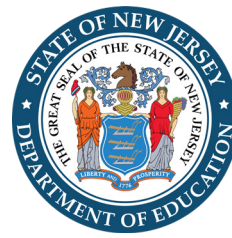


# ADDRESSING BIAS IN K-12 SCHOOLS

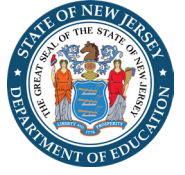


This packet was developed by the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR) and New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) as part of the recommendations of the [New Jersey Youth Bias Task Force Report](#). It is designed to provide a brief plan for addressing bias in schools and to offer additional resources for delving more deeply into bias response. The three handouts in this packet – on preventing, intervening in, and responding to bias – focus on a whole-school response that includes not only the individuals involved in an incident, but the broader community of students, faculty and staff, and families. The handouts also highlight ways to meaningfully address underlying issues and implement proactive measures that can affirmatively create a culture of equity and inclusion. Schools and administrators remain responsible for ensuring compliance with state and federal antidiscrimination laws, and with any other legal obligations or mandatory reporting requirements to which they may be subject.



# HOW TO PREVENT BIAS IN SCHOOLS

Proactive efforts to foster positive climate and culture can discourage bias and increase the support available to students when incidents occur. By cultivating communities in which acts of prejudice are unacceptable and diversity is valued, schools can help prevent bias incidents from occurring.



## 1 ASSESS

- Conduct annual school climate assessments to identify school climate vulnerabilities that show the school may be at increased risk for bias ([The New Jersey School Climate Improvement Survey](#)).
- Analyze the diversity of school staff and identify strategies to improve staff diversity ([Diverse & Learner-Ready Teachers \(DLRT\) Initiative](#)).
- Review practices to ensure Black, Hispanic, and Latinx/e students, as well as students in other protected categories, are not over-classified as students with disabilities and underrepresented in advanced or accelerated courses and programs.
- Review discipline data (suspensions, office referrals) to evaluate whether discipline policies are disproportionately applied to or affect Black, Hispanic, and Latinx/e students, students with disabilities, or students in other protected categories.

## 2 EDUCATE

- Ensure instructional materials are inclusive of the full range of student identities.
- Provide professional development on culturally responsive instruction, principles of anti-bias education, and bias-based bullying and harassment (see, for example, [DCR Education and Training Unit](#), [ADL Anti-Bias Education Programs](#), and [Usable Knowledge: What Makes Effective Anti-Bias Training](#)).
- Ensure that instruction reflects New Jersey's curricular mandates related to diversity, including [the contributions of African American people](#), [LGBTQIA+ people](#), [AAPI people](#) (Asian American and Pacific Islander), [people with disabilities](#), and education on [the Holocaust and genocides](#). (See [Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Educational Resources](#) and [NJ Commissions and Agencies](#) for additional resources on a broad array of people and topics.)
- Prioritize schoolwide social and emotional learning (SEL) (see, for example, [NJDOE's SEL Modules](#), [NJ State Bar Foundation Social Emotional Character Development](#)).
- Provide staff and students with comprehensive anti-bias training (see, for example, [NJ State Bar Foundation Violence Prevention/Anti-Bias Programs](#), [ADL A Classroom of Difference Programs](#)).
- Plan the school calendar to maintain a focus on bias prevention throughout the year (e.g., Week of Respect, [SEL Day](#), National Stop Bullying Day, [No Name-Calling Week](#)).

## 3 INNOVATE

- Adopt new approaches to school discipline, such as [Positive Behavioral Supports](#) or Restorative Practices (see, for example, [Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools](#)).
- Implement new approaches to engage families and community members in larger discussions concerning bias prevention (see, for example, [Learning for Justice: Family and Community Engagement](#), [ADL: How Can Educators Effectively Involve Families in Anti-Bias Efforts?](#)).
- Encourage students to serve on school climate/safety teams to ensure their voices are included in decision making affecting school climate and culture.
- Create opportunities for students to mentor one another and encourage the sharing of ideas between students of diverse backgrounds.
- Establish new student organizations where students can engage peers with shared experiences.

## 4 REFLECT

- Dedicate time to measure how well a school is preventing bias.
- Celebrate successes as the school makes progress in providing more equitable educational experiences (e.g., increased attendance at family events, improved results on school climate surveys).
- Openly reaffirm the commitment of the school community to prevent acts of bias in public forums and seek feedback on how to improve upon current practices.

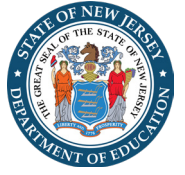
### Additional Resources

- Anti-Defamation League: [Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment](#)
- U.S. Department of Justice: [Preventing and Responding to Bias and Hate Incidents in K-12 Educational Settings: A Toolkit for School Communities and Leaders](#)
- Learning for Justice: [Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education](#)
- New Jersey Department of Education: [School Climate and Student Learning Environment](#)



# HOW TO INTERVENE WHEN BIAS OCCURS

Educators play a critical role in cultivating an atmosphere of safety and respect at school. When bias occurs, educators have a special responsibility to intervene immediately. Below are some essential strategies for responding to bias in the moment.



## 1 IDENTIFY

- Consider if the behavior has crossed a line from a minor transgression that can be handled on an individual basis using the strategies below (under INTERRUPT, DISCUSS, EDUCATE) to more serious conduct that might constitute bullying or a bias incident. Potential bullying and bias incidents should be reported immediately, as they require a special type of response and trigger legal obligations under both [New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act](#) and [New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination](#).
- The following Learning for Justice guide offers a resource for identifying bias-based conduct: [Identifying and Responding to Bias Incidents](#). For information on what constitutes a bias crime in NJ, and how to report it, see the NJ Office of the Attorney General resource, [Bias Crime: Report It!](#)

## 2 INTERRUPT

- Stop the behavior immediately: make it known that bias (whether intentional or not) will not be tolerated. (See, for example, [What Did You Just Say?](#))
- Remove students from the situation if they continue the behavior or refuse to cooperate.
- Remind students of class ground rules and enforce safe space guidelines. (See, for example, the Anti-Defamation League's [Establishing a Safe Learning Environment](#).)
- Find a private moment to check in with the targets of bias, if possible. Ask how you can support them.
- Let the aggressors and/or targets of bias know that you will follow up with them privately, at a later time, as needed.

## 3 DISCUSS

- If appropriate, ask individuals or the class about the behavior using questions that encourage critical thinking (see, for example, [15 Questions that Teachers and Parents Can Ask Kids to Encourage Critical Thinking](#)).
- Meet students where they are; draw them in with questions that inspire reflection rather than just calling out the negative behavior.
- Use discussion to foster openness and empathy. (See, for example, [Start Empathy Toolkit](#).)

## 4 EDUCATE

- Correct misinformation; provide facts to counter inaccurate stereotypes, assumptions, and prejudices.
- Challenge stereotypes and prejudices (including implicit bias).
- Explain the impact of the behavior (regardless of intent).
- Clarify school and community values and norms.
- Provide context using history and current events.
- Teach media literacy so that bias is not reinforced by, and does not continue on, social media or other digital platforms (See, for example, [Common Sense Education](#).)

## 5 FOLLOW UP

- Follow your school's procedures for Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) to document and report the incident to school administration, as required by the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act.
- Make a plan to contact parents or family members, if appropriate.
- State your intention to continue to address the issue; don't make it a "one and done."
- Let students know that dismantling bias involves awareness and effort over time.

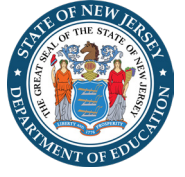
### Additional Resources

- CASEL: [Equity and SEL](#) (social and emotional learning)
- Anti-Defamation League: [Making it Meaningful: Interrupting Biased Comments in the Classroom](#)
- Anti-Defamation League: [Responding to Bias Incidents in Middle and High Schools](#)
- Learning for Justice: [Speak Up at School: How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias, and Stereotypes](#)



# HOW TO RESPOND AFTER BIAS OCCURS

After an act of bias occurs, schools have a responsibility to investigate and take appropriate action to address the incident, including speaking out against the act, planning a response, and supporting the community through the healing process. Below are some essential strategies for responding to bias.



## 1 COMMUNICATE

- Communicate directly with the families of involved students (both the targets of bias and the aggressors).
- Make a clear public statement denouncing bias-based conduct and sharing plans to investigate the allegations in a timely manner.
- Prepare classroom educators to communicate appropriately with their students about the issue, focusing on the need to present a unified anti-bias commitment and support both the direct targets of bias as well as those indirectly affected (for example, support for all Jewish students, not just the individuals targeted, following antisemitic acts).

## 2 INVESTIGATE

- Launch a timely and unbiased investigation of the incident, as required by both the [Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act](#) and the [Law Against Discrimination](#), including interviews with involved parties and witnesses and a review of any video footage or other evidence. Consider whether this was an isolated incident or part of a pattern of harassing conduct, and take appropriate action to stop any harassment.
- Notify and coordinate with local government and law enforcement authorities as required by the the [Uniform State Memorandum of Agreement Between Education and Law Enforcement Officials](#).
- Share accurate information with the community to correct misinformation and rumors, while maintaining the anonymity of involved students as appropriate.

## 3 SUPPORT

- Support the direct targets of the bias through counseling and trauma-informed mental health interventions; make these services available to indirect targets of bias to help with the healing process in the broader community.
- In addition to implementing the local district's code of student conduct, ensure aggressors receive support in understanding and repairing the harm caused to the school community.
- Communicate with and educate the students and their families so that they are aware of how the school is responding and unified around the school's anti-bias values.
- Establish safe spaces – such as diversity clubs or affinity groups – for students to engage in dialogue, receive support, and plan activities that promote feelings of allyship and inclusivity at school.

## 4 ASSESS

- Evaluate the incident and the school's response to identify ways to strengthen bias prevention strategies.
- Remain transparent with students, staff, and families regarding anti-bias initiatives, and involve them in prevention efforts.
- Make a plan to implement proactive measures to build bridges of understanding across differences in the school community, including through curriculum, extracurricular activities, and school rituals and events.

### Additional Resources

- Learning for Justice: [Responding to Hate and Bias at School](#)
- Anti-Defamation League: [A Guide for Responding to School-Based Bias Incidents](#)
- U.S. Department of Justice: [A Toolkit for School Communities and Leaders – Preventing and Responding to Bias and Hate Incidents in K-12 Educational Settings](#)
- Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health: [Bias Incident Response Best Practices](#)

