Yes	Yes
60	Washington Global PCS	Yes	Yes
61	Washington Latin PCS	Yes	Yes
62	Washington Leadership Academy*	Yes	▨
63	Washington Mathematics Science Technology PCHS	Yes	Yes
64	Washington Yu Ying PCS	Yes	Yes
65	Youthbuild PCS	Yes	Yes

*School opened in school year 2016-17, data not required for this report.
¥City Arts and Prep changed its name in school year 2016-17.

Compliant policy	63	95.45%
Submitted incident data	52	80.65%

Appendix B: Incongruence Between Submitted Policies and Website Policies by LEA

A systematic search of LEA websites was conducted to locate bullying prevention policies. Each LEA website was searched using the following search terms: "bullying"; "student/parent handbook"; and "code of conduct." The reviewer also searched through available navigation to identify logical locations for the policy. If a policy could not be identified on the website, the reviewer used Google to see if the policy was posted in other locations (excluding the DCOHR "Know your Policy" portal), such as the DC Public Charter School Board database. In the table below, LEAs are noted as "not found" when no policy could be identified using these search methods. Each identified policy was then compared to LEA's submitted compliant policies and the requirements of the YBPA. LEAs are noted as not consistent when identified polices were not in compliance with the requirements of the YBPA.

LEAs for which no policy could be identified or an identified policy was inconsistent with their YBPA compliant policy were notified in October 2016 of this status and invited to update their policy. An additional search for these updates was conducted in December 2016 for purposes of this report.

		On website?	Consistent?
Public LEA			
	D.C. Public Schools	Yes	Yes
Charter LEAs			
1	Academy of Hope PCS	Yes	Yes
2	Achievement Prep Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
3	Apple Tree Early Learning PCS	Not Found	N/A
4	BASIS DC PCS	Yes	No
5	Breakthrough Montessori	Not Found	N/A
6	Bridges PCS	Not Found	N/A
7	Briya PCS	Not Found	N/A
8	Capital City PCS	Yes	Yes
9	Carlos Rosario International PCS	Not Found	N/A
10	Cedar Tree PCS	Yes	Yes
11	Center City PCS	Yes	Yes
12	Cesar Chavez PCHS	Yes	No
13	Children's Guild DC PCS	Yes	Yes
14	City Arts & Prep	Yes	Yes
15	Community College Preparatory Academy PCS	Not Found	N/A
16	Creative Minds International PCS	Yes	Yes
17	DC International School	Yes	Yes

		On website?	Consistent?
18	DC Prep PCS	Yes	Yes
19	DC Scholars PCS	Yes	No
20	Democracy Prep	Yes	Yes
21	District of Columbia Bilingual PCS	Yes	Yes
22	E.L. Haynes PCS	Yes	No
23	Eagle Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
24	Early Childhood Academy PCS	Not Found	N/A
25	Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom PCS	Not Found	N/A
26	Excel Academy PCS¥	Yes	N/A
27	Friendship PCS	Yes	Yes
28	Goodwill Excel Center*	Not Found	N/A
29	Harmony DC PCS	Yes	Yes
30	Hope Community PCS	Yes	No
31	Howard University PCMS	Yes	No
32	IDEA Public Charter School	Yes	No
33	Ideal Academy PCS¥	Yes	N/A
34	Ingenuity Prep PCS	Yes	No
35	Inspired Teaching Demonstration PCS	Yes	Yes
36	Kingsman	Yes	Yes
37	KIPP DC	Yes	Yes
38	Latin American Montessori Bilingual PCS (LAMB)	Yes	No
39	LAYC Career Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
40	Lee Montessori PCS	Yes	No*
41	Mary McLeod Bethune PCS	Yes	No
42	Maya Angelou PCS	Yes	No
43	Meridian PCS	Yes	No
44	Monument Academy	Yes	Yes
45	Mundo Verde Public Charter School	Yes	Yes
46	National Collegiate Preparatory PCS	Yes	Yes
47	Next Step PCS	Yes	Yes
48	Paul PCS	Yes	Yes
49	Perry Street Prep PCS	Yes	Yes
50	Richard Wright PCS for Journalism and Media Arts	Yes	No
51	Rocketship Rise Academy	Yes	Yes
52	Roots PCS	Yes	No
53	SEED PCS	Yes	Yes

		On website?	Consistent?
54	Sela PCS	Yes	No
55	Shining Stars Montessori PCS	Yes	Yes
56	Somerset Preparatory Academy PCS¥	Yes	N/A
57	St. Coletta Special Education PCS	Yes	No
58	Thurgood Marshall Academy PCS	Yes	Yes
59	Two Rivers PCS	Yes	Yes
60	Washington Global PCS	Yes	No*
61	Washington Latin PCS	Yes	Yes
62	Washington Leadership Academy	Yes	Yes
63	Washington Mathematics Science Technology PCHS	Yes	No
64	Washington Yu Ying PCS	Yes	No
65	Youth Build PCS	Not Found	N/A

¥ Excel Academy, Ideal Academy and Somerset have not submitted compliant policies to the Office of Human Rights.
*Lee Montessori and Washington Global do not post the full policy and refer back to OHR, however this is not sufficient.

Bullying policy on website	56	84.85%
Website policy in compliance with YBPA	33	50.00%

Appendix C. Bullying Prevention Strategies Reported By Schools

As part of their school year 2015-16 Healthy Schools Profiles, schools were asked to report on the types of training provided to students, staff, and parents regarding their bullying prevention policy. Responses were categorized and summarized below.

Bullying prevention strategies reported by schools