

INTRODUCTION

The Howard County Public School System's (HCPSS) mission is to create innovative and accountable learning communities where we expand opportunities and access, remove barriers, and foster an inclusive environment. To act with integrity, we will transparently report and respond to school hate and bias incidents that hinder belonging.

This report summarizes and analyzes hate bias incidents reported to HCPSS through the [Stop Bullying Form](#). The 2025–2026 school year (SY25–26) marks the first full year of data collection using this tool, which launched in February 2025. Previously, hate bias incidents were captured within bullying and harassment reporting, making them more difficult to identify and analyze separately. The data collected helps HCPSS identify trends, guide prevention efforts, and strengthen our school communities.

WHAT IS A HATE BIAS INCIDENT?

A hate bias incident, as defined by the Maryland Office of the Attorney General, **is any act or expression of hostility or aggression that is motivated by bias against a protected class but does not constitute a crime under state or federal law.**

Protected categories in Maryland include: race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, disability, national origin, and homeless status.

A hate crime is a criminal act motivated by bias that violates the law. HCPSS involves the Howard County Police Department (HCPD) whenever a hate crime occurs.

HOW INCIDENTS CAN BE REPORTED



Verbally

Tell a trusted adult or administrator.



In Writing

Write a statement and give it to a teacher, counselor, or administrator.



Online

Complete the [Stop Bullying Form](#) on the HCPSS website and select Hate Bias Incident.



By Others

Parents/guardians may report incidents shared by their student or that they witnessed.

What happens next? Once an incident is shared with an HCPSS staff member, the staff member completes the [Stop Bullying Form](#) and selects Hate Bias Incident.

SY25–26 AT A GLANCE



Hate Bias Incidents Reported



Affirmed as Hate Bias
131 of 282 reports



Race/Ethnicity
Most frequently reported bias motivation (multiple selections allowed)



Investigations Begin Within 2 Days

SY25–26 INCIDENT DATA

Overall Incidents

The total number of reported hate bias incidents in SY25–26 was 282 (Figure 1). The highest number of incidents were in middle school (148), followed by elementary schools (74), and high schools (60) (Figure 2).

Reporting & Documentation

Reports were initiated by the person harmed, parents/guardians, or school staff. As this is the first full year of this reporting option, continued training and implementation are expected to strengthen consistency in reporting and documenting incidents. In order to support this, school administrators, staff, and student service coordinators received training in SY25–26.

Bias Motivation

Reporters may select multiple bias motivations, so totals may exceed reported incidents. Categories were combined to streamline data (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Incidents by Academic Quarter

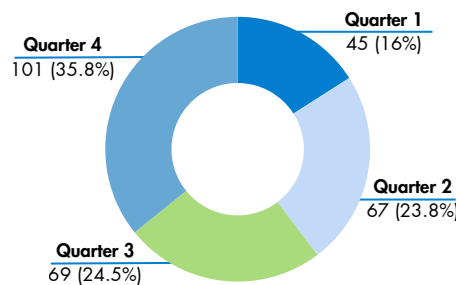


Figure 2. Incidents by School Level

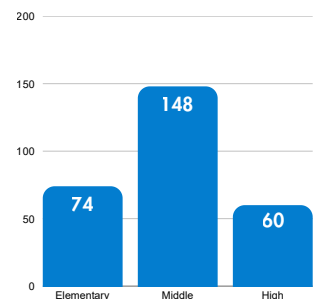
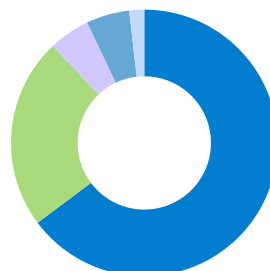


Figure 3. Incidents by Bias Motivation

Multiple Selections Allowed



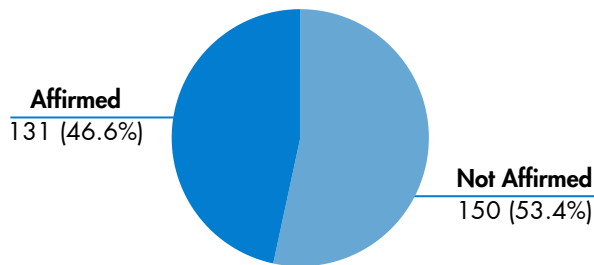
- Race/Ethnicity (n=285 | 64.8%)**
Includes race/ethnicity (n=148), racial/ethnic harassment (n=78), national origin (n=42), immigration status (n=17)
- LGBTQIA+ (n=102 | 23.2%)**
Includes sexual orientation (n=48), gender expression (n=28), gender identity (n=26)
- Religion (n=22 | 5%)**
- Disability (n=23 | 5.2%)**
- Socio-Economic Status (n=8 | 1.8%)**

FROM REPORT TO RESPONSE

INVESTIGATIONS

- **Begin Promptly:** School administrators must begin investigations within two days of receiving a report.
- **Investigate:** Administrators conduct interviews, collect evidence, (e.g., photos, texts, social media), contact parents/guardians, and notify School Directors.
- **Engage Support:** Central Office support is requested as needed.
- **Respond:** Supports and/or consequences are implemented in accordance with HCPSS policies and the Student Code of Conduct.

Figure 4. Results of Hate Bias Report Investigations



*One incident is still pending further investigation.

INVESTIGATION OUTCOMES

- **Document Findings:** Investigation results are recorded in Synergy, where investigators determine whether the reported incident is affirmed as hate bias.
- **Affirmed (n=131):** Incidents affirmed as hate bias were categorized as either bullying, cyberbullying, harassment or intimidation (BCHI) including hate bias (n=51) or hate bias but not BCHP (n=80).
- **Not Affirmed (n=150):** Incidents not affirmed as hate bias were categorized based on the investigation findings as not hate bias (n=14), insufficient evidence (n=33), false allegation (n=17), BCHP without hate bias (n=15), unable to verify (n=18), or conflict/inappropriate behavior (n=53).
- **Track Results:** Investigation outcomes are analyzed to identify patterns and inform ongoing improvement.



CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Review of 14 cases found some inconsistencies between incident descriptions and selected investigation outcomes. Administrator training and scenario-based guidance began at the start of SY26-27 to strengthen consistency in determining and documenting investigation outcomes.

INTERVENTIONS & SUPPORTS

SUPPORTING STUDENTS TARGETED



In-School Staff & Personal Support
Trusted “go-to” adults and individualized safety plans.

Family Engagement & Collaboration
Parent/caregiver outreach and student/parent conferences.

Counseling & Specialized Services
Counseling, mental health, Student Support Team (SST), and for students with an Individualized Educational Program (IEP), additional supports.

Custom Interventions
Additional interventions based on student needs and circumstances.

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS INITIATING HARM

Administrative Interventions & Direct Communication

Administrative conference to address the incident, reinforce expectations, and determine appropriate supports and/or consequences. Includes parent/family outreach and conferences.

Educational & Restorative Approach

The educative resources move beyond traditional discipline and towards a restorative informed understanding of anti-bias, anti-racism, and cultural competence. Restorative practices include components of anti-bias to understand the impact of harm, whether intentional or unintentional, and to work to create a culture where relationships exist to repair, if harm has occurred.

Counseling & Specialized Support

Counselor/SST referrals to address behavioral or social-emotional needs, along with IEP consultation and individualized behavioral planning or behavior contracts.

Environmental & Schedule Adjustments

Separation of students, schedule or class changes, and other adjustments to support safety. *Alternative placement was identified as an outcome in one investigation.*

Disciplinary Actions & Loss of Privileges

Detention, in-school intervention/suspension (ISI), short-term suspension, or loss of school privileges based on the incident.

External Interventions

In rare circumstances a referral to law enforcement may be warranted. *One incident involving cyberbullying was referred to HCPD.*



NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build Relationships & Belonging

Expand opportunities for students to develop positive relationships and a stronger sense of belonging.

2. Strengthen Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Continue SEL instruction that builds empathy, respect, identity awareness, and responsible decision-making.

3. Strengthen Prevention & Response

Provide continued administrator training, guidance, and school-based support to improve prevention, investigation, documentation, and response.



LEARN MORE: [STOPBULLYING.HCPSS.ORG](https://stopbullying.hcpss.org)