

New Jersey Department of Education

School Climate State Coordinator Annual Report

July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

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 2024, covering the period from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

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 aged 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. The summary of activities below outlines the services that were provided by the State Coordinator during fiscal year 2024 (FY 24), the first full year of the position.

Response to Inquiries

The State Coordinator is the primary respondent to emails and phone calls concerning the implementation of the ABR and subsequent amendments. As such, significant time was spent responding to over 400 emails and 190 telephone inquiries during FY 24.

Additionally, 58 stakeholders contacted the OSSS through both modes of communication, email and telephone. For these inquiries, the stakeholder received a response through the most helpful mode of communication (e.g., an email response was sent to stakeholders needing hyperlinked materials, a telephone response was provided to stakeholders whose email needed further clarification on the inquiry).

Figure 1 represents the number of responses for each month during FY 24, for each mode of communication: telephone, email, and both telephone and email. Figure 2 represents the total number of responses for the entirety of FY 24.

Figure 1: Number of Responses per Month by Telephone, Email, and Telephone/Email

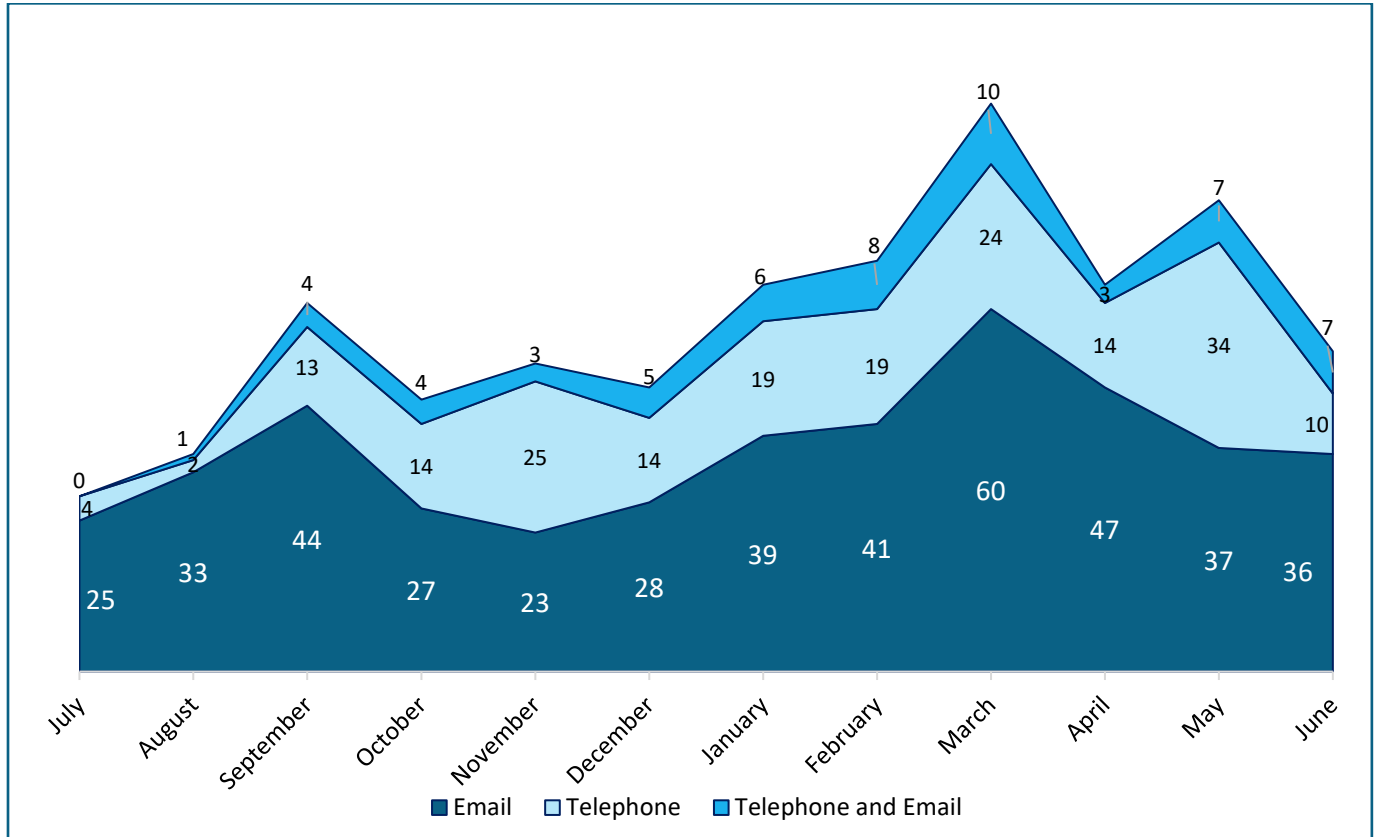


Table 1: Number of Responses per Month by Telephone, Email, and Telephone/Email

Month	Email	Telephone	Telephone and Email
July	25	4	0
August	33	2	1
September	44	13	4
October	27	14	4
November	23	25	3
December	28	14	5
January	39	19	6
February	41	19	8
March	60	24	10
April	47	14	3
May	37	34	7
June	36	10	7

Figure 2: Total Number of Responses

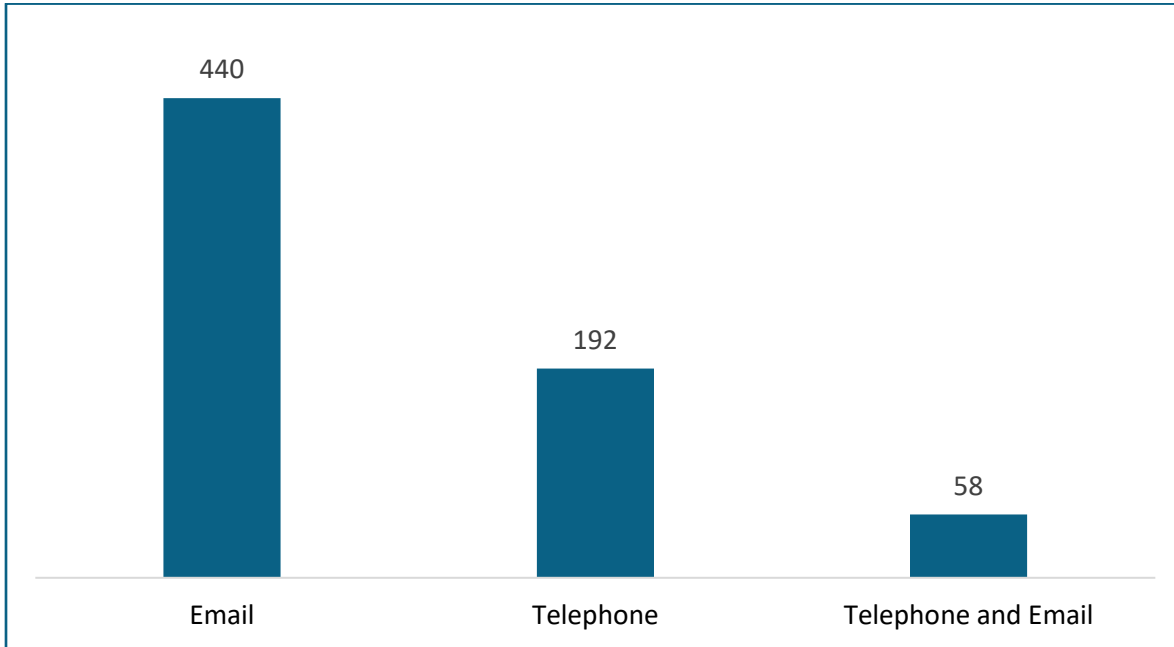


Table 2: Total Number of Responses

Type	Total Number of Responses
Email	440
Telephone	192
Telephone and Email	58

During FY 24, it is notable that the State Coordinator was included on an automated form that served as an email petition to a school district. The emails received as part of this petition did not require a response from the State Coordinator; however, the over 4,600 emails that were received required review and time to process.

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of inquiries received by stakeholder group for FY 24. It is notable that the “Other” category includes inquiries from advocates, attorneys, media, not specified, etc.

Figure 3: Percentage of Inquiries by Stakeholder Group

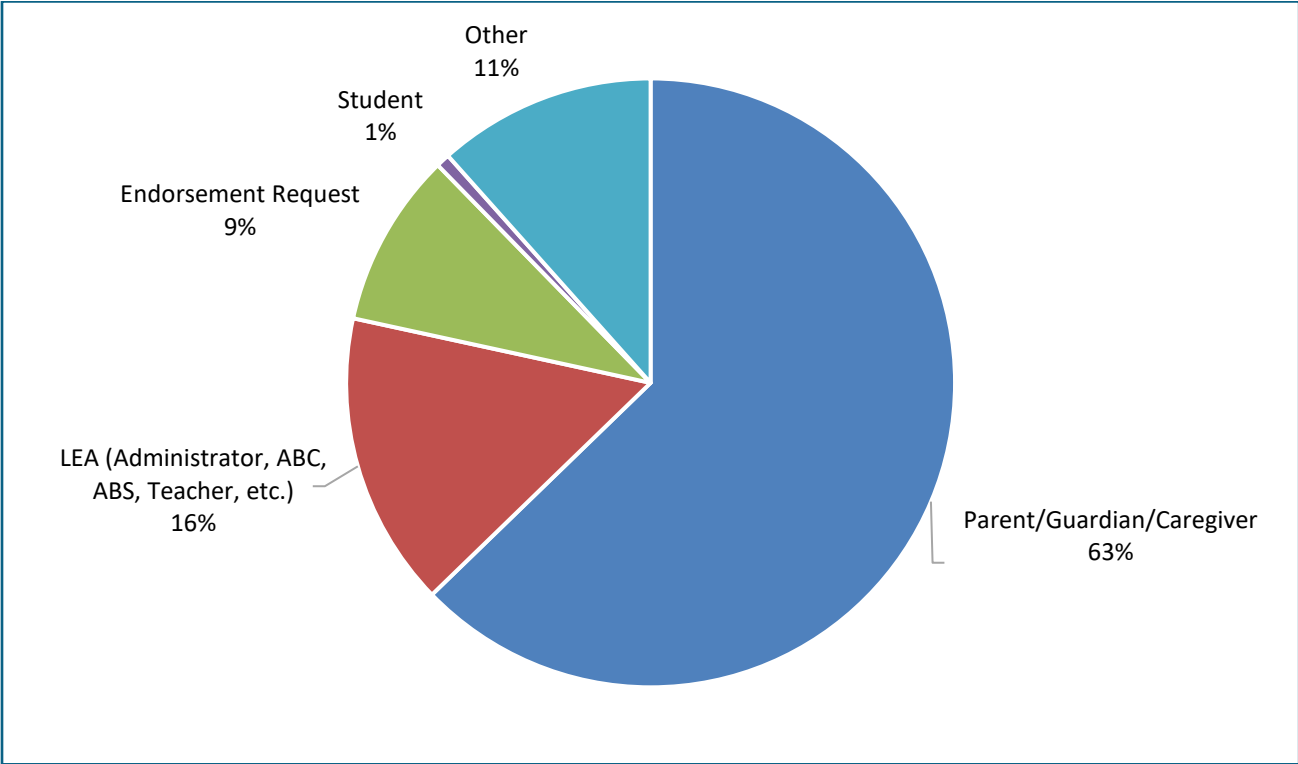


Table 3: Percentage of Inquiries by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Percentage of Inquiries
Parent / Guardian / Caregiver	63%
LEA (Administrator, ABC, ABS Teacher, etc.)	16%
Endorsement Request	9%
Other	11%
Student	1%

The majority of inquiries were received from parents, guardians, and/or caregivers. The inquiries received from LEAs included: principals, ABCs, ABSs, SS/SCTs, and board of education members.

Figure 4 represents the resources that were provided to stakeholders based on their inquiry. The inquiries received involved a variety of issues and questions regarding the implementation of the ABR and school district HIB policies. The majority of the inquiries were related to the following HIB topics:

- HIB Policies and Procedures
- Reporting HIB
- HIB Investigations

- Professionalism/Performance/Actions of Staff
- HIB Appeals
- Other (e.g., conducting student interviews, preliminary determination provision, FERPA, timelines, staff roles and responsibilities, school district compliance to the ABR and HIB policies, etc.)

Figure 4: Resources Provided to the Stakeholders

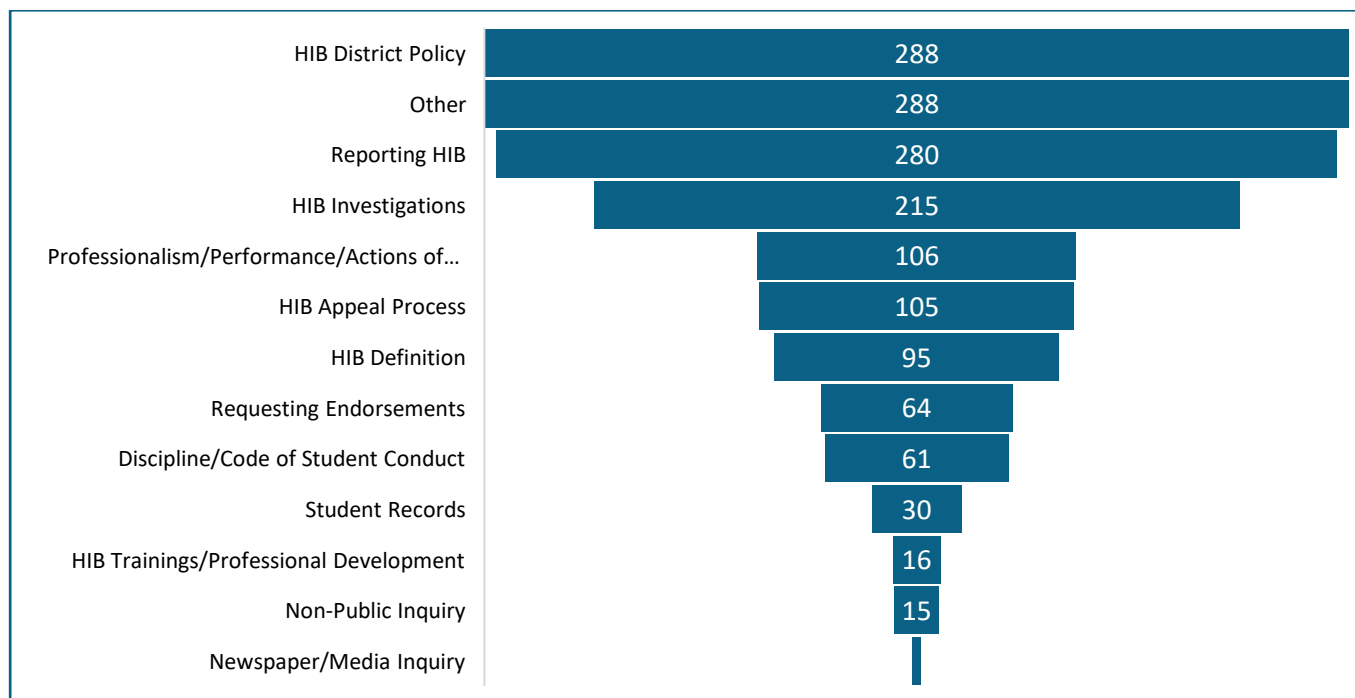


Table 4: Resources Provided to the Stakeholders

Inquiry Type	Number of Responses
HIB District Policy	288
Other	288
Reporting HIB	280
HIB Investigations	215
Professionalism/Performance/Actions of School Staff Concerns	106
HIB Appeal Process	105
HIB Definition	95
Requesting Endorsements	64
Discipline/Code of Student Conduct	61
Student Records	30
HIB Trainings/Professional Development	16
Non-Public Inquiry	15
Newspaper/Media Inquiry	3

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 and sent individuals to the appropriate office within the Department.

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 task force officially convened on June 26, 2023 and continued their work through December 2023. During this six-month period, the State Coordinator worked alongside other Department staff to support the ABTF by:
 - Drafting agendas and serving as the notetaker for task force meetings.
 - Developing Microsoft Forms to assist in organization of the ABTF (e.g., selecting a chairperson, determining subcommittee preferences).
 - Compiling any requested materials, including survey items from the previous ABTF, Student Safety Data System data, etc.
 - Assembling information to assist with the hosting of focus group meetings.
 - Monitoring the ABTF's email account (ABTF2023@doe.nj.gov) and responding to inquiries as needed.
 - Supporting the task force to successfully host two public hearings which fulfill the requirements of *P.L. 2019, c. 179*.
 - Managing registration of all attendees at the in-person and virtual public hearings.

- Developing materials to promote awareness and engagement in the public hearings (e.g., [NJDOE Anti-bullying Task Force Broadcast](#), press release, social media posts).
- Developing handouts for each public hearing to outline the protocols, directions and procedures for the hearing.
- Coordinating communication to all public hearing registrants prior to the event with information related to logistics and protocols.
- Compiling verbal, written, and electronic testimony received during the public hearings and synthesizing all information to inform the work of the ABTF.
- Upon the request of the chairperson, proofreading the ABTF's draft report, suggesting edits for grammar, checking footnotes/citations, and developing the reference page.
- Publishing the [Report from the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Task Force](#) on the [Department's ABTF webpage](#) after the report was submitted to the Governor on December 28, 2023.

Development of Resources

- Updated HIB 338 Forms for the 2024-25 school year.
 - Facilitated translations of the HIB 338 Form for Families and Caregivers into ten languages in addition to English.
 - Disseminated all updated HIB 338 Forms through posting on the Department's HIB website after ensuring each document fulfilled the website accessibility requirements.
- Assisted with the revision of the 2023-24 School Self-Assessment for Determining Grades under the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR)*.
- Began revisions to the Department's Guidance to Parents and Guidance to Schools on the ABR to include updates based on the most recent amendments to the ABR.

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 (e.g., [NJDOE Broadcast: New Jersey School Climate Improvement \(NJ SCI\) Survey and Platform Virtual Showcase, 5.15.24](#)).
- Collaborated with colleagues to promote awareness and share resources and activities in celebration of International SEL Day held on March 8, 2024.
- 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. (e.g., Report from the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Task Force, 12.28.23)

- Promoted the use of the State Coordinator’s email (HIB@doe.nj.gov) and the Department’s HIB website.

Presentations

- August 21, 2023: Developed and delivered a virtual presentation to the Anti-Bullying Task Force. The *School Climate State Coordinator Presentation to the Anti-Bullying Task Force* included State-wide HIB data and the State Coordinator’s focus for the future (e.g., promoting NJ SCI, spotlighting SS/SCTs, and providing resources to school districts on the role of bystanders during HIB incidents).
- October 4, 2023: Developed and delivered a virtual presentation for DREAMS school mentors on *NJ SCI & School Climate Improvement Plans*.
- December 12, 2023: Developed and delivered a second virtual presentation to the Anti-Bullying Task Force. This *School Climate State Coordinator Presentation to the Anti-Bullying Task Force* reviewed previously shared State-wide HIB data and the statutory requirements for the position of the School Climate State Coordinator.
- January 30, 2024, and February 5, 2024: Developed and delivered two virtual presentations during the Division of Educational Services’ Winter Institute on *School Safety/School Climate Teams: The Next Chapter*.
- March 13, 2024, and June 26, 2024: Delivered two trainings for the New Jersey Department of Education’s Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning’s School Safety Specialist Academy. The *School Safety Specialist Academy: Office of Student Support Services* presentation provided content related to the OSSS including the ABR, HIB, hazing, truancy, and handle with care.
- May 21, 2024: Developed and delivered a workshop at the Ceceilyn Miller Institute for Leadership & Diversity (CMI)’s School Climate and Anti-Bullying Conference on *Selecting Evidence-Based Bullying Prevention Interventions based on School Climate Data*.

Recommendations

- Continue to make updates to the Department’s [Guidance for Parents on the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act \(ABR\)](#). A review of the data collected over FY 24 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.
- Continue to make updates to 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 school leaders, anti-bullying coordinators and anti-bullying specialists.
- Develop and deliver 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.
- Refine the current Department webpages dedicated to the ABR and HIB to streamline the information and resources provided according to general information and stakeholder-specific resources (e.g., LEAs and Families/Caregivers). This will promote accessibility of information and resources across the State.
- Continually 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 language regarding the purpose and intent of the State School Climate Coordinators’ email account (<mailto: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.