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To: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public Schools
Principals of Public Schools
Administrators of Nonpublic and Charter Schools

From: Jhone M. Ebert, Senior Deputy Commissioner

Subject: Available Guidance and Resources to Combat Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination in Schools in Light of Recent Immigration-related Actions

In recent weeks, reports regarding incidents of bullying, discrimination, and harassment in schools across the country have surfaced in the news media. In addition, there have been recent immigration-related actions by federal officials that have created fear and confusion across the country. The New York State Education Department (“NYSED” or “the Department”) takes very seriously any action that compromises the school climate in which our students come to learn every day. In New York State, advocates, parents, and school staff have called upon the Department to expand and build upon existing guidance and resources to combat harassment, bullying, and discrimination, as well as to enhance efforts to build and maintain positive school climates pursuant to the Dignity for All Students Act (“DASA” or “the Dignity Act”).

New York State’s Dignity Act was signed into law in 2012 to provide students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function, and was amended in 2013 to include cyberbullying¹. The law requires schools to provide students, persons in parental roles, and staff with information about DASA and to develop policies and procedures that require a safe school environment. Specifically, DASA requires school districts to develop Codes of Conduct that prohibit harassment, bullying (including cyberbullying), and discrimination against students by other students or school employees, as well as provisions for responding to incidents of discrimination and harassment and reporting such incidents to NYSED.

As described below, NYSED, together with the New York State Office of the Attorney General (“OAG”), has issued guidance and resources to help school staff, students, and parents report and address incidents of harassment, bullying, and

¹ For additional guidance and resources related to the Dignity Act please visit, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/>.

discrimination. A joint guidance document issued by NYSED and the OAG in August 2016 includes a sample form for reporting and investigating DASA incidents.²

